

Spring 2017

EXAMINING ATTITUDES ABOUT GUNS, VIOLENCE, & GUN CONTROL AMONG AFFECTED FAMILY MEMBERS

Marina Giannirakis

John Carroll University, mgiannirakis17@jcu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://collected.jcu.edu/honorspapers>

 Part of the [Sociology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Giannirakis, Marina, "EXAMINING ATTITUDES ABOUT GUNS, VIOLENCE, & GUN CONTROL AMONG AFFECTED FAMILY MEMBERS" (2017). *Senior Honors Projects*. 104.
<http://collected.jcu.edu/honorspapers/104>

This Honors Paper/Project is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Essays, and Senior Honors Projects at Carroll Collected. It has been accepted for inclusion in Senior Honors Projects by an authorized administrator of Carroll Collected. For more information, please contact connell@jcu.edu.

**EXAMINING ATTITUDES ABOUT GUNS, VIOLENCE, & GUN CONTROL
AMONG AFFECTED FAMILY MEMBERS**

By: Marina Giannirakis
John Carroll University

Abstract

This study uses mixed methods to examine people's attitudes about gun control, and factors that affect them. These factors include whether people feel safe in their neighborhoods, have experienced previous victimization, as well as respondents' income, gender, and age. A secondary data analysis of General Social Survey (GSS) data from 2004 was conducted (n= 854). In addition, three semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted to add further context and perspective. The regression analysis showed that fear within neighborhoods and respondent's gender were significant predictors for attitudes about gun control. Previous victimization, income, and age were not significant predictors of respondents' attitudes about gun control. The interviews discussed the safety concerns people have about gun violence within neighborhoods and the diversity of responses people may have to victimization.

INTRODUCTION

Attitudes toward gun control are a timely issue, as mass shootings have been on the rise even though overall violent crime has been decreasing (Lemieux 2014). In fact, the BBC news states that in 2015 there were 372 mass shootings and 64 school shootings in the United States. (BBCnews.com). This research will contribute to this topic by gathering in-depth information about the perspectives of those people whose lives have been affected the most by gun violence. Specifically, I am interested in how neighborhood gun violence changes people's attitudes on gun control in the United States.

This study will start by using quantitative methods to examine behaviors and attitudes about gun control. This particular study is analyzing the following five hypotheses. First, previous research suggests that the more afraid you are to walk around your neighborhood, the more likely you are to support stronger gun restrictions. Second, respondents who have been previously victimized are also more likely to support stronger regulations. Next, based on the literature, age and income should both be significant. The older an individual is, the more likely they are to support gun restrictions. The higher the respondent's income, the more likely they are

to support restrictions. Lastly, gender should also be significant in the analysis. Because it is more common for men to own guns, it is more likely that women will be more supportive of gun control.

This research analyzed secondary data from the 2004 General Social Survey (GSS). After conducting initial quantitative research on attitudes about gun violence, three participants who had been personally affected by gun violence were interviewed. These interviews captured more in-depth feelings about gun control as well as possible solutions to reduce the amount of gun violence in society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Views on Gun Control

There are two strong opposing sides when it comes to the gun control debate. The first position defends the Second Amendment and believes the solution to gun violence and mass shootings in the United States is to have armed guards in public places, such as schools or movie theaters (Lemieux 2014). This position also believes citizens should be armed and there should be no “gun free” zones (Lemieux 2014). Meanwhile the second position wants to have more restrictions for gun owners by increasing background checks and having people acquire a license more similar to a driver’s license (Lemieux 2014). These two opposing positions are rooted in the historical foundation of the United States. On the one hand, individual rights are supposed to be protected, but on the other hand, protecting the common good and larger community is just as important (Celinska 2007). With the increasing number of mass public shootings, the public is becoming more and more vocal about seeing a response from the government. Therefore, what kind of impact are these shootings having on conversations about regulations and stricter ownership privileges? Should owning a gun even be a right, or is it more of a privilege? The

United States and Mexico are the only two countries that have it in their constitutions that owning a gun is a “right to bear arms” (Lemieux 2014). A lot of people in the United States believe that taking away guns completely would not solve the many underlying problems, and would probably be impossible; however, if gun owners viewed gun ownership as more of a “privilege,” many believe it might be easier to create more effective changes.

