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Despite California's Strong Gun Laws and Regulations, Issues of Gun Safety and Fears of Gun Violence Remain

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Gun violence in the United States — whether the firearm is used to hurt another or to harm oneself — is a long-standing and urgent public health issue. While gun violence is often associated with mass killings, it is homicides, suicides, and attempted suicides that account for the majority of gun-related deaths and injuries in the United States.¹ According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in 2020 alone, more than 40,000 people died and 71,000 were injured in firearm-related incidents in the United States.² In comparison, the state of California has the seventh-lowest gun death rate in the nation and some of the strongest gun regulations and laws.³

The 2021 California Health Interview Survey (CHIS) included questions about guns in the

home and fears of gun violence, asked of California adults and of adolescents ages 12 to 17. This fact sheet focuses on the resulting estimates about guns and gun safety at home, as well as attitudes related to gun violence among adults in California. It also highlights estimates across population groups that are disproportionately affected by gun violence, including young adults (ages 18 to 25); immigrants; veterans; lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB) adults; transgender or gender-nonconforming adults; and adults living in rural areas.

According to 2021 CHIS estimates, of the 29.7 million adults then living in California, about 14.6% were young adults; 5.8% were veterans; 31.9% were immigrants; 10.6%

Exhibit 1: Among Selected Populations in California, Percentages of Adults Who Store Guns at Home and Who Worry About Being a Victim of Gun Violence

Category	Young Adults	Immigrants	Veterans	LGB	Transgender or Gender-Nonconforming	Rural Areas	Total
Adults with firearm kept at home	14.8% (12.7–16.9)	7.7% (7.0–8.4)	38.1% (35.2–41.0)	13.8% (11.9–15.6)	13.2% (8.0–18.5)	31.9% (29.6–34.1)	17.6% (17.0–18.2)
Adults with firearm kept at home loaded and unlocked	7.5%^ (1.0–13.9)	5.0% (2.7–7.2)	13.9% (10.7–17.2)	9.3% (4.9–13.7)	13.0%^ (0.0–38.0)	9.7% (7.5–11.9)	7.7% (6.7–8.8)
Adults who were “very worried” about being a victim of gun violence	14.3% (12.6–16.1)	24.0% (22.3–25.6)	4.4% (3.3–5.5)	13.7% (11.4–16.1)	9.6%^ (3.0–16.2)	6.5% (4.8–8.2)	12.9% (12.2–13.5)

Source: 2021 California Health Interview Survey
Figures in parentheses show 95% confidence interval.

^ Statistically unstable estimate

identified as LGB, and 1.2% as transgender or gender-nonconforming; and 9.1% lived in rural areas.

Key Takeaways

Firearms kept in the home. About 5.2 million California adults, or 17.6%, kept a firearm at home (Exhibit 1). Among California gun owners, 1 in 5 (19.6%) reported keeping at least one firearm at home with a trigger lock, 72.5% with a cable lock or locked container, and 7.9% with both a trigger lock and a cable lock or locked container (see **Appendix** for all percentages not shown in Exhibit 1: <https://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/publications/Documents/PDF/2022/Gun-Violence-Appendix.pdf>). Still, 7.7% of adult gun owners reported having a firearm at home that was loaded and unlocked.

Among selected population groups, veterans comprised the highest percentage of those with a firearm in the home (38.1%). The percentage of adults with a firearm in the home in California's rural areas was more than double the figure for urban dwellers (31.9% vs. 16.2%). The percentage among immigrants was three times lower than the percentage among U.S.-born adults (7.7% vs. 22.2%).

Gun owners who kept their guns loaded and unlocked. Gun-owning veterans had the least gun-safe environment based on this measure, with 13.9% having a firearm at home loaded and unlocked, a figure double that for gun-owning non-veteran adults in the state (6.8%). Among LGB adults who owned guns, the percentage of those with firearms at home loaded and unlocked was comparable to the figure for non-LGB adults, at 9.3% and 7.7%, respectively. The percentage among gun owners in rural areas was 9.7%, comparable to the 7.3% figure for urban gun owners.

“Very worried” about being a victim of gun violence. Among selected population groups, California veterans reported the lowest percentage (4.4%) of being “very worried” about being a victim of gun violence. Nearly

one-quarter (24.0%) of adult immigrants in the state reported being “very worried” about this issue, a percentage three times that for U.S.-born adults (7.7%). Among young adults in the state, 14.3% reported being “very worried” about being a victim of gun violence, a figure comparable to that among other age groups (such as adults ages 65 and older, at 11.4%; see **Appendix**). LGB and non-LGB adults had similar percentages, at 13.7% and 12.6%, respectively. Only about 6.5% of adults in rural areas reported that they were “very worried” about being a victim of gun violence, half the percentage for adults in urban areas (13.5%). The percentage for all adult Californians was 12.9%.

Implications and Conclusions

Despite the strong gun-related legislation enacted by the state of California, our findings indicate that gun safety and public concern over gun violence remain prominent issues, especially among key population groups. Given the urgent need for policy change that addresses gun violence, policymakers should revisit federal and state legislation that stifles as well as prevents research into gun violence and gun injury prevention.³

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Endnotes

- 1 National Safety Council Injury Facts. 2022. *Guns*. <https://injuryfacts.nsc.org/home-and-community/safety-topics/guns/#:~:text=Guns,-Brief&text=Gun%2Drelated%20deaths%20from%20preventable,1%25%20were%20preventable%2Faccidental>
- 2 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2022. *Fast Facts: Firearm Violence Prevention*. <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/firearms/fastfact.html>
- 3 Giffords Law Center. 2022. *California Gun Laws*. <https://giffords.org/lawcenter/gun-laws/states/california/>



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