The following summary data were presented in **Goldstein, E.V., Sanger, A. & Hill, J.L. Firearm experiences and safe storage challenges among a sample of Black adults: a rapid qualitative analysis. Inj. Epidemiol. 12, 79 (2025). https://doi.org/10.1186/s40621-025-00634-5.** *Please see the referenced paper online for full details about the methods used to generate the following data, as well as the data in final, published format.*

SUMMARY DATA – AIM 2

Topic 1: Experience with Firearms

Key Concept 1.1: Early Introduction to Firearms Through Parents

Most participants were introduced to firearms at an early age, often by their fathers or mothers. The participants' parents commonly kept firearms in their homes for safety and protection, motivated by fears of racial vulnerability as Black individuals in a majority white society, perceived political threats (e.g., during the Cold War), and exposure to firearm violence in their communities. Firearms were also kept for other reasons, such as parents' being introduced to firearms through military careers, recreational use and fun, hunting, rural living (e.g., the necessities of living on a farm), and as a shared family hobby – especially between fathers and their children, e.g.:

> My father used to take us to the shooting range. There used to be a police range. We'd go shoot and then, after the police range, after shooting, we'll go and have hot wings. And play some arcade games. So, I always associated that as a fun Saturday.

One participant captured the emotional complexity of growing up around firearms in their community, where exposure to firearm violence coexisted with a sense of enjoyment and familiarity:

> You mention the word firearm [to people in the community], and it takes them back, you know, to some form of PTSD, back to something that happened to them, or they lost someone close to them, you know? Someone was shot, someone was robbed, someone was murdered, you know, something like that… So, whenever the topic of firearms or a gun comes up, they immediately retreat back to that space. And although I grew up with those kinds of things, we always just enjoyed firearms, how they looked, how they fired, and stuff like that.

Participants repeatedly talked about being taught how to properly clean, handle, and use their families' firearms from a young age. Their families' firearms were typically stored securely in the home, e.g., in gun safes that only adults could access:

> Only adults had the pin or the code [to the gun safe]. That was the standard. I didn't get the code to the guns in the house until I turned 18. And I think my dad would repeatedly change it, like, every two months, every three months.

However, not all participants recalled safe storage practices. One participant described how firearms were left unsecured, relying instead on verbal warnings, which proved ineffective, fueling their curiosity and leading them to access the firearms anyway:

> Personally, like growing up at home, my dad didn't own a safe. He had his rifles the closet. He just threatened us, "You better not touch it." But of course, we did.

<u>Key Concept 1.2: Introduction to Firearms in Adulthood</u>

Other participants described first becoming familiar with firearms in adulthood. Their firearm experiences were shaped by a range of motivations. For some, professional roles in the military or law enforcement served as their entry point into firearm use. These participants received formal training as part of their job requirements, which in turn shaped their perceptions of firearm safety and responsibility. Several participants became interested in firearms as adults for hunting, recreation, or due to a general interest in the form and function of different firearms (i.e., a fascination with the physics of firearms). For them, shooting was seen as a hobby or activity that was technical, aesthetic, and enjoyable, e.g.:

> I've always had an inquisitive nature. I've had to know how something works, how it functions, why it functions the way it does. Even with, like, trains, planes, you know, I guess just being curious and just wanting to know why things work the way they do.

Several participants sought out firearms as adults for personal safety and protection, sometimes after experiencing or witnessing violence or discrimination, either firsthand or indirectly, such as through high-profile law enforcement killings of Black individuals like Tamir Rice.

Regardless of their motivation, most of these participants reported a commitment to learning how to store and use firearms safely, even though several participants had to overcome an initial fear of firearms. They sought out training through concealed carry courses, instruction from family members, or organizations such as the National Rifle Association (NRA), U.S. Concealed Carry Association, NAAGA, and local ranges, with several participants noting the comradery with others that developed during those experiences. Multiple participants pursued certification to become firearm safety instructors themselves for recreational or entrepreneurial reasons. One participant emphasized their motivation to challenge what they viewed as negative stereotypes about Black firearm owners and increase the visibility of responsible firearm ownership as a Black individual:

> I know it's looked upon negatively within the Black community because we're not looked at the same as gun owners. So, I wanted people to realize that we own our firearms legally. We do take the steps. We do take classes. Everyone is not a criminal. And I said, "I just wanted to bring that to light as well." A lot of us take it seriously. We actually go train, you know? I want to take us out of that negative [narrative].

Topic 2: Why Firearms are in the Home

Key Concept 2.1: Firearms Kept in the Home for Protection

Most of the participants kept firearms in their homes to protect themselves, their families, and their property. The perceived need for protection through firearm ownership was repeatedly a response to fear – a fear of some external threat that might disrupt their lives. Specific fears included the fear of experiencing racial violence, racism, or racial prejudice, even when the participants had not directly experienced such prejudice, e.g.:

> During the last presidential election, some of the supporters of one of the candidates thought that it was okay to run members of [a historically African American fraternal organization] off the road, which I am a member of that [organization]. And so…that was the straw that broke the camel back for me. So, at that time, I took the [fraternal organization] license plate off my car, and I asked my brother to take me to buy a gun so I can protect myself.