Lemieux (2014) also studied the effect gun culture has in mass shootings. This idea that the United States has a gun culture is a significant factor when looking at gun control arguments. Many pro-gun groups have argued that mass shootings are because of the United States’ violent culture. They believe it is not due to gun ownership (2014). These pro-gun groups also want to see “armed guards in public spaces, armed teachers in schools, and an armed general population to deter or to prevent shooting rampages in public places” (2014:78). Continuing this idea, Altheimer and Boswell (2012) researched the relationship between the current gun culture in the United States, and the historical role of guns (2014). This research has not been thoroughly investigated yet, but the overall findings across research show that gun availability and gun violence are very closely associated with historical and cultural traditions and views (2014). And these historical views of gun availability have only increased over the years. Wallace (2015), points out that the media ignites fear of crime after mass public shootings. The media draws so much focus on mass shootings that there are two distinct reactions. Many people are afraid of losing their gun privileges and actually go out and purchase guns for fear of stronger restrictions. Others, driven by emotions and fear, make even larger strides to protect their guns at all costs.

Diversity and Gun Violence

There is a cycle of poverty present in the United States, and sometimes it is hard to escape victimization. Low-income families, while less likely to own firearms, are more likely to

partake in risky gun behavior (Vacha & McLaughlin 2004). Vacha and McLaughlin (2014) draw on previous survey results regarding gun ownership and victimization, as well as data from interviews of parents of elementary school children in low-income neighborhoods and one middle-class neighborhood. Interviews were conducted on a voluntary basis and complete confidentiality was assured. Looking at reasons why people kept firearms, Vacha and McLaughlin found that there was a relationship between crime rate and gun purchases. That being said, there is a high chance that fear of crime leads to gun purchases (2004). They also found that among disadvantaged urban residents there is a high likelihood of victimization (2014). According to their study, it can be concluded that the fear of crime causes someone to purchase a gun, especially among impoverished, urban residents. Whether or not the purchasing of guns among low-income families is because of a self-help response has not been studied, but is something that hopefully will get addressed in the near future.

Young (1985) also studied marginalized groups and the effect prejudice had on gun ownership. He found that racial prejudice led more minority males to purchase guns out of fear of aggression from others. Although this study is from 1985, racial prejudice related to gun ownership still heavily prevails in society today, and understanding the reality and reasoning behind gun ownership among disadvantaged people is another way to uncover people's views on gun control, and what affects those views.

Gun violence and precursors to it are often associated with the type of environment one lives in. Low-economic families have suffered more economic depression than middle-class families, and this reflects directly in the neighborhoods they live in (Lemieux 2014). The low-income families at the school Lemieux interviewed were also exposed to tremendously more violent situations than middle-class families. Research showed that ninety-one percent of people

from low-income families were afraid to walk at night within a mile of their neighborhood compared to seven percent of middle-class families, and ten percent of the low-income families have had homes broken into in the last year versus zero percent in the middle-class families (Lemieux 2014). Although this was only one particular study, it suggests that there is a strong correlation between socioeconomic statuses and where you live with the larger fear of crime and fear of safety in your neighborhood.

Worries About Youth and Guns

Age can also have a large impact on attitudes toward gun violence. Perceptions of crime and the consequences of carrying a gun differ drastically for various age groups. Many perceptions of crime among age groups are influenced by the gun culture present in the United States. According to a national survey, “5.1% of youths from grades 9 through 12 recorded carrying a gun within the last 30 days” (Loughran et al. 2015:1). Many youths do not see carrying a gun as a serious offense, and many adolescents are starting to carry them younger and younger. In a study by Loughran et al. (2015), the authors looked at a group of 16 year old adolescents that were previous offenders in the criminal justice system. Most of the adolescents were male with 44% being African American and 29% being Hispanic. The study found that approximately 47% of respondents had carried a gun at some point in their lives. The ones that had carried a gun had lower fear of violent crime affecting them as well as different perceptions of the risks involved with carrying a gun. Loughran et al.’s study reinforces the idea that adolescents are not fully mature enough to understand the consequences of carrying a gun. However, the study also found that adolescents started to carry when they had high exposure to violence. In conclusion, this study found that gun carrying led to lower perceptions of risk, but higher exposure to violence (Loughran et al. 2015).

