

GUNS DON'T MAKE YOU SAFER

Gun ownership and access is associated with increased homicide, suicide, unintentional deaths, and injuries

Contrary to talking points by the gun lobby, overwhelming research shows that gun ownership and easy access to guns inherently puts you at higher risk of death and injury. With a recent study estimating that there are more guns than people in the United States¹ and with a rate of gun violence continually increasing, it is more imperative than ever to know the facts on guns and gun violence.

GUN OWNERSHIP

U.S. firearm ownership rates exceed those of other high-income countries² and Americans own 46% of the world's civilian-owned firearms.¹ Thirty percent of Americans report owning a gun,³ with estimates of the total number of privately-owned guns in the U.S. ranging from 265 million to nearly 400 million.^{1,4,5} The majority of gun owners (66%) report owning multiple guns³ and it is estimated that half of all guns are in the hands of just 3% of the U.S. population.⁴

REASONS FOR GUN OWNERSHIP -- "PROTECTION"

More than 6 in 10 Americans believe that a gun in the home makes it safer - a figure that has nearly doubled since 2000.⁶ This increase in perceived safety is reflected in shifting reasons for gun ownership. In a 2017 Pew Research survey, two-thirds (67%) of gun owners cited *protection* as a major reason for gun ownership.³ This represents a notable increase from the mid-1990s, when the majority of American gun owners cited *recreation* as their primary reason for gun ownership and fewer than half owned guns primarily for protection.⁷

HOW DOES ACCESS TO FIREARMS AFFECT GUN DEATHS?

HOMICIDE

- Access to firearms - such as the presence of a gun in the home - is correlated with the increased risk for homicide victimization.^{8,9}
- State-level gun ownership is significantly related to firearm homicides.^{10,11,12}
- Among high-income countries, firearm ownership rates are associated with increased firearm-related death rates; the U.S. had the highest firearm ownership and death rates of all 27 countries examined in one study.²

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOMICIDE

- An abused woman is 10 times more likely to be threatened with a gun than to defend herself with one.¹³ In fact, when an abuser has access to a firearm, the risk that their female partner will die increases more than five-fold.¹⁴
- Access to firearms is associated with femicide across high-income countries. Women in the U.S., where gun ownership is highest, are at higher risk of homicide victimization than are women in any other high-income country.¹⁵

SUICIDE

- Empirical evidence from ecologic and individual-level studies has consistently shown that access to firearms increases the risk of suicide.^{8,9,16,17,18,19,20,21}
- Access to a gun in the home increases the odds of suicide more than three-fold.⁸
- A recent study found that the prevalence of household gun ownership was the best predictor of youth suicide, more so than even knowing the approximate number of youth who will attempt suicide in a given year. For every 10 percent-point increase in the household gun ownership, the suicide rate among youths age 14-19 years increased nearly 27%.²²
- When there is easy access to a gun, firearm suicide risk increases further when that weapon is stored loaded and unlocked.²³ In the U.S. where two out of five gun owners (38%) report there is always a loaded gun within easy reach at home,³ the ready availability of firearms is a significant risk factor for suicide and safer storage must be considered in prevention efforts.

CHILD AND UNINTENTIONAL DEATHS

- Availability of firearms is associated with an increased risk of unintentional firearms deaths for every age group; the mortality rate is seven times higher in the four states with the highest gun ownership rates as compared to the four states with the lowest gun ownership rates.²⁴
- The majority of victims killed in unintentional shootings are under age 25 - as are four out of five of the shooters.²⁵

GUNS AND CRIME RATES

- “Right-to-carry” (shall-issue) concealed carry laws are associated with higher rates of violent crime, and the size of the detrimental effects increase over time - presumably as more citizens carry guns on them.²⁶
- State-level firearm ownership is associated with higher levels of firearm assault and firearm robbery.²⁷

Bottom Line: Despite many Americans believing that guns increase safety, overwhelming evidence shows firearm ownership and access is associated with increased homicide, suicide, unintentional firearm deaths, and injuries.

¹ Karp A (2018). ‘Civilian Firearms Holdings, 2017.’ Estimating Global Civilian-Held Firearms Numbers. Geneva: Small Arms Survey, the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva.

² Bangalore S & Messerli FH. (2013). Gun ownership and firearm-related deaths. *Am J Med.* 126(10), 873-876.

³ Pew Research Center, June 2017, “America’s Complex Relationship With Guns”

⁴ St Martin G. (26 Sep 2016). Study: 70M more firearms added to US gun stock over past 20 years. *News @Northeastern*. <http://www.northeastern.edu/news/2016/09/study-70m-more-firearms-added-to-us-gun-stock-over-past-20-years/>

⁵ U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, Firearms Commerce in the United States 2011, August 2011, pp 11, 13, 15.

⁶ McCarthy J. (7 Nov 2014). More Than Six in 10 Americans Say Guns Make Homes Safer. *Gallup*. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/179213/six-americans-say-guns-homes-safer.aspx>

⁷ LaFrance A. (19 Sep 2016). The Americans Who Stockpile Guns. *The Atlantic*.

<http://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2016/09/the-americans-who-stockpile-guns/500564/>

- ⁸ Anglemeyer A, Horvath T, Rutherford G. (2014). The Accessibility of Firearms and Risk for Suicide and Homicide Victimization Among Household Members: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis. *Ann Intern Med.* 160(2):101-110.
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