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# Perceptions of People's Experiences Regarding Gun Violence

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*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Walden University  
2018

Abstract

Perceptions of People's Experiences Regarding Gun Violence

by

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MA, Chicago State University, 1996

BA, University of Minnesota, 1994

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Criminal Justice

Walden University

May 2018

## Abstract

Gun violence is a problem in many communities across the United States that are characterized by poverty, and lack of quality education, yet little is known about the experiences of victims of gun violence in these places. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to better understand how people who have been victims of gun violence perceive problems and solutions associated with the production, distribution, and ownership of guns. Based on the theoretical framework of Rousseau's social contract theory, this study explored gun violence from the perspectives of 10 victims whose lives were directly or indirectly affected by gun violence to understand how victims perceive the obligations of government to the governed in terms of response to gun violence. Data from individual interviews were subjected to selective and open coding followed by a thematic analysis procedure. The key findings from this study revealed that gun violence victims were able to differentiate between the intended use of firearms and its abuse. The victims associated the abuse of firearms to deteriorating social factors. In accordance with the classic premise of the social contract theory, the victims thought that the fight against gun violence needed to be led by the affected communities. The results of this study demonstrated what appeared to be a new rendition of theory, that instead of challenging local authorities, the victims opted for a leadership-based collaborative approach to eradicate the underlying social weaknesses that lead to gun violence. The conclusions drawn from this study may provide insight into appropriate measures that can aid in social uplift among affected communities, such as modifications to existing gun control laws to promote safety and efficiency and citizen collaboration toward improved regulation.

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## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my late dad James Manwun Ndikum and mom Philomina Bukwere Ndikum for always being there for me and having faith in my God-given gifts. They still have confidence every one of their kids and encourage them always to strive to do their best and leave the rest to the Lord. My late dad's wish was to have one of his kids become a doctor. I just accomplished that for him. I am thankful to have you all as my biggest supporters. Your unending affection roused me to wrap up this study. I additionally need to commit this to my lovely wife Jacqueline Ndikum for enduring me for 22 years and my 4 kids: Terence N. Mofor, Charles E. Ndikum Jr., Ashley Ndikum and Desere Ndikum. My wife and my 4 kids are my most significant accomplishment, and with whom I am so proud. I cherish all of you with all my heart with all the support and love you have given me through this educational journey. It is also dedicated to my brothers and sisters, Victorine Mujang Tasog, Marcel Chinje Ndikum, Edith Shuri Chofor, Evelyn Lum McCurdy, Evangeline Che Ndikum and my late brother Denis Nji Ndikum. The support of the Manwun Ndikum family had given me tremendous strength and endurance when I was worn out and required a push. Much thanks to all of you for your endowments of confidence in God and love of education, it has furnished me with inspiration to satisfy my dreams.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Gun violence is a devastating problem that has been of concern for decades, particularly within the past 20 years. According to Halbrook (2013b), firearms have been used in both violent and nonviolent crimes, including homicide, suicide, and armed robberies. The growing severity of gun violence has forced the U.S. federal government to implement more stringent regulatory measures. The measures that have been implemented are diverse, ranging from community-wide programs that promote firearm prohibition among high-risk groups, such as violent offenders and victims of violence, to school-wide programs that encourage children living in high-risk communities to make smart, healthy choices. However, one of the most fundamental means of regulating gun control is to establish policies that strictly govern the production, distribution, and ownership of firearms. To create successful, efficient, and safe policies, further research needs to be conducted on the topic of gun violence. I sought to add to the existing body of knowledge surrounding gun violence by conducting a qualitative, phenomenological case study to collect the perspectives of gun violence victims. This study also provides brief background information on the history of gun violence to shed light on the government's ongoing efforts to decrease gun violence in this country.

### **Literature Review Search Strategy**

The literature that I consulted to establish the relevance of gun violence was selected from various sources. I conducted a literature search using electronic data sources that included the databases of Walden University Library and Google Scholar. Databases that I accessed online included ProQuest Digital Dissertations, EBSCOhost, and Sage Publications. Keywords and phrases searched included *gun violence in the*

*United States, repercussions of gun violence, aftermath of gun violence, effects of gun violence, incidence of gun violence, victims of gun violence, gun violence in urban areas, causes of gun violence, and slight variations of these terms.*

The literature review included peer-reviewed articles, books, studies, and dissertations. Subtopics discussed included the extent of gun violence and strategies that to decrease the incidence of gun violence in the modern day.

### **Research Background**

According to Halbrook (2013a), no community or culture is exempt from the perils of gun violence. Gun violence is a significant threat to safety that affects both large cities and small communities throughout the country (Halbrook, 2013a). Though classified by different terms, firearms are the standard weapons used in various crimes, both as means of intimidation and to inflict casualties. Firearms, when wielded as weapons, are generally perceived as violent, in that they can inflict harm on a single person or several people, as well as the individual in custody of the weapon, whether intentionally or accidentally. However, the term *crime*, when related to gun violence, only appears in association with homicide and in situations in which an assault, suicide, or attempted suicide involves a deadly weapon (Gray, 2014). Other crimes involving firearms, such as accidental or unintended death or injury, are labeled simply as *nonviolent* (Jackson & Sorenson, 2014). The difference between violent and nonviolent is attributed to the intent of the individual carrying the firearm. Due to the potential impact associated with the use of firearms for reasons unrelated to self-defense, the aftermath of gun violence is grave for communities, cities, and the nation as a whole.

According to Godbold (2014), gun violence presents a particular threat to the country's youth. When a child is exposed to gun violence, it may have significant and adverse effects, including the loss of close friends and relatives. According to Wolf and Rosen (2015), rates of childhood mental illness are unusually high in areas with high gun violence rates. The adverse effects of gun violence on youth present a need to develop better coping strategies for the aftermath of gun violence, both for the nation and for individual communities, especially in neighborhoods that have high rates of criminal activity.

Webster and Vernick (2013) contended that it is the government's responsibility to protect children and teens from gun-related crimes. According to Stowell (2014), the chief means of protecting youth involves using laws and strategies to protect the public. However, in the past decade, this effort has proven unsuccessful, and many Americans have voiced their dissatisfaction with the glorification of guns in modern-day society (Calhoun, 2014), particularly among the country's youth. The need for social change to address this problem is great, as argued by Cook (2013). Gun violence, especially in areas with high poverty rates, creates a troubling scenario that cannot be regulated or handled easily. Federal laws and social agencies, such as community policing, have thus far been ineffective in managing gun violence. Consequently, it has been challenging to find solutions to violence. In this situation, youth have felt encouraged to acquire guns to protect themselves and their households, thereby continuing the cycle of gun violence in these neighborhoods (Malley-Morrison et al., 2015). This phenomenon prompted me to investigate the severity of gun violence in this country and its associated social implications.



### **Problem Statement**

The problem is that gun violence and its associated personal and criminal repercussions pose a significant threat to public safety, especially in lower-socioeconomic-status regions. If stricter policies were created to tackle gun violence, they might help to control and manage issues contributing to its incidence, such as gun production, distribution, and ownership. The development of new policies must begin with access to more thorough information about gun violence. There is a need to establish and implement new policies to control and manage the phenomena of gun production, distribution, and ownership, to ultimately decrease the incidence of gun violence across the country. Although researchers have gathered many numerical data concerning gun violence incidence in the United States, few researchers have conducted qualitative studies on best policies based on the perceptions of people who have personally encountered gun violence. For example, prior research may have revealed how prevalent gun violence has become within a small Northeastern State but little research has explore how gun violence has personally affected the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being of those having experienced gun violence in a small Northeastern State. I addressed this problem by collecting information on the perspectives of 10 participants from a small Northeastern State.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological case study was to add to the existing body of knowledge concerning gun violence by presenting the firsthand perspectives of gun violence victims. Throughout this research, the term *victim* refers to a participant who was personally shot or a participant with a family member who was

shot within 10 years of data collection. A phenomenological design was appropriate for this study; researchers use phenomenology when the purpose of their research involves personal experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

### **Research Question**

Although various efforts have been made to decrease the incidence of gun violence over the years, such as the Gun Control Act of 1968 and the Hand Brady Violation Act of 1998, gun violence has significantly increased. In the same year that the latter act was enforced, there were 30,708 American casualties due to gun violence (Corlin, 2001). This number included 17,424 suicides, 12,102 homicides, and 866 accidental shootings, with an additional 64,000 individuals receiving emergency room treatment for nonfatal injuries from a firearm (Corlin, 2001). This number was significant when compared with similar figures for other countries during the same year. According to Corlin (2001), in 1998, the number of firearm fatalities was 1,164 in Germany, 1,034 in Canada, 391 in Australia, 211 in England and Wales, and 83 in Japan. In other words, the incidence of gun violence in America in 1998 was more than 30 times that of other countries. Despite the various measures that have been pursued to address gun violence, this number has not decreased. According to the Brady Campaign, an international initiative to end gun violence, there are more than 89 firearm casualties every day (“Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, n.d.). The estimate amounts to an average of 32,485 casualties annually—a number that does not include the amount of nonfatal firearm injuries.

The majority of gun violence incidents are concentrated in areas of lower socioeconomic status. It’s essential to understand the reasons for the ineffectiveness of

prior policies and the reasons why gun violence has been closely associated with communities of lower socioeconomic status. To better understand the gravity of gun violence in these communities, it is advantageous to gather information directly from victims. Based on the discussion presented thus far, the following research question was raised: How do people who experienced gun violence perceive problems and solutions associated with the production, distribution, and ownership of guns?