When discussing keeping firearms in the house with children, it is interesting to hear that most children are aware that their parents have guns in the house. In a study by Sorenson and Cook (2008), they found that the “proportions of parents and adolescents responding affirmatively [to having guns in the home] were similar: 25.7% and 26.8%, respectively, for any guns in the home; 15.0% and 13.2%, respectively, for handguns” (2007:1). There may be a common misconception that children do not know where or how to get access to a gun. This study shows that children are always watching, and are aware of what kind of gun is in their home. Cooke (2004) explains that among adolescents in the United States, guns are associated with violence, where in other countries they are seen primarily as protection. All of these factors could be contributing to the overall “gun culture” in the United States, and instead of using guns as protection they are associated with violence at a young age.

Neighborhood Fear and Safety

The type of neighborhood; urban, suburban, or rural, can have a significant impact on the rates of gun violence, and also how safe someone feels in his or her neighborhood. Justin Medina (2015) from Temple University looked at the relationship between social capital, or the ability of an individual to take advantage of resources, and firearm violence. Medina (2015) found that high rates of crime and violence lessened a neighborhood's ability to gain social capital. Without social capital there is a lack of community and trust within a neighborhood. Medina's (2015) study specifically looked at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and the neighborhood firearm victimization rate. Two factors that he found impacted this rate were participation in local organizations and the amount of trust present in neighborhoods. Especially for adolescents, the more time they spent in organized activities, the less likely they were to be victims or perpetrators of gun violence (Medina 2015).

The more collective efficacy (or informal social control and trust) a neighborhood has, the less likely it is to be effected by gun violence (Medina 2015). When there is high trust and responsibility in a neighborhood, the people living in it are more likely to look after each other and take care of each other. Medina (2015) researched the impact different kinds of organizational activities had on criminal behavior and gun violence. After reviewing research, Medina (2015) found that civic engagement, specifically in politics, is significant in decreasing the amount of gun violence present in neighborhoods. Another discovery Medina (2015) made was that if more community leaders presented their neighborhoods with more recreational options, trust and community relationships would increase, eventually leading to an overall higher level of collective efficiency. Relationships are one of the most important aspects of organizing and building community. Strong relationships based on mutual trust increase the safety of the neighborhood and increases the overall social capital of the neighborhoods. Specifically related to firearms, Medina stated that, "...elevated levels of trust at one time period are associated with a reduction in neighborhood firearm victimization at a later time" (2015:93). This conclusion significantly proves that firearm victimization is strongly connected to types of trust in neighborhoods.

Not only is trust important in creating safer neighborhoods, but fear of crime and crime rates need to be addressed if neighborhoods hope to create a community of trust. They both have been directly connected to disorder in neighborhoods, and some theories even suggest disorder is a direct cause of serious crime (Sampson and Raudenbush 1999). A study by Sampson and Raudenbush (1999) looked specifically at social and physical disorder in urban neighborhoods, and how that setting is connected to violent crime and gun violence. The study found that when they asked residents survey questions about neighborhood disorder and crime, most people

answered that their perceptions of disorder predicted fear of crime (Sampson and Raudenbush 1999). Although their study did not look specifically at guns in neighborhoods, understanding that perceived disorder in neighborhoods lead to a fear of crime is essential in recognizing factors that are related to gun violence. Once variables connected to gun violence are recognized, we can then look at people's views on gun control and how and if they change if they have been personally affected by gun violence.

METHODS

This research was conducted using mixed methods including both secondary data analysis and in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Because of the complexity and controversy of the issue, it was beneficial to analyze it using multiple methods.

Secondary Data Analysis

Data set

The General Social Survey (GSS) gave me access to a large amount of responses from around the United States, which might have been hard to obtain through a self-created survey. Gun control issues have been a popular topic in the last few years and there were many questions related to gun violence and gun control in the GSS.

