



Research Brief: The Relationship Between Firearms, Mass Shootings and Suicide Risk among LGBTQ+ Young People

June 2024

Background

Deaths due to firearm violence occur in alarming numbers in the United States (U.S.) each year. In 2023, over 43,000 people died from a firearm-related injury, and the majority (55%) of these deaths were from suicide (Gun Violence Archive, 2024). Young people are at heightened risk, with firearms being the leading cause of death for youth ages 13-24, and the cause of half of all suicide deaths in this age group as well (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2024; National Violent Death Reporting System, 2024). Only in the last five years did Congress allocate federal resources for firearm violence research, and the prior decades-long ban on this research has stymied information that could have been used to prevent these deaths (Hellman, 2019). This lack of research has had wide-reaching effects, including the limited understanding of how firearm violence impacts specific vulnerable populations, such as LGBTQ+ individuals. Although much progress has been made, systematic data collection efforts that assess LGBTQ+ identity and experiences have long been a challenge in the U.S., similarly limiting available research on LGBTQ+ health and wellness (Healthy People 2030, 2023). One of the most consistent findings we do know from available research, however, is that LGBTQ+ young people experience higher rates of considering and attempting suicide compared to their peers.

[The Trevor Project's 2024 U.S. National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ+ Young People](#) found that 39% of all LGBTQ+ young people seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year. This finding is important in the context of what we know about firearms: they are the most lethal means used in suicide attempts; nearly 9 in 10 (89.6%) suicide attempts with a firearm result in death (Conner, Azrael, & Miller, 2019). Furthermore, though mass shootings constitute a small fraction (1.5%) of firearm deaths in the U.S., the public nature of this violence, often targeted toward members of oppressed groups, still have noteworthy impact. Mass shootings are defined by The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) as any incident in which four or more people are shot and wounded or killed, excluding the shooter. Many LGBTQ+ people across the country identified with the victims of two widely publicized mass shootings that occurred at LGBTQ+ nightclubs in recent years: the Pulse shooting in 2016, and the shooting at Club Q in 2022. The mental health of survivors and directly impacted geographic communities are adversely affected by mass shootings (Lowe & Galea, 2017), and individuals not directly affected by mass shooting events can

also experience post-traumatic stress through media exposure (Thompson et al., 2019). In the instance of the Pulse shooting, those who identified as LGBTQ+ responded more strongly to media coverage and, in turn, experienced more post-traumatic stress (First et al., 2023).

[Everytown for Gun Safety](#) states that not only is addressing firearms essential to any strategy to reduce suicide, but also that the effect of mass shootings extends to survivors, families, and communities. Despite the elevated risk of suicide attempts among LGBTQ+ young people, the fact that the majority of firearm deaths in the U.S. are suicides, and the high lethality of suicide attempts involving firearms, little is known about how many LGBTQ+ young people own or have access to firearms, or how experiences of mass shooting events impact suicide risk. Using data from the 2024 U.S. National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ+ Young people, this brief examines relationships between access to firearms, the impact of mass shootings, and suicide risk among LGBTQ+ young people.

Results

Access to Firearms

Overall, **40% of LGBTQ+ young people reported that there was a firearm in their home**. The majority (92%) of those with a firearm in the home reported that it was not theirs. Additionally, of those who reported the presence of a firearm in their home, 63% reported that the firearm was kept in a locked place, 22% reported that it was not kept in a locked place, and 15% reported that they did not know whether it was kept in a locked place.

Demographics

LGBTQ+ young people ages 13-17 reported higher rates of having a firearm in their home (44%), compared to their LGBTQ+ young people ages 18-24 (36%). **LGBTQ+ young people living in the South reported the highest rates of having a firearm in their home (48%)**, followed by LGBTQ+ young people living in the Midwest (43%), West (37%), and Northeast (25%). Cisgender boys and men reported the highest rates of living in a home with a firearm (46%), followed by transgender girls and women (43%), transgender boys and men (42%), nonbinary youth (38%), youth questioning their gender identity (38%), and cisgender girls and women (36%). Native and Indigenous LGBTQ+ young people reported the highest rates of living in a home with a firearm (58%), followed by White LGBTQ+ young people (45%), Multiracial LGBTQ+ young people (38%), Black LGBTQ+ young people (31%), Latinx LGBTQ+ young people (29%), Middle Eastern and North African LGBTQ+ young people (22%), and Asian American and Pacific Islander LGBTQ+ young people (21%). No significant differences were found in rates of having a firearm in the home when comparing LGBTQ+ youth based on their socioeconomic status.