### **Theoretical Framework**

In qualitative research methodology, the researcher is required to incorporate a theory that guides the research study. This theory serves as a guide for the research process, directing study decisions, such as the sources cited (Monette, Sullivan, & DeJong, 2011). The theoretical framework for this study was social contract theory, which involves the conviction that social order exists through a shared contract among people and that the state exists to serve the will of the general population. Hobbes developed the roots of social contract theory in 1651, and Locke expanded it in 1689, followed by Rousseau in 1762 (Clark & Moore, 2012).

Clark and Moore's (2012) study was of relevance to the present study because throughout the research the term *multilevel* was used to describe a form of data structuring that enabled the researcher to categorize individual observations into areas that were of interest to the researcher or study focus. However, this study requires an adequate understanding of the causes, effects, and aftermath of gun violence. The social contract model indicates that gun violence can best be resolved or limited with active contribution from community members (Conway, 2014). Chapter 2 contains a more detailed explanation of the theoretical framework.

### **Nature of the Study**

For this study, the chosen methodology was qualitative case study with a phenomenological approach. The selected design required me to investigate individual encounters and develop accurate depictions of participants' unique experiences (Butkus & Weissman, 2014). Finlay (2012) explained that the phenomenological approach emphasizes the need to understand how people interpret experiences and, consequently, the knowledge spurred from experience. In this approach, the researcher must portray how people encounter a phenomenon—according to Finlay (2012), “how they see it, depict it, feel about it, judge it, recollect it, comprehend it and discuss it with others” (p. 16). However, to obtain such information, a researcher must arrange to meet with the individuals in question, as they have “‘lived experience’ instead of old experience” (Finlay, 2012, p. 23). The individuals in question—the participants—must therefore have a thorough understanding of their experience, its consequences, and its gravity, as well as the sequence of events leading up to and following such, to serve as a reliable, accurate, and useful resource.

A qualitative research method was appropriate for this study. According to Finlay (2012), a qualitative design is most appropriate when a researcher identifies the need to explore a subject that has minimal past information and when there is a need to grasp meanings, motives, reasons, and patterns to achieve in the research study. Qualitative research methods are valuable for their ability to provide rich descriptions of complex phenomena. A qualitative research method was suitable for this study because it offered a systematic and rigorous method for achieving the research objectives. The method aims to minimize bias and error (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). The research method used in

this study was based on a theoretical background that provided comprehensive and vivid information through interviews, which also required the researcher and participants to follow a specific process during data collection (Pedhauzer & Schmelkin, 2011).

According to Breakwell, Hammon, Fife-Schaw, and Smith (2015), qualitative research involves the development of a clear and concise semi structured discussion guide that ensures that all of the research topics are covered and that all discussions and findings remain relevant. Qualitative methods enable participants to respond to open-ended questions in the process of exploring the reasons behind their respective responses. Notably, this portion of the research is referred to as involving *in-depth interview techniques* (Pedhauzer & Schmelkin, 2011). These interviews are conducted privately, either via phone or in-person. It is essential to engage in social relations with the participants so that they can feel comfortable sharing their opinions and views while understanding that their information will be kept confidential. Information is recorded and transcribed for analysis purposes and later presented when the findings are complete.

Interviews help researchers gather information while placing them in a position to elaborate on individual responses to ensure the clarity of a particular topic. The use of in-depth interviews ensures that participants can express their opinions and establish new understandings. According to Finlay (2012), the dynamics and changing aspects of participants are essential features that indicate the significance of in-depth interviews. This kind of discussion is also fundamental because it may reveal underlying issues that were previously unknown, as well as behavioral triggers and barriers. Therefore, qualitative research creates a platform that aids in understanding and creating new concepts (Butkus & Weissman, 2014).

## Definition of Terms

This study used various avenues to acquire information. This qualitative case study involved collecting the firsthand perspectives of gun violence victims to provide law enforcement agencies—which are charged with implementing the policies established by the government—with a more in-depth comprehension of the depth and breadth of gun violence, as well as insight into how to decrease its occurrence. As previously stated, this information was collected by interviewing 10 participants who were either victims of gun violence or had a family member who was a victim of gun violence within the past 10 years. In relation to this important topic, the following terms are referenced throughout the study:

*Assault weapons:* Semi-automated and fully automated weapons that incorporate a detachable magazine and may include a pistol grip. On certain occasions, they are specialized to allow flash suppressor and barrel shroud. Flash suppressor increases the visibility of the shooter, hence increasing accuracy.

*Automatic:* The practice whereby the action of firing is repeated once the trigger is held down (McPhedran, 2016).

*Background checks:* Require that a person who purchases a gun from a licensed dealer undergo a background check, as stipulated by the federal law called the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act (Hemenway, 2014).

*Gun show loophole:* Illegal transfer or exchange of weapons between or among people whereby one of the parties does not qualify legally to use a gun due to mental health problems, drug use, or other reasons under the law (Conway, 2014).

*High-capacity magazine:* Gun that holds a high amount of ammunition (more than 10 bullets) and allows for the use of semiautomatic techniques (Conway, 2014).

*Private party transfer:* A situation whereby one person owns a gun and lends it to another person for a fee. In this case, the third party may illegally access a firearm and may engage in inappropriate acts of gun violence (Lott, 2013).

*Second Amendment:* This amendment to the U.S. Constitution ensures the right to keep and bear arms. A state militia has the right to hold and use weapons for the security of a free state (Hemenway, 2014).

*Semiautomatic:* A situation in which a weapon has a loading action and each pull of the trigger results in firing (Lott, 2013).

*Strawman purchase:* An action that occurs when a person purchases a gun through a person who lives in a legalized state because the initial buyer lives in a banned state (Frantz et al., 2016).

*Victims:* Participants in the study who had either been shot themselves or who had a family member who had been shot within 10 years of data collection.

### **Assumptions**

In this phenomenological study, the aim was to understand the perceptions of people who had experienced gun violence in a small Northeastern State. As a result, this study involved a few assumptions. First and foremost, I assumed that a definite relationship exists between firearms and violence. I presumed that gun violence is a menace to society and that it has impacted the country's population over time. Further, I assumed that participants provided honest responses to the interview questions so that an accurate depiction of their lived experiences could be made. Finally, I believed that

community members have an essential role to play in reducing gun violence and in ensuring that peace and harmony are maintained in society.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

This phenomenological study examined the impact of gun violence. Specifically, the geographical area of research was narrowed to a small Northeastern State. Data were gathered through purposive sampling. Samples were taken from the 3 square miles surrounding a small Northeastern State, and I analyzed the data to understand the impact of gun violence and the measures and strategies that the participants believed could be undertaken to reduce gun violence.

### **Limitations of the Study**

As described by Yin (2012), limitations are restrictions on the methodology over which a researcher has limited control. These restrictions affect data analysis and results. Therefore, the researcher is responsible for finding appropriate measures that can help to maintain a focus on achieving the primary objectives of the research. Because of the substantial amount of data required, the research process may be both expensive and time consuming. The complexity of automating qualitative data may make the research less efficient. Interviews may demand a substantial amount of time because of the probing, collection, and data analysis process. Further, to acquire reliable information, it is necessary to source data from different elements or people so that adequate deductions and recommendations can be made from the findings.

### **Significance of the Study**

This phenomenological study offers an analysis of gun and firearm violence from the perspective of victims residing in a small Northeastern State. According to Vizzard,



Jackson, and Sorenson (2014), some issues of gun violence can be related to poverty, mental illness, history of substance abuse, lack of education, and other socioeconomic, environmental, and sociological problems. The steps undertaken by the federal government to control and regulate unlicensed movement and ownership of guns have been discussed in this research. According to Vizzard et al. (2014), a need exists to stir public awareness in the fight for social change in a positive, impactful manner. This research could result in the provision of immediate care and consideration with the objective of promoting social change.

Moreover, this phenomenological study was conducted to provide a better understanding of the history of inefficient policies surrounding efforts to regulate gun control by examining the Gun Control Act of 1968 (P. L. 90-618) and Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act (P. L. 103-159). The research delved into the history of the United States, precisely in relation to the reasons for the country's high rate of gun violence. I examined the efforts of the Gun Control Act of 1968 to reduce gun violence, followed by information about the Brady Act, which requires that a background check be performed for every buyer of a firearm to prevent the use of firearms for wrongful purposes.

### **Summary**

Gun violence is a critical issue. Its severity is evident through the efforts of the federal government to implement measures to reduce gun violence in communities, particularly where the incidence of violent crime is high. The focus of this study was the need to establish and implement new policies to control and manage the phenomena of gun production, distribution, and ownership, in order to ultimately decrease the incidence

of gun violence across the country. Such research is needed to promote social change in this country. This study is of critical importance because it addresses the effects of gun violence. The goal of this phenomenological study was to understand the extent of gun violence in a small Northeastern State. Although the findings cannot be generalized, the study may influence future policies to control and manage gun production, distribution, and ownership, thereby contributing to the reduction of gun violence across the country. As previously stated, according to the Brady Campaign, an international initiative to end gun violence, there are more than 89 firearm casualties every day (“Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence,” n.d.). These amount to an average of 32,485 casualties annually—a number that does not include nonfatal firearm injuries. Tonry (2013) argued that an increase in the number of firearm-linked fatalities would be evident if the problem is not addressed effectively. Exploring a small Northeastern State, this study used purposive sampling to gather data from citizens. In the following Chapter, I present a comprehensive review of the current research that has been undertaken on gun violence and the centrality of this issue.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to describe personal experiences of gun violence for 10 participants from a small Northeastern State, Approximately 30 Americans are killed with a gun and another 151 are taken to healing centers as a consequence of firearms (National Crime Victimization Survey, 2015). Likewise, each day, approximately 55 individuals commit suicide with a weapon, and 46 individuals are killed accidentally with a gun (National Crime Victimization Survey, 2015).

