

# Many in law enforcement own firearms—they are more likely to have suicidal thoughts, says study

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Law enforcement officers in the United States own firearms at high rates and rarely engage in secure firearm storage, which could increase their

risk for suicide, according to a Rutgers study.

The researchers, whose [study](#) appears in the journal *Injury Prevention*, examined data from 369 [law enforcement officers](#) in the U.S. Information about firearm ownership, storage, [suicide risk](#) and demographics were included in the present study.

Overall, 70.5% of law enforcement officers report owning a firearm. The most common type of firearms owned were handguns (79.7%) followed by shotguns (61.1%) and rifles (57.5%). A sharp majority, 78.9%, reported owning more than one type of firearm.

Law enforcement officers reported low rates of engagement in secure firearm storage. The most common type of secure storage methods used were gun safes (39.8%), followed by locking devices such as trigger or cable locks (31.2%). According to the study, 57.6% of the sample reported lifetime thoughts of suicide and those with lifetime thoughts of suicide were more likely to own firearms.

"Historically, law enforcement officers have had higher rates of [suicidal thoughts](#) and behaviors," said Allison Bond, [clinical psychology](#) doctoral candidate with the New Jersey Gun Violence Research Center at Rutgers and the first author of the study. "We found that not only are they experiencing high rates of suicidal thoughts, but those who have had suicidal thoughts are more likely to own firearms, and are often not engaging in secure storage.

"This is concerning because access to a firearm increases the risk for several types of firearm related injuries and death, including suicide; and this risk is even higher when a firearm is not stored securely. We need to work with law enforcement officers to determine ways to increase secure storage."

Previous research has found that law enforcement officers have [high rates of suicidal thoughts and behaviors](#) than the [general population](#), and a high percentage of their [suicide deaths result from firearms](#).

"If law enforcement officers experiencing suicidal thoughts are more likely to have quick access to an unsecured [firearm](#), there is a greater risk that, in their worst moment, they will reach for and use by far the most lethal method for suicide," said Michael Anestis, executive director of the New Jersey Gun Violence Research Center and an associate professor at Rutgers School of Public Health.

Anestis, the senior author of the study, added, "We do not always know when an officer is suffering with suicidal thoughts, so we need to work with that community to foster a general tendency to store firearms securely by default so that, if they one day find themselves thinking about suicide, it will be more difficult for them to make a deadly decision in response to those thoughts."

**More information:** Allison E Bond et al, Law enforcement and firearms: understanding firearm ownership and storage habits, *Injury Prevention* (2023). [DOI: 10.1136/ip-2023-044919](https://doi.org/10.1136/ip-2023-044919)

Provided by Rutgers University

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