GUN DEALERS, PAWNBROKERS SAY IT'S TOO EASY FOR CRIMINALS TO GET GUNS
Results published despite gun lobby efforts to block collection of research data

(SACRAMENTO, Calif.) — The majority of U.S. firearms dealers and pawnbrokers believe it is too easy for criminals to get guns in America, results from the UC Davis Firearms Licensee Survey reveal.

The survey is believed to be the first of its kind to gather the views of federally licensed firearms dealers and pawnbrokers on important social issues and the firearms business itself, as well as to collect data on the characteristics of these business establishments.

"Characteristics of federaly licensed firearms retailers and retail establishments in the United States: Initial findings from the Firearms Licensee Survey" appears online today in the Journal of Urban Health. The survey was conducted by the UC Davis Violence Prevention Program in 2011.

This initial publication provides the first detailed statistical portrait of retail establishments -- gun dealers and pawnbrokers -- that sell firearms. It also details respondents' personal characteristics and attitudes toward firearms, including their incentives for and concerns about employment in the firearms industry.

Subsequent publications will address reports of frequency of criminal activity at their stores, estimates of the frequency of and motivations for deliberately participating in illegal gun sales among their colleagues, and opinions on selected policy issues.

"Owners and senior executives of federally licensed firearms dealers and pawnbrokers are valuable sources of information on retail commerce in firearms, links between legal and illegal gun sales, and policies designed to prevent the firearms that they sell from being used in crimes," said Garen Wintemute, director of the UC Davis Violence Prevention Research Program and author of the study. "We were very gratified by their willingness to participate in this study and share their unique insights with the scientific community."

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To conduct the survey, Wintemute followed well-established procedures for research in the field. He used the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives' online database to identify licensed dealers and pawnbrokers in the U.S. believed to sell 50 or more firearms a year. He then mailed the retailers a 12-page questionnaire with 38 questions and a final text box for respondents to offer additional comments. Licensees from California, Connecticut, Hawaii, New Jersey, Nevada, Pennsylvania and Virginia were excluded from the survey because counts from the National Instant Criminal Background Check System were not available.

Of the 1,601 licensees sent questionnaires, 591 returned completed surveys, for an overall response rate of 36.9 percent. Gun dealers and pawnbrokers responded in nearly equal numbers, with respondents employed by corporate multisite licensees (such as a sporting goods and general retail stores) responding less frequently (19.7 percent) than those employed by a corporate/single-site licensee or by an individual owner (41.1 percent). The group as a whole was demographically homogeneous: older (median age of 54), White, non-Hispanic and male.

The majority of gun dealers and pawnbrokers (54.9 percent) believed it is too easy for criminals to get guns in the U.S. Agreement varied little with age and sex, was somewhat more common among gun dealers than pawnbrokers, and was more common among respondents from corporate/multisite licensees than others. Reasons for working in the firearms business reflected a match between the job and respondents' personal interests. These included introducing new gun owners to shooting sports and helping to build a safer community rather than looking for personal material benefit. Major concerns about the business were too many gun control regulations and fears that the government might confiscate their guns.

A plurality (44.7 percent) of gun dealers operated as sporting goods stores or general retail stores, 28.7 percent were specialized gun stores, and 18.2 percent were located in residences. Gun dealers appeared more likely than pawnbrokers to specialize in specific types of firearms and to sell firearms at gun shows or on the Internet. Pawnbrokers reported a higher percentage of sales to women and sales of inexpensive handguns. There was a direct relationship between the frequency of attempted purchases by persons who were prohibited from owning firearms and sales of firearms that were later used in crime.

Wintemute noted that gun lobby tried to interfere with the execution of the survey.

"Major national organizations sought to block this research, even though it could help protect the public's health and safety without undue interference with the legitimate uses of firearms," Wintemute said. "Two days after the first questionnaire was mailed, the —more—
National Shooting Sports Foundation posted notices on its website 'strongly discouraging retailers from participating in this study.' The National Rifle Association (NRA) quickly followed suit, issuing a similar notice and e-mailing its entire membership.

Despite the interference, Wintemute's study had a response rate that is comparable to other surveys of retail establishments using similar methods. The incident demonstrates the influence Wintemute says the gun lobby has exerted over the years to limit research on firearms and injury.

"Congress has effectively barred the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) from conducting or supporting research on firearm violence since 1995," Wintemute said. "The National Institutes of Health budget now contains the same restrictions. With the continuing epidemic of firearm violence, it is tragically clear that we need more research, not less."

But the tide may be turning.

Wintemute notes that in July 2012, Jay Dickey, who served as the NRA's point person in Congress for the restrictions on the CDC, wrote in the Washington Post that "scientific research should be conducted into preventing firearm injuries."

"If we are going to prevent mass tragedies like the shootings in Aurora, Colo., and endemic firearm violence that kills or injures an average of nearly 300 people a day, we must all support research that identifies the causes of firearm violence and points to effective remedies," Wintemute said.

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