The current literature that establishes the relevance of the problem in this study came from various sources. For the literature search, I used electronic data sources such the Walden University Library and Google Scholar. Online sources accessed through the university included ProQuest Digital Dissertations, EBSCOhost, and Sage Publications. Keywords and phrases searched included *gun violence in the United States, repercussions of gun violence, aftermath of gun violence, effects of gun violence, incidence of gun violence, victims of gun violence, gun violence in urban areas, causes of gun violence*, and slight variations of these terms. The literature review included peer-reviewed articles, books, studies, and dissertations. Many subtopics reviewed in this study were from authors' references in the literature. Subtopics discussed included the extent of gun violence and strategies that to decrease the incidence of gun violence in the modern day. More than 95% of the sources in the literature review were published within 5 years of data collection. The literature included in this review includes research on various aspects of gun violence, current and previous studies on gun violence in the United

States, debates on the constitutionality of gun control, arguments for and against gun control's effectiveness, and information on the study's theoretical framework. Studies that served the purpose of this literature review were related to how gun violence has a direct link to failed regulations in a small Northeastern State.

The major sections of this chapter address the literature search strategy, the organization of the literature review, the study's theoretical framework, and literature related to critical variables. The chapter ends with a summary and conclusions. In my exploration and review of the literature, I describe a policy paradox related to gun control in the United States as a fundamental issue challenging the implementation of gun control policies. More importantly, this exploration of past literature reveals the need for additional clarity and new information on the gun violence problem and solutions from the perspectives of those who have encountered gun violence themselves.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study was social contract theory (Clark & Moore, 2012). Social contract theory involves the conviction that social requests exist through a mutual contract among individuals, and that the role of the state is to serve the will of the community. The underlying foundations of social contract theory were established by Hobbes in 1651, followed by Locke in 1689, and Rousseau in 1762 (Clark & Moore, 2012). Hobbs explained that individuals shield themselves from their ordinarily warlike inclinations. Later, Locke and Rousseau emphasized the same idea. Rousseau noted that a legislature gets its power from the assent of the general population. Locke emphasized the part of the person in the public arena and contended that insurgency was the general population's response if the state mishandled its duty to

citizens. To guarantee the security of all residents, numerous governments, such as those of the United States and the United Kingdom, have determined that the best choice is to surrender some individual rights in exchange for administrative control. The most straightforward way in which this exchange occurs in the context of this study involves the exchange of free will in regard to committing murder or acts of violence without consequences for submission to judicial, law enforcement, and jail systems to ensure safety. In any case, with these choices comes a wide range of thoughts, ideas, and variables. Although these thoughts and theories are hundreds of years old, they form an indispensable part of the current criminal justice framework.

The social contract hypothesis, particularly as articulated by Locke, Hume, and Rousseau (1960), highlighted fatal events involving weapon, including the criminal equity framework. The social contract hypothesis of Locke et al. (1960) depends on the possibility that people live in a condition of nature, which as Locke discussed is a position of peace that does not have a government (Moustakas, 1994). In this situation, every individual has the right to seek justice in response to violations without a legal process to follow. In his Second Treatise, Locke addressed the idea that because every individual is not suited to being judge, jury, and killer, the state holds this responsibility (Moustakas, 1994).

Aspects of Locke et al.'s (1960) social contract hypothesis form the cutting edge of the criminal equity framework. Unlike many other countries, the constitution of the United States provides its people strong civil rights to protect their freedom. Locke et al. discussed how these civil rights provide people the power to challenge even the state law if they deem that their state laws are not providing them adequate security. If people

under any government feel insecure and oppressed by their government the balance of power always falls in the hands of people in a way that results in a war like confrontation between the public and their government (Copes & Miller, 2015).

Locke et al. (1960) examined a group of citizens who no longer felt safe because of high crime and violence rates within their communities. These citizens perceived that the high crime rate in their area was sustaining because the criminal elements in their society had protection from an interest group from within the local law enforcement agencies. Locke et al., (1960) explained that when perceptions such as these emerge in groups, people naturally resort to agitation. Locke trusted that under these conditions, residents had the privilege and commitment to oppose the ruling power and remake a superior government (Clark & Moore, 2012). A legislature secures and permits nationals the privilege to gently battle and sort out changes in insurance and government control. In this instance, the administration would not disintegrate under the conditions depicted by Locke, and natives would be committed to complying with the laws of the state (Clark & Moore, 2012),

In qualitative research, a researcher is required to incorporate a theory that guides appropriate study decisions (Monette et al., 2011). In this sense, the study conducted by Clark and Moore (2012) was of relevance to the present study. Throughout the research of Clark and Moore, the term *multilevel* was used to describe a form of data structuring that enables a researcher to categorize individual observations into areas that are of interest. Based on the topic of gun violence, observations and participant responses shared a similar. However, this study requires an adequate understanding of the causes, effects, and aftermath of gun violence. For this study, it was essential to have a good

understanding of the stimuli, impacts, and consequences of gun violence. Several theories present clear and comprehensive explanations for events. Social contract theory indicates that gun violence is best or preferably examined via four levels of concern. As a result, there were four levels of influence to describe a framework that can determine factors placing a person at risk of gun violence (Wolf & Rosen, 2015).

At the individual or intrapersonal level, strong resentful or angry feelings may cause a person to use a gun. A form of interpersonal-level awareness is that which communicates awareness to another person or a group of individuals about gun violence. A form of community or societal-level influence occurs when members of a society advocate for safe and appropriate child-raising methods to prevent cases of gun violence. Technically, it includes individual responsibility and cultivation of the mind of the child during growth and development. The 4<sup>th</sup> framework level entails societal-level influence, whereby the media offers a significant platform to educate members of society about the importance of reducing gun violence (Wolf & Rosen, 2015).

### **Literature Review Related to Key Variables**

#### **Gun Violence in the United States**

Squires (2012) argued that American culture seems to accommodate what is identified as “gun culture,” a phrase presumably adapted from Hofstadter’s writings exploring America as a gun culture. The majority of Americans who support gun control proposals tend to condemn the longstanding gun culture (Brent, Miller, Loeber, Mulvey, & Birmaher, 2013). Their argument is that the gun culture in America is indeed a barrier that has been preventing enactment of gun control policies (Spitzer, 2015). It is essential

to explore gun culture because it is one of the main factors challenging the enactment of new gun regulations. Furthermore, many people tend to believe in the concept of individualism and self-reliance, which seems to be shaped by this culture. Gun culture can comprehensively explain pro-gun behaviors that may pose a safety concern (Brent et al., 2013). It is clear that American gun culture has something to do with the decisions that people make regarding gun-use regulations. Moreover, the phrase itself recapitulates the long-term connection of Americans and their guns, and this context can be dated back to the foundation of the United States. This connection extends to modern-day society, where many Americans embrace guns as part of their culture. Although these individuals represent just small portion of the general population, a majority of them are aware of the risks this culture poses to the broader community (Brent et al., 2013).

In the previous section, I articulated a phenomenological approach to deep-seated attitudes toward guns. Individualism and self-reliance, two constructs investigated in this study, are engraved in the longstanding gun culture. This exploration has portrayed a hidden path that may guide the decisions that people make in regard to gun possession. Research has it that the highest number of crimes committed in the United States are perpetrated with illegally obtained guns (Freilich, Chermak, Belli, Gruenewald, & Parkin, 2014; Hogan & Rood, 2013; McGinty, Webster, & Barry, 2013; Swedler, Simmons, Dominici, & Hemenway, 2015; Wozniak, 2015). Guns used by criminals are likely to have been purchased from unlicensed dealers operating on the black market (Halbrook, 2013b).

Illegally owned firearms may be obtained from domestic gun dealers (Jackson & Sorenson, 2014). This is even more evident in the fact that the black market for guns is



dominated not by organized crime, but rather by a looser system of gangsters who obtain illegal firearms from domestic manufacturers (Killingley, 2014). Research findings also indicate that criminals get firearms from other people who organize small-scale transfers of firearms from one state to another out of the legal pool (Krouse, 2011; Murphy & Rubio, 2014; Vittes, Vernick, & Webster, 2013; Wolfson, Teret, Frattaroli, Miller, & Azrael, 2016).

### **Costs of Gun Violence**

Cases of gun violence are estimated to cost the U.S. security sector approximately \$229 billion each year (Secretariat, 2015; U.S. Congress, 2014). However, less stringent gun policies may cause criminals to continue committing crimes using guns. Kellner (2015) noted that an interdisciplinary background check on those purchasing new guns had not been critically exercised; thus, many guns fell into the arms of criminals. The Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act (P. L. 103-159) calls for every person purchasing a new gun to undergo a criminal background check. Consistent with Kellner's (2015) observation, Hemenway (2014) reported that despite the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act, 40% of gun transactions are conducted without criminal background checks in the United States. Therefore, controlling gun violence requires some improvement in security systems to ensure that criminals are restricted from purchasing firearms to jeopardize public safety. A majority of states follow less stringent gun policies, which is believed to cause less efficiency in preventing violent acts. Sophisticated and systematic research based on gun policies can aid in better understanding the challenges that these systems have been facing in attempts to curb gun violence.