Additional fears included a fear of waiting too long for law enforcement to respond in a time of crisis or exposure to crime, a fear of civil unrest during the COVID-19 pandemic, and fears and suspicions related to prior military service experiences.

Several participants were motivated to acquire firearms following personal experiences with violence, including firearm violence; threats of violence, even at places of religious worship; or crime. One participant described how a home break-in prompted an immediate decision to purchase a firearm, not out of preparation, but as a protective instinct and the urgent need to feel safe:

> The first reason that I bought a firearm is a common reason. When I moved, someone broke into the house I was renting, so I was like, "I'm gonna go get a gun." And that's what I did. I didn't do any research. I ended up buying a gun that I have not used, probably since I bought it. I was green with that, so I didn't really have the knowledge. I didn't do any research, so I just went out, bought a gun so that you feel, quote, unquote, you know, "safe."

Several participants stressed that doing so was their right under the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution – their right to purchase firearms, defend themselves, and protect their families. For multiple female participants, firearm ownership was not only about personal safety but also about having the privilege to take their family's protection into their own hands, much like their own mothers did.

Key Concept 2.2: Firearms Kept in the Home for Work, Hobby, and Education

Participants also reported keeping firearms in their homes for occupational, recreational, and educational reasons. For example, some participants had law enforcement and security personnel jobs requiring them to carry firearms, while other participants kept firearms in their homes for recreation and hobby, including activities like competitive target shooting, skeet-shooting, and hunting. Multiple male participants were motivated to keep firearms in the home and model responsible ownership for their children. They viewed this as an opportunity to teach

their children about firearms in more constructive ways than those sometimes portrayed or experienced in their communities., e.g.:

> I tell people all the time, I wouldn't have trusted myself at 16 with a firearm. Because I was just immature and irresponsible versus my daughter. Me going through my life experiences…made it easier for me to prepare her to be in a house with guns.

These participants sought to teach their children how to safely handle, clean, and secure firearms in their homes, and in doing so, demystify firearms and decrease their children's curiosity about accessing firearms. One participant described their desire to instill an understanding about the danger of firearms, given the ubiquity of firearms in their communities:

> For me, making sure that my children are very aware and knowledgeable about not only the firearm itself, but how it operates and the destruction that it can cause in the wrong hands was very, very important.

Topic 3: Challenges to Keeping Firearms Safe in the Home

Key Concept 3.1: Access to Firearm Safety Knowledge and Training

Despite being asked about challenges to safely storing firearms in the home, participants discussed a broader lack of – and limited access to – reliable firearm safety knowledge in Black communities as a key challenge to safe firearm storage and keeping firearms safe in the home. Multiple participants expressed their worry that too many Black firearm owners do not fully understand how and when to use a firearm properly, e.g., how to properly load, handle, and shoot their firearms, or store their firearms securely. Of concern for these participants were the potential consequences of acquiring firearms for self-defense without understanding the harm that irresponsible firearm handling can inflict on oneself or others, regardless of whether the firearms are securely stored. For one participant, limited firearms knowledge was the primary challenge to ensuring secure firearm storage and safety in the home; however, the participant also expressed their view that Black communities should not face unnecessary barriers to firearm ownership and knowledge:

> The Bible has a verse in Hosea 4:3, that says, "My people are destroyed for the lack of knowledge." And I believe that that is the biggest barrier that we have. It should be the responsibility of every gun owner to be properly trained on all the aspects of being a responsible firearm owner. But there's got to be a medium in there. [Not] everybody needs to go through a million hours of training before they can get a gun. We can send you away to war, but we can't trust you with a gun and all these other kinds of things. It's our rights, too. It's our constitutional rights.

Participants specifically expressed their concern that there may be limited knowledge about firearm storage and safety devices (e.g., safes and locks) within Black communities. Even when locks are distributed for free by firearm dealers or healthcare entities, instruction on how to use the locks is not always provided in Black communities.

For some participants, limited knowledge of firearm storage and safety practices was not perceived as the firearm owners' fault; rather, limited firearm safety knowledge was the consequence of inaccessible training or instruction in Black communities, which can lead to ignorance about firearm basics, storage, safety, and laws:

> Carelessness is you knew better. Ignorance is, you know, I don't speak this in a derogatory way, but ignorance is just not knowing.

