

To reduce gun violence, lift roadblocks to firearm data

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Barriers to data on firearms — who has them, how and where they are stored and other information — are limiting our understanding of gun violence in America. Credit: Jens Lelie/Unsplash

While gun violence in America kills more than 35,000 people a year and as calls for policies to stem the crisis grow, University of Washington researchers point out in a new analysis that barriers to data stand in the

way of advancing solutions.

"Firearm data availability, accessibility and infrastructure need to be substantially improved to reduce the burden of the public health crisis of [firearm](#) violence," said Dr. Ali Rowhani-Rahbar, lead co-author and associate professor in the Department of Epidemiology in the UW School of Public Health.

The paper was published as a Viewpoint in *JAMA* on Oct. 11. Other co-authors are Dr. Frederick Rivara and Morgan A. Bellenger from the Department of Pediatrics in the UW School of Medicine.

The authors look at three specific categories—firearm ownership and storage, firearm purchase and firearm tracing—to show how previously available data led to published research. In these three cases, data either is no longer being collected or researchers are not allowed access.

For example, a 2003 amendment to the U.S. Department of Justice appropriations bill still blocks the release of federal data involving the tracing of firearms to anyone outside of law enforcement or prosecutors. In another example, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System previously collected data related to household firearm ownership and storage, but the CDC stopped asking those questions in 2004.

"There are fundamental questions of policy and practice important for preventing firearm violence that have been left unanswered for decades," Rowhani-Rahbar said. "Part of our inability to answer those questions is due to limited research funding. However, there are circumstances in which the lack of access to pertinent data that are not readily collectible by or available to investigators, regardless of research funding, can substantially impede research progress."

More information: Ali Rowhani-Rahbar et al, Firearm Violence Research, *JAMA* (2019). [DOI: 10.1001/jama.2019.16286](https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2019.16286)

Provided by University of Washington

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