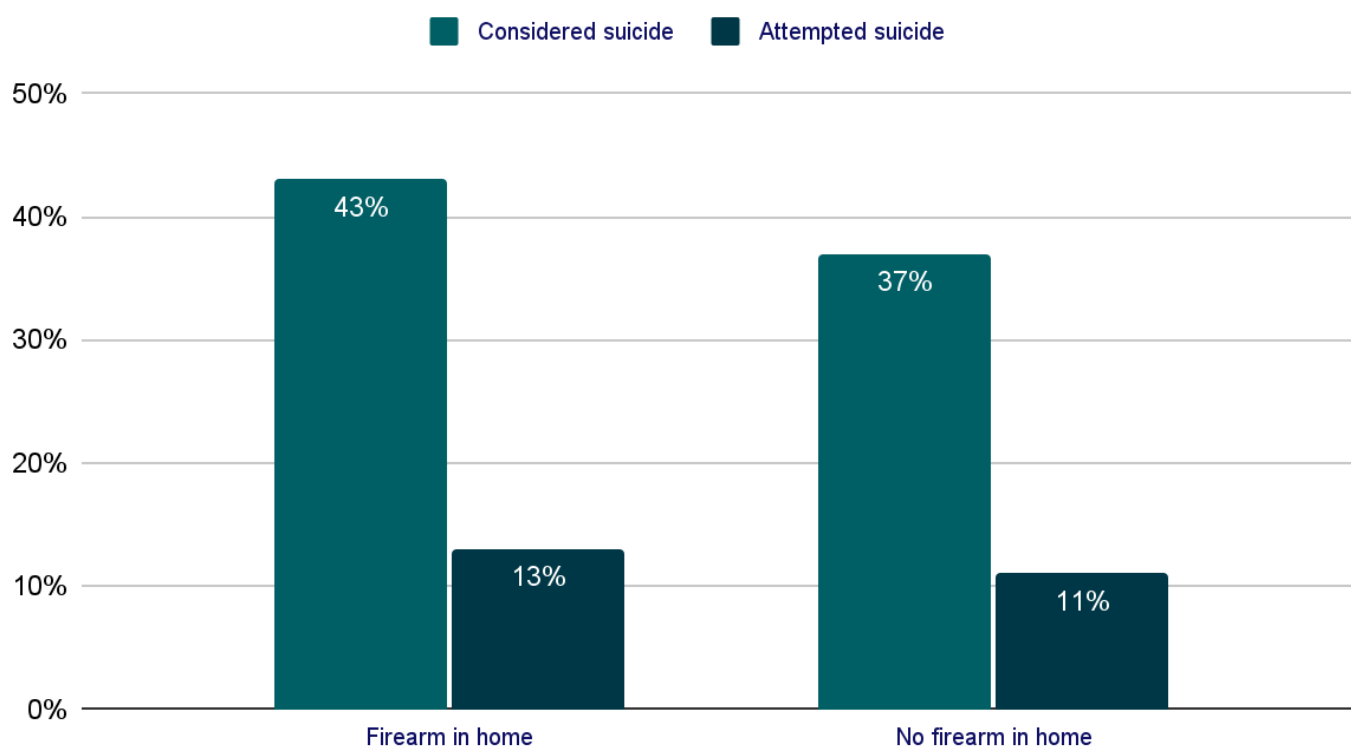
Associations with Suicide Risk

LGBTQ+ young people who reported the presence of a firearm in their home reported higher rates of having seriously considered suicide in the past year (43%), compared to their LGBTQ+ peers who did not report a firearm in their home (37%). Reporting the presence of a firearm in the home was associated with 19% higher odds of seriously considering suicide in the past year (adjusted odds ratio [aOR] = 1.19, 95% Confidence Interval [CI] = 1.11-1.28, $p < 0.001$), compared to LGBTQ+ young people who did not report the presence of a firearm in the home.