The population for the secondary data analysis was U.S. citizens over the age of 18. Since the GSS only surveyed English speakers until 2006, my population consists of only English-speakers, as my data set is from 2004. The sample is a multi-stage area probability sample and surveyed approximately equal numbers of males and females for the sample. While the original sample set from 2004 consisted of over 3,000 respondents, a subsample is used for this study consisting of 854 respondents.

Variables

During the secondary data analysis, I looked at one dependent variable and two independent variables, along with three additional control variables. My dependent variable was respondents' attitudes about gun control. My independent variables were how safe respondents feel in their neighborhood and if they have been previously victimized. Attitudes about gun control are expressed as supporting or opposing gun permits and other restrictions. How safe respondents feel in their neighborhoods is asked in the GSS as whether or not respondents would feel unsafe walking within a mile of their neighborhood at night. This variable is referred to as *fear* throughout the analysis. The independent variable, victimization, expresses whether or not a respondent has been a victim of a series of crimes before in their lives. Control variables consist of age, respondents' income, and gender.

Attitudes about gun restrictions and permits consist of two GSS questions asking whether or not a respondent favors or opposes gun permits, and whether or not there should be more legal restrictions on handguns in society. Computed together, these two variables test for attitudes about gun restrictions. Based on the coding scale, zero represents a respondent who is opposed to stronger restrictions, and two represents a respondent who strongly supports restrictions. Additionally, the variable that represents a respondents' victimization history consists of: being personally assaulted, being robbed, and being burglarized. The respondents' victimization history is computed on a scale of zero to three; zero, having never been a victim of any of the crimes, and three, being a victim of all three crimes. Based on previous research, it is possible that people who do not feel safe in their neighborhoods and have been previously victimized are more likely to support gun restrictions and have stronger attitudes about gun permits.

Qualitative Methods

Sample and sampling

To further explore the attitudes of people who specifically have lost a family member to gun violence, three in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted in Cleveland, Ohio. The participants were recruited through three strategies; contacting survivor networks (1), utilizing personal networks (1), and snowball-sampling (1) techniques.

All three participants currently reside in Cleveland, Ohio, and all three participants are female. The interviewees' ages range from 35 to 68 years old. Two of the three participants are African American, while the third participant is Caucasian. All of the participants have a high school diploma or GED, with one participant having completed two years of college. The current income of participants had a significant range from \$20,000 to \$60,000 a year. Besides having lost a loved one to gun violence, there were no other criteria for participants, and all interviews were conducted on a voluntary basis.

Analysis

Each interview lasted between 25 and 60 minutes. All of the interviews were recorded by the author and later transcribed. Before each interview began, participants completed a short demographic survey. The interviews were all semi-structured and followed an open-ended interview guide that was separated by several themes relating to guns, gun control, and gun violence. The guide also had topics on neighborhoods, family member loss, and general information about the interviewees. Pseudonyms were used for all three of the participants. Since the sample for the interviews was small and non-random, it cannot be generalized to any other larger population. However, generalizability was not the focus of this study, but rather, gaining an inside look at what it means to lose a family member to gun violence. While this research is

just a starting point looking at the issues of gun violence, it is hoped that further research will continue to analyze this problem in more depth.

QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

Sample Descriptive Statistics

This quantitative analysis analyzed the following five hypotheses. The more afraid you are to walk around your neighborhood, the more likely you may be to support stronger gun restrictions. Second, respondents who have been previously victimized are also more likely to support stronger restrictions. Third, based on the literature, age and income should both be significant. The older an individual, the more likely they are to support gun restrictions. Fourth is an examination of income, as the higher the respondent's income, the more likely they are to support restrictions. Lastly, gender should also be significant in the analysis. Because it is more common for men to own guns, it is more likely that women will be more supportive of gun control restrictions.

After running descriptive statistics, the data has shown that the average support for stricter gun restrictions is 1.53 (see Table 1). This mean explains that more than half of the respondents are in favor of stronger gun restrictions. These attitudes towards restrictions help show that there is much higher support for restrictions than there is opposition.

