

3 Priorities for a Public Health Research Agenda

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Some lessons from Newtown

Evident **research gaps** in the national debate

1. Updated **survey** of gun ownership
2. Evaluation of state laws requiring **background checks** for private sales
3. Updated analysis of school **rampage shootings**
4. **Sources of guns to youth suicides**

Updated survey of gun ownership

“Why wouldn’t we want to close the loophole that allows as many as 40 percent of all gun purchases to take place without a background check?” (President Obama)

40% is widely repeated and critiqued

Main source: 1994 National Survey of Private Ownership of Firearms In the US

Cook & Ludwig (1996)

Two national surveys

	1994 NSPOF	2004 Harvard survey
Sponsor	NIJ/ Police Fdn	Joyce Fdn/Harvard
Sample (completed)	2568	2770
Response rate	23%	12-18%
Method	RDD	RDD

Stability and change

	1994 NSPOF	2004 Harvard
Adults owning guns	25%	26%
Male	42%	42%
Female	9%	11%
# of guns/owner	4.4	6.6
% of owners with handgun	64%	64%
% of owners with 4+ guns	42%	48%

What can we learn?

Transactions

Storage

Carrying

But:

Is a **valid** survey of gun ownership possible given political and cultural sensitivity? (Smith 2003)

2. Private-sale background checks

Most prominent of the President's proposals:
Universal background checks for gun buyers

Laboratory of the states: **15 states** require background checks for private sales of handguns
(Wintemute and Baker 2013)

Some evidence on gun **trafficking** (Webster et al. 2009)

But there have been no good evaluations of the effect on **crime or suicide**

3. School rampage shootings

Epidemic of rampage shootings in US high schools, **1996-99**. Subsides after Columbine

Newman and Fox 2009; US Secret Service “Safe School Initiative” (2002); NRC’s *Deadly Lessons* (2003)

Secret Service: develop our capacity for **threat assessment for prevention**

Signaling by troubled adolescents → failed plots
(K. Newman to NSF SBE Directorate, 2013)

Recommendations for CDC Funding

1. National survey of firearms ownership (subject to [assessment of alternative methods](#))
2. Background checks (learning from state experience)
3. High school [rampages](#) – signaling, threat assessment, SROs, and failed plots