

# Who is using guns for suicide?

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The average profile of an American using a gun for suicide is a married, white male over the age of 50 who is experiencing deteriorating health.

"Gun suicides may be preventable particularly among [older men](#) who are being treated for failing health," explained corresponding author Bindu Kalesan, PhD, MPH, assistant professor of medicine at Boston University School of Medicine and assistant professor of community health sciences at Boston University School of Public Health. "When an older man has a physical health problem, having a gun in the house may lead to him using it for [suicide](#). Therefore, it may be prudent to have his geriatrician or physician educate them about the potential dangers.

The findings, which appear online in the *Journal of Affective Disorders*, also showed that the reasons for using a gun for suicide differed among men and women according to their age—young men and women as well as older women were motivated by financial problems.

Using data from the Centers for Disease Control's (CDC) National Violent Death Reporting System from 2003-2011 in 17 states, researchers from BU Schools of Medicine and Public Health compared gun suicides versus other means of suicide across sex and [age groups](#).

They observed that firearm preference for suicides among older men may be driven by physical [health](#) problems, while economic stressors and recent crises may trigger use of firearm for suicides in the other sex and age groups, indicating the potential need for tailored interventions and programs according to sex and age.

Suicides are of growing [public health](#) concern in the United States. Approximately 60 percent of gun deaths in this country are suicides and the majority (85 percent) are fatal since the injury is normally to the head.

According to the researchers having a gun ownership registry may be useful. "The current Firearm Owners Protection Act (FOPA) removed regulatory action by Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives and also prevented any form of registry of gun owners. Maybe we have to rethink FOPA, considering the burden of mortality associated with gun suicides and the alarming number of guns in the civilian population."

Other BU authors on the study were Laura Sampson, MS, statistical analyst in epidemiology; Yi Zuo, MPH, lead biostatistician at the Center for Clinical Translational Epidemiology and Comparative Effectiveness Research; and Sandro Galea, MD, DrPH, dean and Robert A. Knox Professor at Boston University School of Public Health.

**More information:** Bindu Kalesan et al, Sex and age modify the relationship between life circumstances and use of a firearm in suicide deaths across 17 U.S. states, *Journal of Affective Disorders* (2018). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jad.2018.04.094](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2018.04.094)

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