The variable *Victimization* is a composite variable made up of three other variables each asking if a respondent had been a victim of that particular crime. The crimes consist of robbery, personal assault, and house being burglarized. The average respondents' victimization was .09, explaining that the majority of respondents had not been victims of any of the three crimes (See Table 1).

	Attitudes About Gun Restrictions (Composite 0-2: 0=opposed, 2=strongly support)	Victimization (Composite 0-3: 0= never been victimized, 3=victimized of all three crimes)
N	854	854
Mean	1.5328	0.0948
Std. Deviation	0.72031	0.34122

The research also looked at two dichotomous variables, fear and gender. The gender variable was coded as 0= female and 1 =male. The fear variable was coded as 0= no (or was not afraid) and 1 =yes (or was afraid).

Table 2: Dichotomous Variables

Gender			Fear		
	Frequency	Percent		Frequency	Percent
female	357	41.8	no	583	68.3
male	497	58.2	yes	271	31.7
Total	854	100.0	Total	854	100.0

When respondents were asked if they are afraid to walk around their neighborhood at night 583, or 68.3% of the respondents replied “no”. The remaining 271, or 31.7% replied “yes,” they were afraid to walk around in their neighborhood by themselves at night (See Table 2).

Regression Analysis

A regression analysis test was used to examine the relationship between fear, previous victimization, age, income and gender. The regression analysis shows the relationship of these independent variables, with the dependent variable, attitudes about gun restrictions. Fear had a significance of .009 and had a positive impact on the dependent variable. Gender had a significance of .001, but being male had a negative impact on the dependent variable. Previous victimization, age, and respondents’ income were not significant and were not predictors of

respondent's attitudes on gun restrictions. Table 3 describes the significance of the variables that were tested for predictors of attitudes about gun restrictions.

Table 3: Attitudes About Gun Restrictions

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.488	0.158		9.408	0.000
	GENDER (0=female, 1=male)	-0.235	0.068	-0.153	-3.478	0.001
	FEAR (0=no, 1=yes)	0.190	0.073	0.115	2.618	0.009
	AGE OF RESPONDENT	0.000	0.002	0.007	0.151	0.880
	RESPONDENTS INCOME	0.008	0.012	0.032	0.724	0.469
	VICTIMIZATION (0-3 Composite)	-0.148	0.110	-0.059	-1.349	0.178

a. Dependent Variable: **Attitudes About Gun Restrictions** (Composite 0-2) 0=opposed, 1 = support, 2=strongly support

The analysis shows that the coefficient for gender, -0.235, reflects that being male had a negative impact on gun control support. However, the coefficient for fear, 0.190, was positive and explains that the more afraid people are in their neighborhoods, the more likely they are to support stronger gun restrictions. While age was not a significant predictor, the older respondents were, the more likely they are to support gun control. The same is true for respondents' income; the higher it is, the more likely they are to support gun control. However, previous victimization although not significant, had a coefficient of -0.148, and had a negative impact on the hypothesis. Therefore people who have been previously victimized are less likely to support stricter regulations according to the analysis, but not at a significant level.

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

Diversity Amongst Victims

Unlike the secondary data analysis, the qualitative interviews provided a wide range of reactions and opinions relating to gun control. The way in which each participant reacted and the next steps they took in their lives after losing a loved one differed for each participant. One of the participants, Kara (age 36), had lost her nephew two years ago. Another interviewee, Ashley (age 41), had also lost her nephew a little over a year ago. The third participant, Janet (age 68), lost her son over 20 years ago. Although all three women reacted in different ways, all stressed the importance of having stronger gun restrictions.

Going into the interviews, the overall goal was to investigate people's views on gun control who had lost a family member to gun violence. Surprisingly no participants reported that their views changed after the incident where they lost a loved one. However, two out of the three interviewees have become more involved in survivor support groups, and one of the interviewees, Janet, even started her own organization in the Cleveland Area. When asking Janet about how she decided to start her own survivors group she stated:

Gun violence, once it happens, even if you've never had any experience with guns before or any kind of opinion, once it destroys somebody in your family or your life, friends, but mostly your family and mostly your child, it destroys. There's no benefit from it. Nothing comes out of it...and if you survive the death, then you gotta keep other people from dying. You got to find a way to survive it (Janet, age 68).

