

# Addressing the impact of COVID on firearm-related abuse and its impact on public safety

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Kellie Lynch, associate professor in the UTSA Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice is addressing the critical link between the COVID-19 pandemic and firearm-related abuse and the need for

safety planning.

Results of the study, which included interviews with victim advocates, revealed an uptick in homicides and threats of gun [violence](#) since the start of the pandemic.

Nearly half of the victim-service providers stated that threats of gun violence against their clients became more frequent during COVID. Nearly 30% of the advocates reported that homicides involving firearms were more numerous during the pandemic.

"Surveying victim service professionals offers a unique frontline perspective of the impact this pandemic has had on firearm violence or abuse and allows for the opportunity to examine the critical issue of safety planning surrounding firearms during a time of particular risk for victims who might be isolated at home with an abuser with [direct access](#) to firearms," said Lynch.

Lynch collaborated on the study with TK Logan, a professor in the Center for Research on Drugs and Alcohol at the University of Kentucky's Department of Behavioral Science. Their report, titled "Always Know Where the Gun Is": Service Providers Perceptions of Firearm Access, Violence, and Safety Planning During the COVID-19 Pandemic," was published in the *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*.

The researchers focused on the increased firearm accessibility of abusers during the pandemic and increased risk for firearm abuse/violence.

The study documented the impact of the pandemic on firearm access and violence as well as the advice given through the perspective of victim service providers across the U.S. about safety planning surrounding firearms and firearm-related abuse tactics.

The data included responses from victim-service professionals from both rural and urban/suburban areas who worked with victims of gender-based violence.

Gender-based violence is a general term used to refer to any type of violence between genders based on unequal power relationships. Gender-based violence can impact anyone, and can include intimate partner and family violence, elder abuse, sexual violence, stalking and human trafficking.

The research team also addressed the fact that procedures, such as shelter in place and school closures, which are designed to help protect the community from the spread of COVID-19, further isolate victims and hinder the help-seeking process.

Lynch explained, "There is great value in examining patterns of official crime records over the course of the pandemic, but official data capture only a fraction of the issue of violence and abuse occurring among victims who are isolated at home with their abusers."

The researchers also studied firearm access related to gender-based violence during this time of uncertainty and unrest. The U.S. observed a "boom" in firearm sales in the early stages of the pandemic and records show the FBI performed nearly 40 million background checks on firearm sales in 2020—an increase of more than 10 million compared to the number of background checks in 2019, and a record high for the country.

"Moving forward, it is important to keep in mind the potential impact of increased firearm sales and/or stockpiles in firearm supplies during the pandemic, about one in five participants reported that threatening to shoot others in public increased during the pandemic," said Lynch.

The researchers also addressed the common themes related to safety planning with firearms. The themes included advising the victim to contact the system for help, assessing the location of firearms and removing the firearms or ammunition.

Lynch stated, "It is critical to recognize the overlap of domestic abuse and gun violence and do a better job of assessing and managing these threats to mitigate the potential risk of devastating homicides."

The researchers concluded that the results offer an initial exploratory investigation on the increase in violence that can be built upon with future work. Ideally, a longitudinal study could examine if and how firearm-related issues change as the [pandemic](#) continues and society moves toward whatever the new normal will look like.

"The results stress the importance of ensuring that firearms are included in safety planning and risk assessment, while also highlighting the need for evidence-based information about best strategies in cases where an abuser has access to a [firearm](#)," Lynch concluded.

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**More information:** Kellie R. Lynch et al, "Always Know Where the Gun Is": Service Providers Perceptions of Firearm Access, Violence, and Safety Planning During the COVID-19 Pandemic, *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* (2021). [DOI: 10.1177/08862605211046270](https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605211046270)

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