LGBTQ+ young people who reported having a firearm in their home had higher rates of attempting suicide in the past year (13%), compared to their LGBTQ+ peers who did not report having a firearm in their home (11%). The presence of a firearm in the home was associated with 17% higher odds of reporting a suicide attempt in the past year (aOR = 1.17, 95% CI = 1.05-1.30, $p < 0.01$),

Among LGBTQ+ young people who reported having a firearm in their home, 48% of those who did not keep it in a locked place and 46% of those who did not know if it was kept in a locked place seriously considered suicide in the last year, compared to the 40% who said the firearms were kept in a locked place ($p < .001$). Similarly, among those LGBTQ+ young people who reported the presence of a firearm in their home, 14% of those who did not keep it in a locked place and 15% of those who did not know if it was kept in a locked place attempted suicide in the last year, compared to the 12% who said the firearms were kept in a locked place ($p < .001$).

Suicide Risk Among LGBTQ+ Young People, by Firearm Access



Experiences with and Fears about Mass Shootings

Demographics

Overall, **21% of LGBTQ+ young people reported that they or someone they know had been personally impacted by a mass shooting**. LGBTQ+ young people ages 18-24 reported significantly higher rates of being impacted or knowing someone impacted by a mass shooting (23%), compared to their LGBTQ+ peers ages 13-17 (18%). LGBTQ+ young people living in the South and West reported the highest rates of being impacted or knowing someone impacted by a mass shooting (22%), followed by those living in the Midwest (21%) and the Northeast (17%). LGBTQ+ young people who reported only just meeting their basic economic needs reported higher rates of being impacted or knowing someone impacted by a mass shooting (26%), compared to their LGBTQ+ peers who had more than enough to meet their basic needs (20%). **Transgender, nonbinary, and gender-questioning young people reported higher rates of being impacted or knowing someone impacted by a mass shooting (22%), compared to their cisgender LGBTQ+ peers (19%)**. Nonbinary young people reported the highest rates of being impacted or knowing someone impacted by a mass shooting (24%), followed by transgender boys and men (22%), cisgender women and girls (20%), transgender girls and women (20%), gender-questioning youth (17%) and

cisgender men and boys (17%). Native and Indigenous LGBTQ+ young people reported the highest rates of being impacted or knowing someone impacted by a mass shooting (24%), followed by Multiracial LGBTQ+ young people (23%), White LGBTQ+ young people (22%), Middle Eastern and North African LGBTQ+ young people (22%), Black LGBTQ+ young people (18%), Latinx LGBTQ+ young people (18%), and Asian American and Pacific Islander LGBTQ+ young people (17%).

A majority of LGBTQ+ young people also reported frequently worrying that a mass shooting could happen in their community (87%), with 33% worrying “a lot” in the past year and 54% worrying “sometimes” that a mass shooting could happen in their community.

LGBTQ+ young people living in the South reported the highest rates of worrying about a mass shooting happening in their community (90%), followed by LGBTQ+ young people living in the Midwest (88%), West (87%), and Northeast (85%). LGBTQ+ young people who reported only just meeting their basic economic needs reported higher rates of worrying about a mass shooting happening in their community (90%), compared to their LGBTQ+ peers who had more than enough to meet their basic needs (87%). **Transgender, nonbinary, and gender-questioning young people reported higher rates of worrying about a mass shooting happening in their community (90%),** compared to their cisgender LGBTQ+ peers (85%). Transgender boys and men reported the highest rates of worrying about a mass shooting happening in their community (93%), followed by nonbinary young people (91%), gender-questioning young people (90%), cisgender girls and women (90%), transgender girls and women (80%) and cisgender boys and men (75%). Multiracial LGBTQ+ young people reported the highest rates of worrying about a mass shooting happening in their community (90%), followed by White LGBTQ+ young people (88%), Latinx LGBTQ+ young people (88%), Native and Indigenous LGBTQ+ young people (88%), Middle Eastern and North African LGBTQ+ young people (87%), Black LGBTQ+ young people (85%), and Asian American and Pacific Islander LGBTQ+ young people (84%).