Recent studies have shown that gun control policies, such as the Gun Control Act of 1968 (P.L. 90-618) and Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act (P.L. 103-159), do not reduce the rate of crimes committed with guns. A study by Santaella-Tenorio, Cerdá, Villaveces, and Galea (2016) indicated a substantial correlation between increased gun crime rates and state gun control laws. It is true that the United States has nearly 4 times more gun violence than all other developed countries. In a recent study, Mann and Michel (2016) reported that although the United States made up less than 5% of the global population, Americans owned 42% of the world's privately owned firearms. In addition, states with the highest crime rates also have the highest gun ownership rates (Mann & Michel, 2016; Santaella-Tenorio et al., 2016). Mann and Michel (2016) blamed poor gun control policies for these crimes and argued that existing gun laws and gun control proposals no longer worked as expected.

To support this argument, Mann and Michel (2016) examined some variables that tended to hinder proper enactment of stricter policies in some states. The most critical variable explored was negligence. Their study found that gun control lobbyists had a stranglehold on the right of people to own guns and claimed that restricted gun ownership could mean violating the right to self-defense. Mann and Michel cited gun control opponents as arguing that further restrictions and policies could infringe upon the legal rights and inherent rights of the citizenry in a free nation. Here, negligence was found to exist where opponents failed to consider the risks that guns pose to society beyond self-defense and living in a free country. Such reasoning does not meet the standards of people's safety as required by law.

Statistics documenting the incidence of gun violence and its effects on citizens are disturbing. Presently, 53.8% of firearm injuries result in hospital visits (Abu-Lughod, 2015; Heide, 2014; Killingley, 2014; Suzan, Sorenson, & Cook, 2012). Past literature tended to focus more on the level of violence rather than on measures that could be put in place to reduce the illegitimate use of guns. Policies requiring gun users to pay hefty fines may lessen the rate of gun violence and costs incurred in the treatment of firearm injuries. Researchers have not fully explored ways in which the American gun culture makes it even harder to implement such sanctions (Abu-Lughod, 2015; Heide, 2014; Killingley, 2014; Suzan et al., 2012).

The contentious debate over gun control has created a variety of issues about individual behaviors and the role that both state and national governments play in controlling gun crimes. Nevertheless, at its core, this debate seems to turn back to a primary concern regarding public policies and how they shape order and people's behaviors within society. Consistent with this perspective, the following section addresses the first construct, which is the behavioral construct that is based on individual responses to gun policies and regulations.

Tonry (2013) argued that an increase in the number of fatalities would be evident if the problem persists. The literature review aims to illustrate, recapitulate, appraise, scrutinize, and synthesize the literature on gun violence in the United States, especially in a small Northeastern State. The chapter provides an account of previous studies on the subject matter of gun control and illegal acts. The literature review goes beyond the investigation of information and includes the expression of relationships that merge the literature and research findings (Tonry, 2013). Despite significant extant literature on

American gun culture and the effectiveness or otherwise of gun control laws and measures to curb rising gun-related crimes even with vigorous enforcement of laws, including those mandating gun licenses and thorough background checks, the fact remains that laws are just not enough to enforce gun control and prevent firearm-induced violence. Furthermore, the research explored the Gun Control Act of 1968 (P. L. 90-618) and the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act (P. L. 103-159) for their impact, effectiveness, and barriers.

According to Philip, Richard, Jens, and Harold (2015), the question is whether adults should be allowed to carry guns that are concealed or store guns in safety away from children. Winkler (2013) argued that over the last few decades, guns have contributed to the depreciation of American culture and that ownership of guns is rooted in the birth of the United States of America. The gun violence has resulted in cultural changes that concur with the belief of people that the American Constitution protects gun ownership.

According to Whitlock (2012), gun control measures were initially meant to oppress African Americans. However, after the Civil War, the North allowed soldiers to take up firearms irrespective of their ethnicity. After that time, even African Americans who did not fight in the war were allowed to not only purchase, but also own guns (Whitlock, 2012). Today, the United States has fallen victim to gun violence that has resulted in increased criminal activity leading to the death of innocent citizens. These activities include violent events, armed robbery, and suicide. The government has made efforts aimed at developing the best policies to govern the nation and reduce gun violence

at a significant rate (Wilson & Petersilia, 2012), such as the Gun Control Act of 1968 (P. L., 90-618) and the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act (P. L. 103-159).

In the United States, gun control and gun rights are mutually exclusive premises. While one side takes a state of tyranny, the other side assumes a state of benevolence. One of the sides argues modern progress, while the other side rests its claims on tradition. Anthropologists established that defensive use of guns in deterring crime is more frequent than official data released by the government indicates (Greene & Marsh, 2013; Metz & MacLeish, 2015). Accumulating statistics shows that widespread ownership of guns reduces the rate of crime because the cost of committing this criminal crime is increased. Armed crime victims lead to a high stake; limbs and lives. Some researchers claimed that it is evident that gun control has the likelihood of reducing crimes related to gun ownership (Kleck & Barnes, 2014; Lacombe & Ross, 2014).

From a cultural perspective, high crime rates are cumbersome because it means the government needs to commit a significant pool of public resources toward enforcement, legislation and adjudication of gun control laws (Hamilton & Kposowa, 2015; O'Brien, Forrest, Lynott, & Daly, 2013). As deemed by the topic of the study in focus, the presence of both new and more stringent gun cultural policies is necessary for this country for the safety of its citizens, as well as for the substantial decrease in the incidence of gun violence. The gravity of this issue, however, can also trigger a culturally polarizing impact, resulting in significant division across government ranks for combat (Hamilton & Kposowa, 2015; O'Brien et al., 2013). Due to this notion, gun control issues are also referred to as “wedge” issues. In fact, according to researchers, there are few issues as polarizing as the issue of guns and gun control (Hamilton &

Kposowa, 2015; O'Brien et al., 2013). Guns can evoke deep feelings among Americans, sparking debates left and right. High profile gun violence cases like mass school shootings have swayed many Americans toward believing that guns are unsafe to own, while others feel strongly about guns as safety measures, whenever there are proposals to reduce the number of guns that can circulate in public (Hamilton & Kposowa, 2015; O'Brien et al., 2013). According to some, guns are labeled as deadly, and ownership immediately deems those that meet the owner as susceptible to a potential risk of gun-related violence (Hamilton & Kposowa, 2015; O'Brien et al., 2013). For this reason, the creation and enforcement of government-enforced policies surrounding gun ownership are complicated, involving debate from two sides with opposing perspectives.

Due to the heated debate and the ongoing concerns surrounding gun control, studies remain ongoing about factors associated with the development of more stringent policies (Newman & Hartman, 2015; Spitzer, 2015). This country has more pro-gun advocates than anti-gun activists; Democrats form the more significant pro-gun movement, while Republicans make the lesser anti-gun movement (Jones & Stone, 2015; Singh, 2015). Party lines have only offered rough guidelines that contradict each other nationwide. Even with the efforts supporting the fight against gun ownership, some citizens are politically apathetic using constitutional powers to kill. This is because this country has become one where people relish in the freedom to equip themselves to kill, whether for matters of self-defense or otherwise, which whether such is even necessary or not (Kleck, 2015; Kleck & Barnes, 2014). With time, it would be farcical for the government to reduce the number of legally used bullets in a magazine of semiautomatic guns, hence the gun control (Kleck, 2015; Kleck & Barnes, 2014). Currently, citizens

can still freely purchase and exchange weaponry online (Kleck, 2015; Kleck & Barnes, 2014).

Guns have been reported as a primary cause of death in this country, with high rates of people expected to die annually from complications due to gunshot wounds (Kleck, 2015; Kleck & Barnes, 2014). Reports indicate that a portion of these deaths occurs in relatively tiny urban areas. Data from the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2015) has shown that, on average, 93 Americans die from gun violence each day. Every Town Research gathered 5 year average of data from the CDC, which demonstrated that seven children and teens are killed with guns in the country every day. According to this same study, approximately 50 women were killed by their partner due to the use of a firearm every month. Black men were found to be 14 times more at risk than Caucasian men of suffering from a fatal gunshot wound (Every Town Research, 2017). Additionally, the country's gun homicide rate is 25 times higher than other high-income countries' average rates (Every Town Research, 2017). Specific statistics may convince citizens that they have a limited chance of falling victim to gun violence. However, in order for people to become interested in an issue, they must be convinced there is a high likelihood of them being directed by the issue (Devi, 2016).

### **Debates on Gun Control**

Mass shootings that have caused tragedy, such as the ones that took place at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn., where most of the victims were children, and the movie theater at Century Center in Aurora, Colo., have triggered even more political debates about the effectiveness of existing gun control laws (Faria, 2013; Fox & DeLateur, 2014; Jena, Sun, & Prasad, 2014). Usually, these debates focus on the

constitutionality and the effectiveness of regulating firearm and ammunition possession and use (Cooper, 2015; Swanson et al., 2016). Unfortunately, most of the debate contains fallacious arguments expressed in poor rhetoric, with complete disregard for scholarly studies done on the issue (Duerringer & Justus, 2016; Gray, 2014). The debate over gun control has now spanned more than two decades, and evidence-based studies remain lacking (Gray, 2014). Recognizing a need for firearm-related studies as mass shootings happen in higher frequency, the former President Barack Obama issued 23 executive orders linked to firearms and asked federal government agencies to be more aware and knowledgeable about gun violence, from its causes to the strategies that can minimize the health problems brought associated with gun-related complications (Lang, 2016; Tzoumis, Bennett, & Stoffel, 2015).

