

Tipping Points of Gun Violence: A Qualitative Study

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Introduction

- In 2022, there were over **48,000 firearm-related deaths** in the U.S., making guns the **leading cause of death** for children and teens ²
- The U.S. **gun homicide rate is 25 times higher** than other high-income countries ³
- **Firearm-related deaths account for over 50% of all deaths** among Black men aged 15-24 ²
- For every gun-related death, three more people survive with injuries, often leading to **long-term trauma** ⁴
- **Tipping point:** A critical moment or series of events that push an individual from considering an action to actually carrying it out ⁵
- This study uses grounded theory and semi-structured interviews to explore the tipping points that lead young adults (18-25) to carry or use guns.

Purpose

- Qualitatively examine what influences someone to carry and use a gun for the first time.

Methods

- Current sample size $N = 3$ recruited from Toledo, OH
 - Mean Age = 24, ages ranged from 22 to 26 years old
 - 33.3% Male, 66.6% Female
 - 100% Black
- Projected sample size $N = 8-10$
- Participants had to have carried guns for reasons other than hunting or sport
- One-on-one, 60-minute, semi-structured interviews conducted via phone
 - Questions focus on personal history, perceived threats, decision-making process, and future intentions
- Transcripts analyzed using grounded theory to identify patterns in decision-making

Preliminary Results

Theme	Quotes	Meaning
Safety concerns	1. “...Not too long ago, I was coming home from work, and there was a car that was following me.” 2. “If I’m going out to run errands and it’s kind of late at night, or if I have to go to a certain part of town...” 3. “I’ve been seeing...these homicides left and right. It was a freaking lady that was killed about six months ago. Just a lot of these women are being killed...They don’t have no self-defense. It’s just, they don’t have a chance. “	The perception that carrying a firearm is necessary for self-protection due to fear of crime, personal vulnerability, and exposure to violent incidents in one’s community.
Family influence	1. “I was eight years old...my uncle was at the time working for the Detroit Police, and he used to come pick me up from school...that’s how I was introduced to guns.” 2. “I was at home, and it was my dad’s.”	Early exposure to firearms through family members, shaped and normalized long-term attitudes toward gun ownership.
Unalterable beliefs	1. “I can’t see any reason that would make me stop” 2. “I can’t imagine a place that I could move where I could move where I would feel like I didn’t need it” 3. “No, I don’t think anything would change my mind now.”	The belief that carrying a firearm is an essential and unchangeable part of personal security. Nothing could be anticipated to change their opinion.

Results and Discussion

- **Fear of violence** is a key motivator for carrying firearms, as participants see guns as essential for self-protection in unsafe environments
- **Early exposure to guns** through family normalizes ownership and reinforces long-term beliefs in firearms as necessary for safety
- Gun carrying is seen as permanent, with many believing **no external changes would eliminate their need for a firearm**, making alternative safety strategies challenging
- Effective interventions should focus on **building trust in public safety, expanding non-lethal defense options, and addressing community violence** rather than relying solely on legal restrictions

Limitations

- Small sample size limits generalizability to a broader population
- Participants may not accurately recall or disclose all details due to the self-report nature of the interviews
- The geographic focus on Toledo, Ohio, may not reflect other regional experiences

Future Directions

- Continue data collection
- Expand the study to include a larger and more diverse sample
- Compare tipping points across different regions and socioeconomic backgrounds
- Investigate longitudinal outcomes
- Apply findings to policy recommendations and community-based violence prevention programs
- Explore how tipping points interact with mental health interventions and support services

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QR code for references

