

Discrimination, crime and suicidal thoughts associated with greater odds of firearm ownership among Black adults

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Black adults—particularly Black women—with higher levels of education and experiences of discrimination and crime are more likely to own a firearm, according to a study by the New Jersey Gun Violence Research Center at Rutgers.

In a new study appearing in the *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, researchers found that Black adults who endorsed firearm ownership were more likely to have grown up in homes with firearms, had previously shot a firearm, and planned to acquire a firearm in the coming year.

"The higher rates of firearm ownership among highly educated Black women were somewhat surprising to us," said Michael Anestis, executive director of the New Jersey Gun Violence Research Center and senior author of the study.

"This might reflect a broader shift toward women and persons of color purchasing firearms across the United States in recent years, perhaps as a reaction not only to the turmoil of the pandemic era, but also to frequent highly publicized episodes of police brutality against Black men and women and the surge of gun violence witnessed across the U.S. during that time."

Recent research shows that since 2019, [half of all new firearm owners](#) in the United States identify as female.

Risk for injury and death—whether by [suicide](#), unintentional shooting or [domestic violence](#)—[increases sharply](#) when firearms are kept in and around the home. [Recent research](#) has highlighted that Black men and women represent an increasing percentage of the firearm owning community.

Despite this, little research has focused on what distinguishes Black adults who do and don't own firearms. In the Rutgers study, researchers at the center surveyed two groups of English-speaking adults. The first group included 502 individuals who identified as Black and were recruited from a national sample in mid-2020.

The second sample included 1,086 individuals who identified as Black and were recruited from a sample drawn from New Jersey, Mississippi and Minnesota in early 2021. Each participant was asked about their experiences with firearms as well as factors related to their identities. In the second sample, participants were also asked about their experiences with discrimination, crime and suicidal thoughts.

In the second sample, researchers examined how extent adverse life experiences were associated with firearm ownership. Those with more experiences of discrimination, who had encountered more crime, and who felt less safe in their neighborhoods were more likely to endorse firearm ownership.

Black adults who endorsed firearm ownership were also more likely to experience suicide thoughts than Black adult who did not own firearms, according to the study.

Given the increased risk for death by suicide when a firearm is kept in or around the home, this indicates that Black adults at the greatest risk for thinking about suicide also are more likely to have ready access to the most lethal method for suicide. This last finding may help explain the sharply increasing rate of firearm suicide among Black U.S. residents.

"For Black Americans, experiences of racism and systemic inequalities may result in the decision to purchase a firearm to protect themselves and their loved ones," said Allison Bond, lead author of the study and a doctoral student with the New Jersey Gun Violence Research Center.

"However, owning a firearm also increases the risk for death by suicide. This is concerning given that Black firearm owners are reporting high rates of [suicidal thoughts](#). Individual and system level prevention and intervention efforts are needed to combat racism, increase secure [firearm](#) storage among the Black community and connect those at risk

for suicide with evidence-based mental health care."

More information: Allison E. Bond et al, Examining characteristics and experiences of Black firearm owners, *Journal of Clinical Psychology* (2023). [DOI: 10.1002/jclp.23532](https://doi.org/10.1002/jclp.23532)

Provided by Rutgers University

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