The very definition of gun control has been subject to debate, as it is quite vague and therefore associated with a range of meanings and interpretations (Cooper, 2015; Swanson et al., 2016). Despite the differing definitions, gun control laws generally prohibit the possession, sale, or use of specific firearms. However, some gun activists claimed that this runs counter to the Second Amendment's protection for owning firearms (Blocher & Miller, 2016; Rosenthal, 2015; Stroebe, 2015), which is why the constitutionality debate arose. This debate is based around various interpretations of the Second Amendment of the United States Constitution, which states that "a well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed" (Hill, 2016, p. #). Two key perspectives surround this debate (Gray, 2014; Thompson, 2016; Weissman, 2013). These perspectives include the right of the people to possess and use arms, wherein to prohibit anyone from owning guns



is not considered constitutional. The second perspective contends that because the constitution stated, “a well-regulated militia;” the framers of the Constitution intended this to only restrict Congress from passing laws prohibiting the state’s right to self-defense, but does not grant individuals the right to possess or own firearms themselves (Thompson, 2016; Weissman, 2013).

The United States vs. Miller (1939) case can be considered a landmark ruling because many acknowledge it as the first ever Second Amendment test case (Harrison, 2016; Schildkraut & Hernandez, 2014). In 1934, Congress enacted the National Firearms Act (NFA), which was a tax on firearms. The NFA focused on the so-called “gangster weapons,” by taxing the manufacture, sale, and transference of silencers, machine guns, and both shotguns and short-barreled rifles. The NFA mandated that these firearms be registered (Appelbaum, 2016; Hill, 2016; Schildkraut & Hernandez, 2014). More importantly, because the taxes levied against these gangster weapons were so high, even more than the price of the firearm itself, ownership has become unattainable to many.

The registration requirement was also directed at “gangsters,” because legislators knew it was doubtful that any criminal would even come forward and register their firearms, being they would also have to provide fingerprints (Appelbaum, 2016; Hill, 2016; Schildkraut & Hernandez, 2014). Several cases took place after the NFA was enacted, such as cases when the Court strengthened the Second Amendment’s ability to protect individuals’ right to own and bear firearms (Johnson, 2015). The McDonald v. Chicago (2010) is a known case, whereas in 1983, the city of Chicago, Ill. enforced a law banning individuals from possessing unregistered firearms and for all gun owners to register firearms on a yearly basis (Arthur & Asher, 2016; Johnson, 2015; Patton, Sodhi,

Affinati, Lee, & Crandall, 2016). The Supreme Court overturned the ruling of the lower Court with a vote of 5-4, holding that individuals may own firearms under the Second Amendment and that the Second Amendment is fully applicable to states (Arthur & Asher, 2016; Johnson, 2015; Patton et al., 2016).

Apart from constitutionality, the debate centers on effectiveness. The debate on the effectiveness of gun control laws naturally have two sides, those who believe laws are an effective deterrent to gun violence and those who claim that gun control is not a solution to less violence (Gius, 2014; Jones & Stone, 2015; Lott, 2013; Spitzer, 2015). Gun control advocates, in particular, claimed that the country could look to Australia to see how useful fewer and regulated firearms are in reducing crimes. Australia is an excellent example because the two countries have many cultural similarities, including their histories of private gun ownership and frontier mentality (Sarre, 2015). Also, like Australia, the United States has a large population of people living in urban areas. In Australia, it could be seen that the passing of the National Firearms Program in 1996, which means firearm laws were no longer left to states and territories, led to several positive changes. For instance, following the passing of NFPIA, Australia's suicide and homicide rates were significantly reduced (Sarre, 2015).

More studies showed a link exists between high levels of fatal violence and visibility of firearms, concluding that gun control laws must be competent in curtailing gun violence (Gabor, 2016; Schaechter & Alvarez, 2016). Apart from Australia, both Canada and New Zealand have often cited as examples that restrictive firearm regulations are essential for reducing violence, especially those involving the use of firearms (Allan, 2015; McPhedran, Baker, & Singh, 2014). The researchers concluded that firearm

regulations could only lead to less violence because firearms would stay out of the wrong hands and criminals will not have guns to use to carry out ill intentions (Gabor, 2016; Schaechter & Alvarez, 2016). However, there are also strong oppositions made against gun control laws, which range from claiming firearm ownership is a constitutional right, is defensive protection, and is a crime deterrent. Those who claimed that owning guns is a constitutional right cite the fact that in the 20th century, between 100 and 170 million people suffered and died out of the doing of the own governments (Benton, Hancock, Coppersmith, Ayers, & Dredze, 2016; Gray, 2014; Lott, 2013). For them, firearms may act as a deterrent for rogue government behavior that can put them and their families in danger. Those who made crime deterrent as their primary reason claimed that personal security could longer be guaranteed by the state. Citizens need to buy guns so that they can survive in a society with high rates of violent crime as well as civil disorder. An armed victim is believed to be a deterrent for criminals (Braga & Weisburd, 2015; Kleck, Kovandzic, & Bellows, 2016; Nobles, 2014).

Lastly, several studies showed that gun control laws do not lead to a reduction in violent gun-related crimes. According to them, the majority of crimes are not carried out with the use of firearms. Statistics show that even though in the 1990s, violent crime rate fell significantly from the rate in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, the number of firearms owned privately has continuously increased by millions since the number was measured and monitored from the 1950s (Braga & Weisburd, 2015; Kleck et al., 2016; Nobles, 2014). These researchers implied that firearm regulations as having little or no impact on crime. Therefore, according to these perspectives, gun violence is not going to be resolved through gun control laws.

## **Effects of Gun Control on Crime Rates**

Studies on the effects of gun control on crime rates have reached inconclusive findings. Some researchers found gun violence to have little impact on crime rates. In particular, as previously stated, requiring a license to possess a gun in ones' home had no effect whatsoever on reducing violent crimes and neither did requirements on an application to purchase a gun have an effect on reducing violent crimes (Jones & Stone, 2015; Kleck & Patterson, 1993; Pederson, Hall, Foster, & Coates, 2015). Bans on the possession of guns by addicts and alcoholics, the purchase of guns by a minor, or on the carrying of concealed weapons and open handgun carrying permits were also not found to reduce gun-related crime rates. A mandatory add-on penalty for crimes committed with a gun was not found to be an effective deterrent either (Lott, 2013; Matt & Michel, 2016).

This section has reviewed the most relevant published reports regarding how effective gun control laws are at reducing murder rates. The findings in this study unequivocally show that bans on gun ownership do not reduce homicide rates and in fact, bans on gun ownership appear to be effective at just the opposite or that that bans on gun ownership result in higher homicide rates. The rationale stated in the studies reviewed for is that individuals committing crimes are deterred by the thought that the victim of the crime may be in possession of a gun to protect themselves, their family and their property and that this fact deters many would-be criminals. Findings of these studies include that bans on gun ownership does not reduce the numbers of criminals who own guns but reduces instead the numbers of law-abiding citizens who own guns, which would explain the rationale for the reduction of crimes in states that do not have bans on gun ownership

(Lott, 2013; Matt & Michel, 2016). In other words, in states where gun ownership is banned, law-abiding citizens will abide by the law and be without the advantage of the protection of a gun, whereas criminals, who do not abide by the laws and who have no regards for what is or is not legal, will purchase guns off of the black market and own a gun despite bans on gun ownership (Jones & Stone, 2015; Kleck & Patterson, 1993; Pederson et al., 2015). For some researchers, the outcome of laws that ban gun ownership seemed to be that the individuals who need the gun to protect themselves, are left defenseless against the criminal element, who will own guns regardless of any laws banning gun ownership (Bangalore & Messerli, 2013; Kalesan, Villarreal, Keyes, & Galea, 2016; Siegel, Ross, & King, 2013; 2014).

Some studies have concluded that gun ownership is not nearly as dangerous or unsafe as assumed (Bangalore & Messerli, 2013; Kalesan et al., 2016; Siegel et al., 2013; 2014). The causative correlation between gun ownership and crime rates does not move in the direction assumed by gun control advocates. Instead, calls for legislation on gun control is more often the result of higher crime rates instead of the answer to them (Bangalore & Messerli, 2013; Kalesan et al., 2016; Siegel et al., 2013; 2014). An early study conducted by Corlin (2001) suggested that the argument for strict gun control is based in part on the moral repugnance toward the use of violence. Since guns are designed with violence as their aim, it stands that guns should be viewed as morally repugnant. However, such a “position necessitates divorcing the violence employed from the context in which it is used, self-defense being the most obvious” (Corlin, 2001, p. 44). Although perspectives usually define the discussions about gun control, the reality is that all citizens, regardless of their belief system observe the degree to which guns negatively

affect the community (Bangalore & Messerli, 2013; Kalesan et al., 2016; Siegel et al., 2013; 2014). The fact that gun supporters can have several reasons for wanting to own guns brings even more confusion to the matter. Some individuals live in risk-free areas, but merely wish to own guns, while others live in dangerous conditions and require guns to remain safe (Bangalore & Messerli, 2013; Kalesan et al., 2016; Siegel et al., 2013; 2014).

Halbrook (2013b) surveyed many kinds of literature on the effects of gun control on crime rates. As a component of this extensive study, Halbrook (2013b) reviewed numerous studies that use state and national data. He observed that the majority of those studies found that gun control could lead to significant reduction of crimes. A distinct characteristic of pro-gun studies indicates negligence in the examination of relevant control variables. For example, Woodard (2015) concluded his study on the foundation of an active zero-order relationship between gun possession and gun-related violence. Woodard's (2015) study tended to suffer from omitted variables, hence, leaving some gaps in the literature. This study tried to bridge these deficiencies by examining every possible variable and constructs that would be of great significance in drawing a particular inference. Given the fact that empirical literature has consistently failed to resolve controversies surrounding gun control, this study explored this topic further. The application of stand-your-ground laws in some states will also be explored to present some of the inconsistencies in law application. Approaches studied here require that this assumption be explicitly examined to help provide the most efficient solution to the issues facing gun control.

