

Researchers find link between lonely veterans and firearm purchases

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Low-income U.S. veterans who are experiencing feelings of loneliness are more likely to purchase firearms, according to new research from UTHealth Houston.

A study led by principal investigator Alexander Testa, Ph.D., assistant professor, and co-investigator Jack Tsai, Ph.D., professor, from the Department of Management, Policy and Community Health with UTHHealth Houston School of Public Health, was [published](#) recently in *Social Science & Medicine*.

"Loneliness was significantly associated with a higher likelihood of purchasing a firearm in the past year," Testa said. "To put the findings in context, loneliness was measured on a scale of zero to six, and the findings showed that 13.7% of persons with a loneliness score of six had purchased a new firearm in the past year, compared to 5.1% of persons with a loneliness score of zero."

Researchers collected data from a [national survey](#) conducted in December 2022 and January 2023 involving 1,004 low-income U.S. veterans. Utilizing Firth [logistic regression](#), a method designed to address biases in small-sample studies, the study aimed to explore the association between loneliness and firearm acquisition in the past year.

Among the key findings, approximately 5.4% of all respondents reported purchasing a new firearm within the past year. The study revealed a [positive association](#) between loneliness and recent firearm acquisition, even after controlling for demographic, socioeconomic, and household variables.

"There are public health concerns about [social isolation](#) and safe firearm ownership as separate issues among veterans, and this study highlights a potential important connection between the two," said Tsai, who is also regional dean in San Antonio. "Helping address one issue may affect the other, and it'll be worthwhile to examine this further and determine whether this connection also exists among other adults."

Investigators also discovered the potential risks associated with both

loneliness and firearm ownership, including veteran suicide. The researchers said the findings show the necessity of targeted interventions to address loneliness and promote safe firearm practices within the veteran community, and may contribute valuable insights for future efforts to improve the [mental health](#) and well-being of U.S. military veterans.

More information: Alexander Testa et al, Loneliness and firearm acquisition among low-income U.S. veterans: Findings from the National Veteran Homeless and Other Poverty Experiences (NV-HOPE) study, *Social Science & Medicine* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2023.116356](#)

Provided by University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston

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