

# Compounded effects of racism on mental distress, alcohol use, firearm purchases among Asian Americans during pandemic

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Racism provoked during the COVID-19 pandemic is directly tied to increased firearm purchases among Asian Americans, according to a study led by researchers at the University of Michigan and Eastern Michigan University.

The study, [published](#) in the *Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities*, is believed to be the first to examine the relationship between racism, mental distress, [alcohol use](#) and firearm purchasing behavior among Asian Americans during the [pandemic](#).

In an effort to better understand these associations, researchers collected data from a national sample of 916 Asian Americans in 2021, using geographical information to determine regional clusters with higher-than-average Asian American populations.

Evaluation of the data showed that experiencing racism was both directly and indirectly related to firearm purchases.

A prior study by the U-M and EMU researchers found that 55% of Asian American firearm purchasers during the early months of the pandemic were first-time gun owners. Other research found an estimated 43% increase in firearm purchases among Asian Americans during this time.

"Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Asian Americans have experienced multiple threats, including hostile rhetoric, violence, exposure to invectives, negative stories in the media, and anti-Asian hate and incidents," said lead author Tsu-Yin Wu, professor and director of the Center for Health Disparities Innovation and Studies at Eastern Michigan University.

"The study results showed that Asian Americans' racism experience is associated with increased mental distress, alcohol use and firearm purchases. The mechanism further illustrated that [mental distress](#) and alcohol use were also linked to firearm purchases, which means racism affects firearm purchase in a heightened way both directly and indirectly."

Among the population examined as part of the study, men were more likely than women to purchase a firearm during the pandemic. Individuals over 50 were more likely to buy a gun than those under age 30. The data also shows that married/cohabitating couples were also more likely to make a firearm purchase.

"Our study findings give us insight into how [racial discrimination](#) and firearm purchase during the COVID-19 pandemic are connected," said Hsing-Fang Hsieh, research assistant professor at the Institute for Firearm Injury Prevention, and the evaluation director for the National Center for School Safety, both based at U-M.

"Using the data we will continue to learn from our Asian American communities and we can develop and implement interventions that address the harmful effects of racism on mental health and firearm injury risks in order to mitigate this public health problem."

**More information:** Tsu-Yin Wu et al, Understanding the Intersectionality of COVID-19 Racism, Mental Distress, Alcohol Use, and Firearm Purchase Behavior Among Asian Americans, *Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities* (2023). [DOI: 10.1007/s40615-023-01874-1](#)

Provided by University of Michigan

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