## **Gun Control Politics**

In today's ever-changing society, public opinion on matters regarding security should be critically considered in policy-making processes. Political agendas shape contentious debates concerning gun control issues rather than rational reasoning (La Valle, 2013). Policymakers are called to seek out, analyze and use the best available approaches for policy development and implementation to achieve optimal results for the best interests of the people. La Valle (2013) delineated that some gun control opponents, such as the National Rifle Association (NRA), should change their self-centered reasoning to ensure that people do not have access to more guns. In this regard, the creation of stricter policies that regulate gun use, as well as the sale of guns, is a requirement that policymakers must meet. Numerous researchers have also highlighted the presence of different motivators for gun control opponents to oppose efforts proposed to solve issues regarding gun violence. Although not discussed in this study, pork barrel legislation is a motivator used by politicians to give tangible benefits to various pro-gun groups in hopes of winning their votes in return (La Valle, 2013).

The gun debate has come to have a specific political nature. The country currently has approximately 20,000 laws and regulations aimed at controlling firearms. Despite this, tens of thousands of people die on a yearly basis because of guns. As the number of firearms is continually increasing, the authorities have attempted to respond by installing harsher regulations and trying to identify flaws in the system. Gun control activists consider the National Rifle Association as one of the principal reasons why the legislative process is corrupted in its mission to achieve goals associated with laws meant to limit the number of guns (Anestis et al., 2015; Hardy, 2015; Steidley & Colen, 2016).

The belief influenced the activists to go to courts themselves in hopes of achieving justice in the matter and further make gun laws harsher. “In response to these lawsuits, the gun industry, with help from the NRA, has turned to state legislatures and Congress for protection” (Lytton, 2014, p. 152). Some bills emerged from this conflict, as legislatures and Congress devised a system that would continue to promote gun ownership among the masses.

Although the NRA has been known to influence the legislative process, many individuals are skeptical about the exact level of involvement of the association. The need for guns can also be perceived as a general need – one that comes from people rather than the NRA. In a way, many individuals who criticize the NRA for its involvement in the gun industry do so because they are not necessarily interested in going through a complicated legislative process addressing gun laws in general (Lytton, 2014). Gun control activists often argue that “the NRA mobilizes grassroots opposition to gun control using extremist rhetoric, engages in intensive lobbying at all levels of government, and uses campaign contributions to reelect its allies and punish its enemies” (Lytton, 2014, p. 154).

The way that the gun control community deals with the legal environment in the country is intriguing because it proves that these people trust courts more than they trust the authorities. From their point of view, attempting to control gun ownership through a series of lawsuits can be more effective than attempting to have legislators and Congress implement harsher gun laws (Lytton, 2014). Even with the fact that concepts, such as the Second Amendment are interpretable, both sides involved have convincing arguments to support their positions. “Advocates of control use a diverse array of methods-not just



econometrics, in fact, but contingent valuation studies, public health risk-factor analyses, and the like to quantify the physical and economic harm that guns inflict on our society” (Kahan, 2003, p. 3). Individuals opposing gun control are similarly prepared to support their convictions, one of their principal arguments being that gun control can cause more physical and economic adverse effects as victims find it difficult to defend themselves against a potential predator (Kahan, 2003).

Many researchers fail to understand that culture is the main reason why gun-related problems exist in the first place. Individuals who feel closer to traditions associated with the country’s background are more likely to oppose gun control. “Control opponents tend to be rural, Southern or Western, Protestant, male, and white” (Kahan, 2003, p. 4). These people think of guns as being a symbol of positive values, with the most important being the right to self-sufficiency. “Control proponents, in contrast, are disproportionately urban, Eastern, Catholic or Jewish, female, and African American” (Kahan, 2003, p. 4). Control supporters also concentrate on the cultural aspect of guns, but they tend to catalog it as another reason why the country experiences so many problems. They promote values like nonaggression and social solidarity when trying to demonstrate that their position is the correct one.

The debate is surprising when considering that both camps tend to emphasize the same values in some cases. Both groups relate to values like equality and solidarity. It is thus difficult to relate to these values, as they seemed to support both positions and only bring more confusion to the matter (Kahan, 2003). Both individuals supporting gun ownership and those who want the government to control it acknowledge the connection between guns and the idea the power of protection. According to Kopel (1995), “people’s

taking the law into their own hands has always been a core principle of the American legal system, and the American attitude towards guns is simply one manifestation of that principle” (p. #). According to this notion, no one can argue that it would be wrong for a person to defend him or herself using a firearm in a situation when this is the only solution available. A criminal performs an illegal act when using any force, regardless whether such force is a firearm or not, while a citizen enforces the law when using force to prevent a criminal act from taking place. Although vigilantes are not always appreciated, studies have shown that most of the public tends to support such activities, regardless of the circumstances in which it occurs (Kopel, 1995).

### **Barriers to Gun Control Regulations**

Besides Dunn (2015), many researchers have consistently examined a variety of constructs based on individual responses to gun regulations that are established to control gun violence. These constructs have helped to identify reasons why it has been too complicated for the implementation or the enactment of new gun policies. For example, Spitzer’s (2015) study conducted on politics of gun control noted that whenever policymakers seek to create or enact law stricter gun policies, they tend to receive more significant controversy based on the concept of individualism and self-reliance.

Individualism and self-reliance are two critical variables that cannot be directly measured, but ones that help to infer challenges faced by policymakers over gun control regulations. According to Spitzer (2015), it has become even more difficult for both the state and national government to coerce gun control policies as pro-gun groups continue to overreact because they feel they are directly affected. It has been evident that from the recent gun debates, politicians seemed to center their arguments on protecting individual

rights and satisfying needs. Within these arguments, the struggle for personal safety seems to have received more research attention compared to the sake of the broader community (Spitzer, 2015).

### **Research Approaches to Gun Control**

Immediately following a tragedy involving a firearm, there are more calls for more gun control despite the fact that none of the proposed solutions ever prevented or even mitigated those events (Wozniak, 2015). In response to this, some researchers seemed to be swayed by emotional argument (Dierenfeldt, Brown, & Roles, 2016; Freilich et al., 2014; Kriesburg, 2012). It is easy to see a myriad of seemingly logic-based gun cases, which are available in the form of studies and reports conducted both by anti-gun and pro-gun researchers (Winkler, 2013; Wolfson et al., 2016; Woodard, 2015). These researchers based their arguments on two more approaches, which are criminal and legal strategies.

### **Criminal Approaches to Gun Control**

Numerous studies contain detailed information about crimes committed with guns (Wolfson et al., 2016; Woodard, 2015). This information was derived from police records and reports gathered from victims. However, it is easy to identify the approach of the researcher just by looking at various constructs and variables explored within the scope of the study. From the criminal approach, researchers have shown that the overall use of firearms is not purposed for recreation and sport but have reported increased use of violent crimes (Killingley, 2014; Woodard, 2015). Handguns have been cited as used for self-defense, particularly among people who engage encounters with gangs and in drug markets (Brent et al., 2013; Cook, 2013; Gray, 2014).

## **Legal Approaches to Gun Control**

This study explored legal approaches to gun control, which includes gun ownership, illegal possession, background checks and gun licensing. Americans take pride in the constitutional right to bear firearms, given the fact that the United States has a state provision that recognizes the right of every legal citizen to possess a firearm, though with some exceptions. As discussed later, this power expands to the ownership of guns for security and legitimate self-defense.

## **Behavioral Construct and Its Correlation to Gun Controversy**

In many ways, any legal regulation aims to change people's behaviors. Laws might seek to increase or decrease various activities within the community, and owning guns is an example of those activities. Paradoxically, this long course can be the most efficient one, mostly if the regulation changes attitudes regarding an underlying moral behavior. According to Kriesberg and Dayton (2012), gun control laws can change people's moral attitudes. The need for state or national government to scrutinize regulated players can also decline drastically (Kriesberg & Dayton, 2012). This paper tried to link gun violence, which is a behavior the public already perceives as harmful, to illegal guns and acquisition, which, on the contrary, the public thinks is inoffensive. For example, regulators of gun violence always wish to reduce the rate of violence by controlling illegal gun use because they feel it is offensive, but still holding that gun possession is relevant for self-defense would associate behaviors involved with a more inoffensive one (Krouse, 2011).

Spitzer's (2015) study focused on behavioral influences on gun policies. He showed that at the heart of the significant attempts to change gun policies, was a shared

expectation for behavior that came with stricter sanctions if people disobeyed gun laws. Norms can be essential influencers for people's behaviors, but changing social norms about people's safety is hard, especially with the increased rate of crimes and terrorism. In many ways, a behavioral construct, which is explored here, is an element that tries to explain why opponents of gun control had been consistently trying to ensure stricter gun control laws in the United States. With the increased rates of violence and incidents of terrorism, Americans believe that their safety is at stake and, therefore, possessing a gun is a human right for self-defense (Brent et al., 2013; Dierenfeldt et al., 2016; Freilich et al., 2014; Kriesburg, 2012). In that case, promoting self-defense with a gun is a variable attributed to the observed behaviors among the opponents.