Additionally, several of these participants described how it can be taboo to talk about firearms in Black communities, which may prevent prospective Black firearm owners from seeking or discovering available storage and safety resources, including locks and other devices and instruction on how to use them. Finally, one participant expressed their concern that concealed carry licensure courses were readily available but focused too much on firearm laws, not firearm mechanics, storage, safety, or use, which may lead to injuries or self-harm:

> [They] didn't teach you anything about a firearm. They taught you the law, that if you hurt someone, you know, if you use your gun or something, it's a crime, but it did not teach you anything about the firearm. … For me, the concealed carry class should be a one-day class on the laws and regulations and four days of firearms training. You know? Where they're actually out there and, day one, all they're doing is taking and cleaning and learning about that particular firearm, where the safeties are, if it has a thumb safety on it versus a trigger safety. Those kinds of things.

<u>Key Concept 3.2: Opportunity Costs – Time and Money</u>

Participants described various costs as barriers to safe firearm storage in the home. These costs included the price of specific types of firearm storage devices, notably gun safes and biometric safety devices. Reflecting on their interactions with other adults in their community, one participant asserted the following advice:

> If you can afford to purchase that gun, you should be able to afford to find a way to store it and lock it. I tell people gun ownership is not cheap. If this is something that you want, you know, you have to consider the expenses that come along with it.

Additionally, participants discussed the financial burden of maintaining firearm safety practices beyond storage alone, including the cost of firearm safety instruction, insurance, and ammunition for practicing and becoming comfortable with operating one's firearm, as well as the potential consequences of not being able to afford ongoing training or practice. They worried that, even with initial training, being unable to afford additional firearm safety instruction – or becoming too complacent over time – would negatively affect their attitudes and behaviors on keeping firearms safe in their homes.

Participants also identified the opportunity cost of time. In addition to having the necessary financial resources, having ample time to commit to staying well-informed of best storage and safety practices (e.g., training, mindfulness, and preparation) can be challenging due to competing life priorities. Similarly, several participants who kept firearms in the home for safety described a perceived trade-off between secure storage and rapid access in an emergency. As Black adults, given the fear of an external threat disrupting their lives (e.g., community or racial violence), the ability to quickly access a loaded firearm for self-defense was seen as more important for protecting themselves and their families than adhering to ideal storage practices. For one participant, the trade-off between safe storage and quick access was further complicated by financial constraints, particularly in Black communities facing economic hardship. The

participant reflected on the difficult choices families must make when resources are limited and safety is a concern:

> There's not a lot of high earners in this area. And with blue collar towns, you have blue collar wages. And with blue collar wages, and the cost of living going up, you know, you have to make those decisions on how to best secure your family and best take care of your family.

Key Concept 3.3: Concerns about Children Gaining Access to Firearms and the Importance of Communicating with Children about Firearms in the Home

Although the interview questions did not explicitly ask about children, the participants repeatedly and spontaneously discussed their worry about their children's curiosity, perceptiveness, and capability of gaining access to their firearms intentionally or unintentionally. As expressed by one parent when reflecting on their household gun safe:

> A child's going to figure it out. That password you think they don't know. They're going to figure it out.

Participants who perceived no other challenges to safely storing their firearms in the home expressed these perceptions, as did participants who reported safely storing their firearms, with one participant noting the evolving challenges of preventing children from accessing household firearms as children get older, e.g.:

> I don't think we have any barriers [to safely storing our firearms]. … [But] as long as [they're] probably like age five or six, the safe is not your problem. By the time they get older, young children are curious.

Another participant stressed these concerns by referencing conversations with other people in their community, as well as online videos they had encountered, underscoring their worry about underestimating children's curiosity and ability to access firearms in the home:

> I've been talking to parents in particular and how they just don't realize that their child can access their gun. In their mind, "Oh, I put it up high enough. They can't reach it." [On YouTube] there is a video of a baby. The parent told the baby that there was something in the cabinet above the refrigerator. And the child scaled that refrigerator like they were Spider-Man. Yeah. And he was still in Pampers. It is like, OK, if this child can get to the top of that refrigerator, what makes you think that your child can't find your gun?

Participants also discussed their concern about how to effectively communicate with children in the home about the purpose of firearms and firearm safety devices in ways that

demystified firearms and emphasized the danger and consequences of trying to access household firearms. One participant framed this challenge within a broader context, specifically addressing the need to combat cultural messages that, in their view, normalize firearms and potential storage practices in detrimental ways among youth in Black communities, including the portrayal of firearms in video games and music as socially acceptable, fun, and consequence-free. The participant asserted that popular media often distorts the Black community's understanding of firearms, storage, and safety practices at a young age:

> It usually comes from what they've seen either on TV, heard in some music they were listening to, or a video game. … Unfortunately, you are what you consume, unless you know better. And a lot of people haven't had that knowledge drilled into them to know that, hey, Call of Duty might not be a good source of firearms knowledge. … I'm not necessarily saying you got to show them, like, a dead body or anything but communicate and show them the harm that could come from accessing a firearm…or not using it safely and things like that.

Collectively, participants emphasized the importance of proactive communication with children and nurturing a culture of safety in their communities at a young age.