

Gun retailers strongly support expanded criteria for denying gun purchases, survey finds

September 23 2013

A scientific survey of gun dealers and pawnbrokers in 43 U.S. states has found nearly unanimous support for denying gun purchases based on prior convictions and for serious mental illness with a history of violence or alcohol or drug abuse – conditions that might have prevented Washington Navy Yard shooter Aaron Alexis from legally purchasing a firearm.

The research, conducted by the UC Davis Violence Prevention Research Program, is to be published in the *Journal of Urban Health*.

The research is the third report from the UC Davis' Firearm Licensee Survey, which assessed support among federally licensed firearms retailers for a background check requirement on all firearm transfers and selected criteria for denying handgun purchases.

The survey is believed to be the first of its kind to gather the views of federally licensed firearms dealers and pawnbrokers on important social issues and the firearms business itself.

"Retailers are well aware and concerned that prohibited persons, those with criminal intent and persons at high risk of committing crimes can readily acquire firearms under current conditions," said Garen Wintemute, professor of [emergency medicine](#) and director of the UC Davis Violence Prevention Research Program. "Our survey was

conducted in 2011 prior to [mass shootings](#) in Aurora, Colorado; Oak Creek, Wisconsin; Newtown, Connecticut; and the Washington Navy Yard. Levels of concern may now be higher among firearm retailers, as they are among the public in general."

Background checks, additional denial criteria endorsed

The survey found that most respondents (55.4 percent) supported a comprehensive background check requirement, with 37.5 percent strongly favoring it. Of those who favored comprehensive [background checks](#), the strength of their support corresponded to the degree that respondents agreed it is too easy for criminals to get guns, recommended more severe sentences for illegal firearm purchasing and provided higher estimates on the prevalence of illegal gun sales by other retailers.

By wide margins, respondents endorsed three existing policies that deny handgun purchases to individuals convicted of aggravated assault involving a lethal weapon or causing serious injury, armed robbery, or domestic violence. They also strongly supported six of nine potential denial criteria proposed in the survey. The percentage of support for existing (*) or proposed criterion for denial of handgun purchases are detailed below:

- *Aggravated assault, involving a lethal weapon or serious injury, 99.1 percent
- *Armed robbery, 99.3 percent
- *Assault and battery on an intimate partner:/ domestic violence, 79.6 percent
- Publicly displaying a firearm in a threatening manner, 84.8 percent
- Possession of equipment for illegal drug use, 80.7 percent

- Assault and battery, not involving a lethal weapon or serious injury, 67.4 percent
- Resisting arrest, 53.1 percent
- Alcohol abuse, with repeated cases of alcohol-related violence, 90.1 percent
- Alcohol abuse, with repeated cases driving under the influence (DUI) or similar offenses, 70.7 percent
- Serious mental illness, with a history of violence, 98.9 percent
- Serious mental illness, with a history of alcohol or drug abuse, 97.4 percent
- Serious mental illness, but no violence and no alcohol or drug abuse, 91.2 percent

"Respondents very strongly supported an array of criteria for denial of handgun purchase by wide margins and in some cases nearly unanimously," Wintemute said. "Support fell below a two-thirds margin in a single case: resisting arrest."

Informing public policy

As federal and state policies on eligibility to purchase and possess firearms and background check requirements for firearm transfers are undergoing intensive review and, in some cases, modification, the views of gun retailers on illegal gun sales and other criminal activity among buyers and retailers could help legislators devise equitable gun laws.

For example, California's legislature has sent to Governor Brown a bill (SB 755 authored by Senator Lois Wolk) to prevent those with multiple convictions for alcohol-related offenses, such as DUIs, from purchasing and possessing firearms. More than two thirds (70.7 percent) of the retailers endorsed this proposal.

About the survey

Wintemute surveyed 1,601 of 9,720 dealers, pawnbrokers and gunsmiths who sold 50 or more firearms each year. The survey comprised 38 questions and was distributed by mail. The response rate was 36.9 percent. Previously published reports detailed other aspects of the survey, from retailers' views on whether it is too easy for criminals to get guns in America to the frequency of illegal gun-purchase attempts and their perceptions on the willingness of fellow retailers to engage in illegal activity.

Provided by UC Davis

Citation: Gun retailers strongly support expanded criteria for denying gun purchases, survey finds (2013, September 23) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-09-gun-retailers-strongly-criteria-denying.html>

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