Associations with Suicide Risk

LGBTQ+ young people who reported being impacted or knowing someone impacted by a mass shooting reported higher rates of having seriously considered suicide in the past year (45%), compared to their LGBTQ+ peers who did not report being impacted or knowing someone impacted by a mass shooting (37%). LGBTQ+ young people who reported being impacted or knowing someone impacted by a mass shooting also reported 38% higher odds of seriously considering suicide in the past year (aOR = 1.38, CI = 1.30-1.46, $p < 0.001$), compared to LGBTQ+ peers who did not report being impacted or knowing someone impacted by a mass shooting.

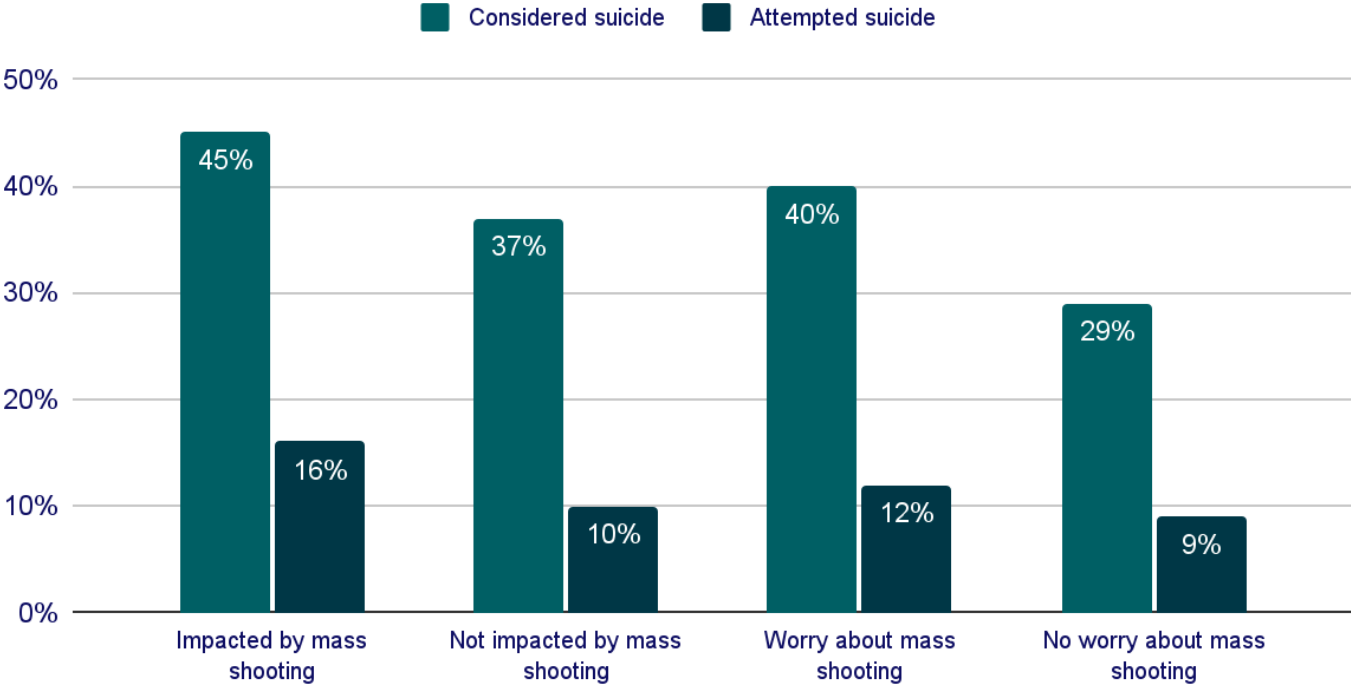
LGBTQ+ young people who reported being impacted or knowing someone impacted by a mass shooting reported higher rates of having attempted suicide in the past year (16%), compared to their

LGBTQ+ peers who did not report being impacted or knowing someone impacted by a mass shooting (10%). Being impacted or knowing someone impacted by a mass shooting was associated with 32% higher odds of reporting a suicide attempt in the past year (aOR = 1.32, CI = 1.21-1.44, $p < 0.001$), compared to LGBTQ+ peers who did not report being impacted or knowing someone impacted by a mass shooting.