It is inspiring and encouraging seeing someone turn one of the worst experiences in their life into a way to help others in similar situations and even advocate stopping gun violence. Janet, Kara and Ashley, are some of the strongest women I have ever met, and they continue to fight everyday for justice and peace.

While all of the participants support stricter gun laws, they all had different views on gun ownership and how guns currently fit into their lives. Janet did not mind people owning guns as long as they were responsible with them. Ashley did not want to be anywhere near guns after the accident, and makes family and friends leave them outside before entering her house. And lastly, Kara owns a gun. Kara was a survivor of robbery before her nephew was killed, and she stated that her previous victimization is what made her buy her gun. Kara stated, *“I was actually robbed at a bus stop by three girls. And that’s what made me go get mine.”*

However, she believes the steps she had to take to obtain the gun were still too lenient. She explained the process she had to go through:

I had to go to a class for a month and I had to go to the shootin range. And that was it. And I don’t think that was strict enough. I don’t have a felony, but still ya know... It should have been something a little bit more hard. Something a little bit more harder like long as you pass the background check, boom, there you go, you pass the class, there you go. And they don’t even require you to go to the shooting range to learn how to shoot. A lot of people I know purchase a gun and don’t even know how to use them... (Kara, age 36)

It is important to learn from people who have experienced this tragedy first-hand, because their responses cannot be separately obtained from the GSS. These answers are authentic and deeply personal, and can help the world discover answers to problems with gun violence.

Neighborhoods and Gun Violence

Two of the three women who participated in the interviews expressed significant fear and concern about the connections between gun violence and neighborhood organization. Analyzing the neighborhoods that these crimes took place in, and the overall safety of the neighborhoods, two of the participants, Kara and Ashley, explained that the neighborhoods they grew up in were full of gun violence and unrest. Ashley stated, *“I moved out of the neighborhood, just because of the gun violence.”* Similarly, when I asked Kara why she had moved from the neighborhood she grew up in she responded, *“The area. The area wasn’t really bad at first. It’s just... the drugs,*

the gun violence. The shootin.” All three participants felt strongly that restrictions on guns are too lenient. Multiple times it was brought up in the interviews that not only is it too easy to purchase a gun, but the time it takes to find a gun and commit a serious crime becomes quicker and quicker every day. When I asked Janet about the area where her son was killed she stated, “*I never thought of it that way [as dangerous]. I mean St. John is St. John. It’s not in the best part of town, but it’s not in the worst part of town.*” The participants’ insights about the connection between neighborhoods and violence reinforce previous literature as well as the secondary data analysis.

Previous literature has focused on building trust in neighborhoods to decrease violence and chaos. Medina (2015) stressed the importance of organizational activities, and found that there was a decrease in gun violence when more adolescents are involved in community events. This was supported by the interviewees who expressed that there needs to be more community activities for people to participate in to help keep them out of trouble. Kara spoke at length about building more community in the neighborhoods to try to combat the violence:

What can we do as a community to try to stop this? I thought maybe it would help by... we got- a petition, we got a YMCA put in to see if it would stop some of the violence. I can say once we got the, ummm, recreation center put there it did slow down the violence, a little bit, because they have something to do. You know they have something to do, like you can swim in there, you can play basketball. They got a place where you can play video games, like a little computer lab. It was really nice, and then, all of sudden, here we go. Back to the gun violence again. Just like crazy (Kara, age 36).

There is positive change that is generated by creating more opportunities in the neighborhood. Although the violence did start up again, Kara believed the creation of the YMCA was a positive development for her neighborhood. She stated that parents need to be more involved in their children’s lives, and they need to be held accountable for the activities their children are involved with:

I don't understand... I was wondering like what can we do as a community to stop some of this gun violence, and only thing I can see is these parents need to get in these kids' life. Knowing what you son is doing and knowing what your son is not doin, ya know? (Kara, age 36)

Paying more attention to the younger generation and creating more community within neighborhoods appeared to be essential factors in decreasing gun violence.