Simply put, the success of gun control laws in changing people's moral behaviors and attitudes depend on some variables. The ones discussed in this study are cultural identity, which refers to the American gun culture and whether existing laws address the underlying issues, especially the ones concerning self-defense and individualism. Lott (2013) found that with the increasing rates of crime and acts of terrorism, people find a need to possess a gun for self-defense. This belief naturally made gun control opponents develop negative attitudes, which turned to the question of what was paramount, whether it was to protect civil rights or to control gun possession when making decisions. As per Blocher (2014), most Americans think they should possess weapons because of their Second Amendments rights. Blocher explained that perhaps one of those reasons could be based on the aspect of individualism and self-reliance. Over centuries, owning a gun in America symbolized individualism and self-reliance. From an individualistic perspective, Americans own guns to defend themselves or thwarting crimes they are likely to face.

For this purpose, gun owners argue that gun-control policies could move this advantage to criminals while others claim that possessing a gun is not the most efficient means of protection.

Recent scholars on expressive law have explained that gun laws can be used to express value, which, in turn, can influence people's attitudes toward self-reliance (Blocher, 2014; Dreier, 2013). Some earlier studies on expressive law looked at the different mechanisms by which gun laws influenced behavior expressively, for example, by controlling peoples' drive to maintain order within the society (McAdams, 2015). Some literature emphasized that some strong laws provided an essential crucial point in circumstances where coming together was required (McAdams, 2015; Wolfson et al., 2016).

Bloomberg (2013) noted that although gun ownership had gradually declined, current regulations on guns still permitted Americans to own more guns. He further explained that in early 2000, more than half of all households were reported to have at least one gun. By the end of 2015, this trend was reported to have changed, where the average number of guns an individual could own had already increased. According to Bloomberg, in the 19th century, a single household was allowed to possess only one gun. Bloomberg also showed that through the 20th century, this number had increased to more than 4 guns per household. These statistics make the point that whatever views people may have about gun control policies, the federal government has a critical obligation to consider these in their policymaking.

Spitzer (2015) highlighted an issue that fueled people's perceptions of the implementation of gun regulations. He explained that through policy coercion, the

government would seek to control the behaviors of people who possessed guns. It is a hypothetical construct that aids in the understanding of people's reactions toward their security and need to possess guns. Vernick and Webster (2013) reported that for every 100 Americans, there were 89 registered guns. Among the numerous policies developed in the country, regulatory gun policies receive critical controversies because gun owners feel that immediate application of those policies would enact specific rules or sanctions, which would be accompanied by punishments and hefty fines or even long-term imprisonment.

### **Effectiveness of Current Gun Control Policies**

The majority of pro-gun groups are still objecting to the full adoption and reformation of the existing gun laws (Butkus & Weissman, 2014). A wide variety of literature reports that the majority of firearm legislation is ineffective (Calhoun, 2014). With a porous border with Mexico and vast stockpiles of weapons accessible from states with less strict gun control policies, anyone with enough money can buy any weapon freely (DeGrazia, 2014). With the boom of the black market for guns, people can now have access to ghost guns which have no serial numbers and can be transported from one state to another (DeGrazia, 2014). It makes it even more challenging to trace guns used to commit crimes. Therefore, new restrictive policies should address various areas which range from prohibited possession, import restrictions, marking requirements and legal change of ownership (Dunn, 2015)

Research indicates that through restrictive policies, gun control can become more efficient and therefore, it is highly recommended that policymakers consider proper reformation of the existing gun laws (Fleming, Rutledge, Dixon, & Peralta, 2016). The

establishment of restrictive gun regulations can reduce gun violence in the country (Fleming et al., 2016). The same study reported that the reformation of the existing gun laws would lead to a reduction in the access to guns.

### **Effects of the Style of Regulation**

Researchers Anderson (2014) and Fantz, Karimi, and Eliot (2016) argued that failure to regulate guns occur because some policymakers are uninterested or are funded by gun lobbyists not to enact gun policies if those policies would affect them directly. Consequently, any attempts to enact stricter gun policies are not likely to succeed due to lack of resources or because of lobbyists who tend to contend changes made on gun policies. Therefore, gun control needs a society that supports and facilitates transformative changes (Fantz et al., 2016). These changes require a culture that encourages acceptance and a culture that is ready to shed off long-held traditions (Gray, 2014). Gun control also needs leaders who are willing to lead by example. When these requirements go uncorrected, the country will never be able to control gun violence (Gray, 2014). Restrictive gun policies provide frameworks for systematically reducing gun possession, the sale of illegal guns, and, perhaps, provide a framework for imposing sanctions to those who violate those restrictive laws (DeSimone, Markowitz, & Xu, 2013; Santaella-Tenorio et al., 2016).

### **Summary**

This study has found that proposals made on gun control policies should include changes that would help in decision-making. Policymakers should first consider the severity of gun violence in the United States and then consider the intent of the policies



developed to ensure that those policies address the widespread issue. Their efforts should be proactively based on the three approaches that are discussed in this study, which are rational, criminal and legal approaches. Focusing on these approaches will ensure that gun control regulation is left to the national and state governments to decide because it is an issue that affects both policymakers and the public alike.

The study has explicitly explored the assumption that stricter gun control laws can be primarily used to monitor gun bearer's behaviors. With that, numerous studies have shown that stricter gun laws can change people's attitude with the assumption that through sanctions accompanied by those laws, policymakers can inflict fear; hence, they can change people's attitudes toward the gun. Therefore, legal strategy has been demonstrated as the most effective means of controlling gun violence. The initial assumption is that stricter regulations can eliminate most of the challenges policymakers have been facing when trying to enact and implement gun-control policies. Considerable research on American culture has shown that in many ways the long-held gun culture plays a significant role in framing challenges faced by law enforcers. The American gun culture tends to model people's reasoning toward gun control, and an amorphous group of people tends to blame this culture for the difficulties that have been experienced in gun control efforts.

However, the establishment of new gun control policies can only be effective if only the ineffective security structures are collapsed and rebuild afresh. America seems to suffer from an appalling number of gun laws and related deaths each year where thousands of people die from gun injuries. Unfortunately, every time conservatives try to look for ways to reduce the increasing number of gun violence, gun control opponents

feel that conservatives are seeking to take away the property of a person who has broken no laws. The Second Amendment determines the legitimacy of their argument, which explicitly allows people to use guns in whichever way they deem right. For that reason, this study is designed to show that policymakers need to call for the reformation of the entire legislative amendment to ensure that it does not place barriers for the creation of new gun regulation policies that are likely to be even more efficient. The contemporary debate in the country has failed to determine whether or not gun control is active. While supporters from both sides have persuasive arguments, the country's cultural values and background makes it difficult for the authorities to actually do something regarding the debate. Many individuals and groups turn to courts to address this issue as they prefer to take direct action instead of having Congress implement new laws (Barnhizer & Barnhizer, 2016; Fleming et al., 2016; Hilgard, Engelhardt, & Bartholow, 2016). Chapter 3 will describe the methodology, research design, and procedures that was used for this investigation.

## Chapter 3: Research Design

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to describe personal experiences of gun violence as expressed by 10 participants from a small Northeastern State. A phenomenological design was appropriate for this study because phenomenology is used when the purpose of research involves the personal experiences of victims (Moustakas, 1994). The main sections of Chapter 3 address the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, and methodology and issues of trustworthiness, followed by a summary. The selection of participants and strategy for data collection and analysis are discussed. Finally, research bias, quality, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations are addressed. My role as the researcher was to obtain access as well as provide protection to the participants. The research question that guided this study was as follows: How can the perceptions of people who have experienced gun violence aid in the process of implementing new policies directed toward gun control?

### **Research Design and Rationale**

In a phenomenological study, a scientist approaches a theme without assumptions or desires and creates a question that extends the examination (Anfara & Mertz, 2006; Moustakas, 1994). A phenomenological case study design permits people to share their experiences of a particular phenomenon (Ohman, 2005). As indicated by Moustakas (1994), phenomenological specialists create vibrant portrayals of the lived encounters of participants. In this study, understanding the impact of legislation and how it contributes to gun violence in a small Northeastern State may create awareness of the underlying problem, which is regulating gun violence. The selected research design included

collecting the responses of participants to arrive at accurate depictions that demonstrate the details of their lived experiences (Husserl, 1982). According to Finlay (2012), “a phenomenological approach enables the researcher to investigate how people interpret their experiences and translate the comprehension of said experience into awareness” (p. 12). “This awareness, in turn, can be used separately—on behalf of the participant—and inside group settings, such as when shared with others” (Finlay, 2012, p. 12). This design allows the analyst to thoroughly portray how people or groups encounter a phenomenon according to “how they see it, depict it, feel about it, judge it, recollect it, comprehend it, and discuss it with others” (Finlay, 2012, p. 16). As per Yin (2013), “in order to gather detailed information, the researcher must facilitate meetings with individuals who have directly experienced the phenomenon in question” (p. 23). Yin (2013) referred to this notion as “lived experience,” rather than “old experience” (p. 23).

Husserl is known as the father and originator of phenomenology as rationality. He characterized phenomenology as investigation of human awareness (Pedhauzer & Schmelkin, 2011). Husserl believed that “lived experience” must be experienced from a first-person perspective, which, in this particular study, refers to the perspective of the participants. This “lived experience” as portrayed by the participants is used to provide a complete depiction of the phenomenon in question. Husserl depicted the principal reason for awareness as the association between the individual's mental demonstrations and the outside world. Husserl described “sectioning” as isolating the phenomenon, investigating it, and suspending previously conceived notions about the phenomenon while decomposing the information from the participants. The purpose of sectioning is to

recognize and confine the individual predispositions of the researcher while investigating the phenomenon (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013).