LGBTQ+ young people who reported frequently worrying about a mass shooting in their community reported higher rates of having seriously considered suicide in the past year (40%), compared to their LGBTQ+ peers who did not report frequently worrying about a mass shooting in their community (29%). LGBTQ+ young people who reported frequently worrying about a mass shooting in their community also reported 53% higher odds of seriously considering suicide in the past year (aOR = 1.53, CI = 1.37-1.72, $p < 0.001$), compared to LGBTQ+ peers who did not report frequently worrying about a mass shooting in their community.

LGBTQ+ young people who reported frequently worrying about a mass shooting in their community reported higher rates of having attempted suicide in the past year (12%), compared to their LGBTQ+ peers who did not report frequently worrying about a mass shooting in their community (9%). LGBTQ+ young people who reported frequently worrying about a mass shooting in their community also reported 38% higher odds of having attempted suicide in the past year (aOR = 1.38, CI = 1.15-1.66, $p < 0.001$), compared to LGBTQ+ peers who did not report frequently worrying about a mass shooting in their community.

Suicide Risk Among LGBTQ+ Young People, by Impacts of and Worry about Mass Shooting



Methods

Data were collected through The Trevor Project’s [2024 U.S. National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ+ Young People](#). In total, 18,663 LGBTQ+ young people between the ages of 13 to 24 were recruited via targeted ads on social media.

The presence of a firearm in the home was assessed via a question which asked, “Are there any firearms in your home?” Response options included: “No,” “Yes, but it’s not mine,” and “Yes, and it’s mine.” Both “Yes” options were coded together to indicate the presence of a firearm in the home. Whether or not the firearm was stored in a secure location was assessed via the question, “Are firearms in your home kept in a locked place?” Response options included: “No,” “Yes,” and “I don’t know.” Being impacted by a mass shooting was assessed via the question, “Have you or someone you know been personally impacted by a mass shooting?” Response options included: “No” and “Yes.” Worrying about a mass shooting was assessed via the question, “In the past year, how often have you worried that a mass shooting could happen in your community?” Response options included: “Never,” “Sometimes,” and “A lot.” The responses “Sometimes” and “A lot” were coded together to indicate worry about a mass shooting.

Chi-square tests were run to examine differences in rates between groups. After checking assumptions, adjusted logistic regression models were run to examine the association between firearm variables and suicide risk, controlling for age, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic status, and Census region. All reported comparisons and odds ratios are statistically significant at least at $p < 0.05$. This means there is less than a 5% likelihood these results occurred by chance.

Looking Ahead

We found that 40% of LGBTQ+ young people reported that there was a firearm in their home, although the vast majority (92%) of those firearms were owned by other people. Having a firearm in the home was associated with higher rates of both seriously considering and attempting suicide in the past year, but these rates were lower when respondents reported that firearms were kept in a locked place. We also explored the role of mass shootings on suicide risk of LGBTQ+ young people, and found that being impacted by or knowing someone who was impacted by a mass shooting was associated with higher risk of considering and attempting suicide in the past year. This relationship was also demonstrated for LGBTQ+ young people who expressed worry about a mass shooting in their community. We urge caution when interpreting the causal nature of these relationships, as our data are cross-sectional. Furthermore, though we document associations between the presence of a firearm in the home and suicide attempts among LGBTQ+ young people, we do not assess the means used in any reported suicide attempts. Individuals who attempt suicide using firearms are unlikely to be represented in survey research, due to the highly lethal nature of these attempts. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that LGBTQ+ young people who have considered or attempted suicide in the past year are more likely to be the ones who have access to firearms.

