

People are falsely denying firearm ownership, and it's not who you might think

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Some firearm owners may not want researchers to know they own firearms, according to a study by the New Jersey Gun Violence Research Center at Rutgers.

In a study published in *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*,

researchers found that based on their answers to a variety of other questions, a group of individuals appeared as though they might be falsely denying [firearm](#) ownership when directly asked by researchers.

While some of these individuals resemble what previous research indicated to be a typical American firearm owner (e.g., white, male), others looked quite different (racial or [ethnic minority](#), female, living in [urban environments](#)), highlighting that the landscape of firearm ownership in the United States may be shifting.

"Some individuals are falsely denying firearm ownership, resulting in research not accurately capturing the experiences of all firearm owners in the U.S.," said Allison Bond, lead author of the study and a doctoral student with the New Jersey Gun Violence Research Center. "More concerningly, these individuals are not being reached with secure firearm storage messaging and firearm safety resources, which may result in them storing their firearms in an unsecure manner, which in turn increases the risk for firearm injury and death."

Rutgers researchers surveyed a group of 3,500 English-speaking adults who are U.S. residents. Each participant was asked if they own a firearm as well as demographic factors and questions assessing perceived threats.

The study indicates a percentage of firearm owners may not feel comfortable disclosing their ownership status. Among those identified as potentially falsely denying firearm ownership, many were women living alone in urban environments.

Recent research shows that since 2019, half of all new firearm owners in the U.S. identify as female and more individuals from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds have purchased firearms.

Although researchers can't say with certainty that [individuals](#) in the study

were lying about firearm [ownership](#), the study nonetheless highlights the importance of considering that our understanding of who owns firearms and our efforts to reach firearm owners on issues, such as secure firearm storage, may be overlooking parts of the intended audience.

"There are several reasons some firearm owners might feel uncomfortable disclosing that they own firearms," said Michael Anestis, executive director of the New Jersey Gun Violence Research Center and senior author of the study. "These results serve as an important reminder that we should not assume we know everything about who owns firearms and that we should ensure that our efforts to reach firearm owners can resonate with broad audiences we might not realize would benefit from the message."

More information: Allison Bond et al, Predicting potential underreporting of firearm ownership in a nationally representative sample, *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* (2023). [DOI: 10.1007/s00127-023-02515-y](#). link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s00127-023-02515-y

Provided by Rutgers University

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