Worries About Guns and Youth

Another overarching theme that came about from the interviews was the worry about adolescents and gun exposure. All of the interview participants expressed significant concern for the younger generation, and believe that guns are too prevalent in young people's lives.

Kara felt strongly about how age affects gun violence, and expressed that children are obtaining guns too young. She believes that the age limit to legally purchase a gun should be raised.

I don't know, like I feel like you should be over thirty to be able to purchase a gun. And I, 21-25 is, you know, you still going through your maturity stage. Sometimes it takes some people a little longer to get there but I just they need wayyy stricter laws about guns...and all these people stop selling them to these kids (Kara, age 36).

While the data from the GSS did not show age as being a significant factor in whether or not people support gun restrictions, previous research from Cooke (2004) has suggested that adolescents are more easily influenced and their brains may not be fully matured yet, therefore affecting their decision-making and their emotional maturity. Kara certainly agreed with this and discussed this view in-depth.

I feel like you should not be able to get it at 21. Because you got a lot of young kids at 21 that still young minded, or they don't have felons so I'm a get my license but still think they can just go out and shoot people and it's not, it's not fair. I think they need a stricter law on gun licenses. They really do. Yeah and its

a lot of people, a lot of young people who do come up with guns because these stupid older people are selling them to them, you know? (Kara, age 36)

Kara was not the only participant who noticed this trend in younger adults. Ashley also spoke about young men acting more violently when a group pressures them.

Because a lot of these young men, they only tough when they with a group versus when they by themselves... I think it should be stricter, stricter laws and rules when it comes to those type of things cause I think that a lot of young men think they carry a gun, they get a little bit of time in jail. To them, that's a slap on the wrist. To us, that's like a whole hellava lot of time. I think that the punishment should be a little more severe than what they given (Ashley, age 41).

The idea that younger adults are more vulnerable and willing to perform violent acts when they are in a group setting is not a new idea. However, it helps to explain why there are so many more young people with guns and why there are so many more young people dying because of guns. The interview participants were able to explain this problem in our society from their personal experiences. They all lost someone they loved because of gun violence, and are trying to take the next step by talking about it so that things can start to change for the better.

DISCUSSION

When people hear about a shooting or a violent incident involving guns, it is natural to react with fear and worry, anger or remorse (Wallace 2015). But the diversity of those reactions is endless, and some of those reactions may become actions. People go out and purchase guns for protection. People also purchase guns if they think the government will take them away. People start support groups for victims of gun violence. People lobby for stronger restrictions and background checks for owners. People take action.

The results from the regression analysis showed that one of the main variables the literature suggested would have an impact on attitudes toward gun control, previous victimization, did not have as strong an impact as predicted. Fear and gender were more significant than victimization. Specifically looking at fear, the literature and regression analysis

both express that neighborhood fear is impactful in individuals' decisions to support gun control. It would have been beneficial to the study if the GSS also asked an additional question about disorder in neighborhoods. Since the literature stresses the more disorder in a neighborhood, the more likely gun violence is to occur there, an additional question in the GSS could have helped explain this situation better (Sampson and Raudenbush 1999). However, the interview participants were able to add to this topic and provide a first-hand account of what it is like to live in and around neighborhood gun violence. Two of the three women moved out of their neighborhoods they grew up in because they did not want their own families to grow up surrounded by gun violence. They also shared their worries about youth specifically getting involved in gun violence, and how they did not want that for their children. The conversations with the interviewees provided insights I was unable to gain by conducting the regression analysis.

This research was an attempt to explain the attitudes people have toward gun control, especially after losing a loved one to gun violence. Gun control was an important topic during the most recent presidential debates, but aspects that seemed lacking were the personal stories. The personal interviews of women in this study indicate that when someone loses a loved one, there is a diversity of responses. One of the women spoke freely about how nothing good can come from gun violence. Another stated that gun violence does not just affect one person, but an endless amount. The diversity in responses that people may have after victimization may be one reason previous victimization was not found to be significant in the regression analysis. The interviews bring these issues to life. Gun violence is real and it affects real people.