[The 2024 National Strategy for Suicide Prevention](#) provides several recommendations for reducing risk of firearm suicide related to access, including storing firearms separately from ammunition in a locked and safe location, providing information about temporary out-of-home storage of firearms, and implementing extreme risk protection orders (ERPOs, also known as red flag laws), which allow for firearms to be temporarily removed from the home of someone at high risk of attempting suicide (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2024). For young people who died by suicide using a firearm, over 40% used one that belonged to a family member, suggesting that different policy approaches may need to be employed for legal minors, many of whom live in homes with firearms that they can easily access (Simonetti et al., 2015). The 2024 National Strategy for Suicide Prevention also has a goal designed around community-based approaches that put both distance and time between a person in crisis and lethal means (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2024). Adapting such a strategy for LGBTQ+

communities may be an important way to reduce firearm-related suicide attempts for LGBTQ+ young people, as policies that encourage safe firearm storage have been proven to lead to reductions in firearm suicides (Schell et al., 2020). These findings have implications for counselors and other mental health professionals, as assessing access to lethal means among people at risk of suicide may help provide more tailored care and reduce risk of suicide attempts and death (Boggs et al., 2020).

Firearms may play another role in suicide risk among LGBTQ+ young people beyond individual access to lethal means. The vast majority (87%) of LGBTQ+ young people reported being worried either sometimes or a lot about a mass shooting happening in their community. These worries may be rooted in rising amounts of protests, threats, and violence directed at LGBTQ+ community events like drag shows, or other visible displays of inclusivity at places such as schools (Margolin & Grant, 2023; Martiny & Lawrence, 2023). Our findings are consistent with prior literature which show adverse mental health outcomes among those exposed to mass shootings (Lowe & Galea, 2017), although our data also suggest that worrying about these shootings is similarly associated with heightened suicide risk. Following the 2016 mass shooting that occurred at Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida, researchers have hypothesized how the collective trauma from this targeted mass shooting may have had a sustained effect on LGBTQ+ people, with evidence pointing to severe psychological distress and increases concerns about safety (Gavulic & Gonzales, 2021; Stults et al., 2017), both of which may in part be reflected in our findings. Resources to support LGBTQ+ young people in the immediate aftermath of targeted shooting events, and likely some time beyond, may be necessary to mitigate any associated increase with suicide risk.

While this analysis is a step forward, there remain large gaps in research on the use of firearms in suicide attempts among LGBTQ+ young people. The lack of systematic data collection efforts on sexual orientation and gender identity in the event of a violent death means that we often have little to no information about those LGBTQ+ young people who die by suicide. The little information we do have suggests there are critical differences in precipitating circumstances and mental health that need to be explored (Lyons et al., 2019). As LGBTQ+ youth are already a population with an alarmingly high risk of considering, planning, and attempting suicide compared to their peers (Gaylor et al., 2021), information about who may be the most likely to use firearms in suicide attempts could help in targeted prevention and treatment efforts.

At The Trevor Project, our Crisis Intervention team works 24/7 to help LGBTQ+ young people in crisis. We also focus on prevention efforts in order to limit the need for crisis resources in the future and reduce the risk of suicide for LGBTQ+ young people. We provide training to youth-facing adults, including professionals who work with LGBTQ+ young people (e.g., counselors, educators, nurses, social workers) to increase understanding of LGBTQ+ young people's identities and provide guidance on trauma-informed suicide prevention efforts. Additionally, Trevor's Research team is committed to the ongoing dissemination of research that explores the experiences of LGBTQ+ young people to prevent suicide, as well as improve

their life experiences.

[Everytown for Gun Safety](#), a collaborator on this research brief, is the largest gun violence prevention organization in the country with more than 10 million supporters and more than 700,000 donors including moms, mayors, survivors, students, and everyday Americans who are fighting for common-sense gun safety measures that can help save lives. [The Everytown Survivor Network](#) is a nationwide community of survivors working together to end gun violence. The Survivor Network amplifies the power of survivor voices, connects survivors to build community, offers trauma-informed programs and trainings, and provides information on and referrals to direct services. [The Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund](#) is the education, research and litigation arm of Everytown for Gun Safety, and seeks to improve the understanding of the causes of gun violence and help to reduce it by conducting groundbreaking original research, developing evidence-based policies, communicating this knowledge to the American public, and advancing gun safety and gun violence prevention in communities and the courts.

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