Some limitations of this study include the small sample size of the interview participants and also the limited GSS questions asked. Gaining access to a larger sample of interview

participants, as well as survey respondents, could have enhanced the study and increased the validity and generalizability. Also, additional variables that could have been analyzed in the regression analysis were race and geographic make-up of respondents' neighborhoods. Did respondents' live in urban, suburban, or rural areas? The importance of this variable was discussed during the interviews, but it was not analyzed in the 2004 GSS data.

Although creating change cannot be done overnight, this study attempts to offer a starting point to enact that change. For instance, based on the research, we know that being female and being afraid had a positive effect on supporting stronger gun restrictions. Previous research and study respondents suggested that implementing more community programs to increase trust and safety in neighborhoods could lower gun violence and have an overall positive impact on neighborhoods. This idea was brought up in every interview and the interview participants significantly spoke about the importance of creating more opportunities for youth. Also, getting women more involved in the gun control debate, and encouraging female participation in local government could increase the support for stronger gun restrictions.

This particular research was driven by the recent increase of violent shootings in the United States. It is not enough to simply analyze and study the effects of gun violence. To make positive change, the underlying causes and possible solutions of gun violence must be examined. Learning and listening to the stories of people who have been affected, and then listening to what they believe needs to be done can be more beneficial than studying survey data alone. Evaluating individuals' attitudes about gun control is a valuable way to change policy and to enact legislation that might make neighborhoods and the country a safer place. After studying the data and completing the interviews, there is no universal response people have after losing a loved

one to gun violence. Views on gun control were different for every participant, and the data showed that many factors are related to this very complicated issue.

REFERENCES

- Celinska, Katarzyna. 2007. "Individualism and Collectivism In America: The Case of Gun Ownership and Attitudes Toward Gun Control". *Sociological Perspectives*. 50(2): 229-247.
- Cooke, Claire A. 2004. "Young People's Attitudes Towards Guns in America, Great Britain, and Western Australia". *Aggressive Behavior*. 30: 93-104.
- "Guns in the US: The Statistics behind the Violence." BBC News. BBC, 05 Jan. 2016. Web. 12 Oct. 2016.
- Lemieux, Frederic. 2014. "Effect of Gun Culture and Firearm Laws on Gun Violence and Mass Shootings in the United States: A Multi-Level Quantitative Analysis". *International Journal Of Criminal Justice Sciences* 9(1): 74-93.
- Loughran, Thomas A., Reid, Joan A., Collins, Megan Eileen., & Mulvery, Edward P. 2016. "Effect of Gun Carrying on Perceptions of Risk Among Adolescent Offenders". *American Journal of Public Health* 106(2): 350-352. doi:10.2105/AJPH.2015.302971
- Medina, Justin C. 2015. "Neighborhood Firearm Victimization Rates and Social Capital Over Time". *Violence & Victims* 30(1): 81-96. doi:10.1891/0886-6708.VV-D-13-00092
- Samson, Robert J., & Raudenbush, Stephen W. "Systematic Social Observation of Public Spaces: A New Look at Disorder in Urban Neighborhoods". *American Journal of Sociology* 105(3): 603-613.
- Sorenson, Susan, & Cook, Phillip J. 2008. "We've got a gun?": Comparing Reports of Adolescents and their Parents about Household Firearms. *Journal Of Community Psychology* 36(1): 1-19.
- Vacha, Edward F., & McLaughlin, T. F. 2004. "Risky Firearms Behavior in Low-Income Families of Elementary School Children: The Impact of Poverty, Fear of Crime, and Crime Victimization on Keeping and Storing Firearms". *Journal Of Family Violence* 19(3): 175-184.
- Wallace, Lacey N. 2015. "Responding to violence with guns: Mass shootings and gun acquisition". *The Social Science Journal* 52: 156-167.
- Young, Robert L. 1985. "Perceptions of Crime, Racial Attitudes, and Firearms Ownership". *Social Forces* 64 (2): 473-4