Phenomenological research enables the researcher to access new information through participants' portrayals of their encounters. The phenomenological design can yield a more profound comprehension of participants' recognitions around a phenomenon, which Yin (2013) expressed as follows: "lived experience is the beginning stage and end purpose of phenomenological exploration" (p. 17). "These encounters and their implications are gathered through top-to-bottom discussions with participants" (Yin, 2013, p. 13). The phenomenological approach concentrates on the reality that is established by the individual cooperating in his or her social connection or individual circumstances that have not been experimentally controlled. This fact must be understood if it is perceived in its natural setting. A phenomenological study is focused on understanding how individuals explain their experiences and how other people perceive them. The goal in conducting an unbiased study is to focus on the phenomenon expressed by participants and to withhold opinion as a researcher (Lewis, 2015). Through phenomenological design, researchers explore the perceptions of participants in terms of their lived experiences. In this study, laws provided me with in-depth descriptions of procedures, beliefs, and knowledge related to the reasons behind gun violence.

### **Rationale**

To identify the best design for this study, I reviewed several qualitative designs that might be appropriate. These designs included narrative study, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study. All of these designs share a common

theme. However, the choice of the most appropriate design for the research was determined by the intention of the study and the nature of the data to be gathered. Narrative study involves exploring an individual's life in the past, present, and future. This approach tends to involve deep investigation of a person's life. However, the design is limited in that it focuses on the history of individuals to address a given activity or event. As a result, the chances are that the past may not have direct connections with the individual's current life and thus does not provide sufficient material to draw a valid conclusion (Huber, Milne, & Hyde, 2016).

Ethnographic research involves methodical study of persons and their way of life, with the aim of investigating the participants' experiences in their natural environment. This research design was not compatible with this research because I did not seek to explore the behavior of a particular group. Further, I did not seek to consider the customs of any group of people (Hammersley, 2016).

My use of phenomenology in this study involved the examination of a phenomenon by investigating the genuine "lived encounters" of people who had confronted gun violence (Walsh, 2012). With phenomenology, a researcher focuses on the significance attributed to encounters by the participants themselves, rather than concentrating on his or her translation of the phenomenon as an analyst (Moustakas, 1994). A target of phenomenological research is investigation of the "lived encounters" of a variety of people so as to broaden the horizon of represented perspectives (Groenewald, 2004).

### **The Role of the Researcher**

An essential undertaking of any researcher is to convince others with respect to the comfort of a proposed investigation (Seidman, 2013). A scientist can contend that qualitative research prompts rich, point-by-point conclusions and suggestions. It is essential that scientists recognize their suppositions as well as biases identified within a study (Pascal, Johnson, Dore, & Trainor, 2011). In my role as the research instrument, I was responsible for describing any assumptions, expectations, biases, or experiences that could affect my interpretations of the research. As the essential research apparatus in this phenomenological study, I used a few iterative measures to maintain a receptive outlook and eliminate individual biases in the gathering, investigation, and translation of the information. With a specific end goal in mind, I used Husserl's (1982) idea of *epoché*, regularly referred to as *bracketing*. Bracketing connotes the disassociation of one's encounters and perspectives and being mindful of the end goal, so as to acknowledge the phenomenon from an objective and novel point of view (Moustakas, 1994). Using bracketing, I minimized the impact of my inclinations and improved the objectivity of the examination.

In phenomenology, the researcher is obliged to determine a structure for the information to be examined (Leonard, 2012). Notwithstanding the strategy used, phenomenologists would concur that the significance of phenomenological research resides in comprehending lived encounters with the phenomenon being examined. The reason to pursue phenomenology is to inspire understanding. The analyst needs to recognize the core of the research so as to determine a strategy that will yield the best responses to the exploration questions (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan, &

Hoagwood, 2015). It is essential that the participants' encounters are expressed in their own voices and not that of the researcher. The content investigation was used to convey the importance of the experience through the distinguishing proof of fundamental subjects. I scanned for repeating regularities, subjects, and examples in the information in efforts to develop themes. Using Palinkas et al.'s (2015) strategy to control the investigation, the technique guaranteed that the participants' portrayals of their encounters were precisely transcribed. I evaluated data repeatedly for accuracy to guarantee that the correct subjects were connected. Spitzer (2015) proposed that genuine investigation of data begins with a quest for subjects, which includes the revealing of shared characteristics of participants. The information was explained by using the accompanying seven stages determined by Spitzer (2015) as an aid:

- Read all of the participants' illustrations of the issue under study
- Extract significant articulations that relate specifically to the issue
- Make sense of notable assertions
- Categorize the issues that make sense into groups or subjects
- Integrate the discoveries into a thorough portrayal of the phenomenon being contemplated
- Formulate a written account of the phenomenon under study following probing interviews
- Validate the thorough account by returning to the participants to ask them about their experiences and evaluate the precision of the discoveries; part



checking. Fuse any progressions offered by the members into the last depiction of the quintessence of the phenomenon.

### **Methodology**

The selected research design includes investigating individual encounters to arrive at accounts of the details of participants' experiences (Husserl, 1982). According to Finlay (2012), "a phenomenological approach enables the researcher to investigate how people interpret their experiences and thereafter translate the comprehension of said experience into awareness" (p. 12). This awareness, in turn, can be used separately—on behalf of the participant—and inside group settings, as in relation to collection procedures, data analysis procedures, and sampling strategy, as explained below. Next, regarding matters of trustworthiness, I address credibility, reliability, participant protection, research biases, and ethical issues, which are thoroughly depicted below, followed by a summary.

#### **Participant Selection Strategy**

The sampling method was used for the purpose of having a uniform collection of subject matter for examination and analysis. Criterion sampling was adapted to select cases that captured predetermined decisive factors of significance (Palinkas et al., 2015). I anticipated that I might also need to use snowball sampling, requesting that participants recruit potential future subjects from their pool of acquaintances. This sampling approach was used to select additional participants to provide information that was valuable to this research. Using this approach, I asked a few participants if they had contact information for others who might have characteristics consistent with the

requirements of the research (Marcus, Weigelt, Hergert, Gurt, & Gelléri, 2016).

Participants were selected according to predetermined criteria, which were as follows:

- Age 18 or older
- Resident of a small Northeastern State
- Directly affected by gun violence either personally or through a family member

Participants who were easily approachable and satisfied the inclusion standard were the first selected through convenience sampling. The selection method served as a starting point; I began with convenience sampling, followed by snowball sampling, which helped me to recruit additional participants. These participants then formed the sample and offered their opinions, views, and experiences through personal interviews and answers to open-ended questions. The research consistently noted reoccurring similarities and statements to unveil overarching themes in the participants' experiences. The method was limited to those who had experienced an incident of gun violence in a small Northeastern State. The choice of this population was based on the notion that such individuals might be knowledgeable about experiences of the topic under investigation as well as the dynamics surrounding the issue of gun violence. The selected participants were involved for the purpose of providing diverse experiences to develop a holistic picture of the issue under deliberation. The participants offered a detailed review on the topic based on their knowledge and experience.

### **Construct Validity of the Interview Protocol**

Independent consultants, who included two experts in the field of criminal justice, were asked to review the interview protocol and ensure that the interview questions were

unbiased, comprehensible, and relatable; were in the correct order; and related to the research questions. The actual study did not include the volunteers who reviewed the interview protocol for this study. The purpose of reviewing the interview protocol was to establish construct validity of the guiding interview questions and assess for weaknesses, bias, ambiguity, limitations, or flaws within the design of the interview questions and make necessary adjustments (Schultze & Avital, 2011). The consultants reviewed the interview questions for approval prior to my use of them in this study.

### **Data Collection**

Semi structured interviews constituted the plan for data collection. Upon obtaining informed consent from the participants, I audio taped the interviews. General questions were asked immediately. This was done so that the participants eased into the process by feeling comfortable with me prior to describing their individual experiences with gun violence. Their initial response functioned as a guide to develop more focused subsequent questions. To ensure that all avenues of questions were covered, I used written topic guides. By interviewing the participants, I gained an understanding of their experience of the topic being studied (Mason, 2012).

In a phenomenological study, the participants' experiences can only be obtained through the stories they tell the researcher. During interviews, the researcher is obligated to make the environment as comfortable as possible to allow the participants to discuss topics as freely and as naturally as possible. The researcher's encounters with participants may turn out to be conversations rather than interviews when the environment is natural (Mason, 2012). According to Mason (2012), interviews conducted by researchers should be almost identical to everyday conversations. By

maintaining an adequate comfort level during the interview, a researcher can then probe for greater depth with the interview questions with little to no resistance.

Approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) was obtained before data were collected for this study. Approval needed to be provided first at the level of the committee chairperson and the committee members, prior to moving onto the IRB for approval. I completed an application for submission to the IRB, and I created a PowerPoint presentation outlining the study for the IRB. When approval is granted by the IRB, the researcher should share the approval number via email to ensure that it is accessible by all stakeholders of the study. Upon the fulfillment of IRB requirements, participants who were easily approachable and satisfied the inclusion standard were the first selected through convenience sampling. This served as a starting point as I sought to begin with convenience sampling, followed by snowball sampling, if necessary, to recruit additional participants. I provided a consent form to all participants and asked them to thoroughly read the form and sign it, confirming their agreement to take part in the study. Before each interview begins, I obtained written permission from the participant to audiotape the meeting. Demographic information was obtained, including age, years in a small Northeastern State, level of education, gender, ethnicity, and approximate number of gun violence incidents witnessed. At this point, the semi structured interviews were conducted at places of the participants' discretion, depending on where they were most comfortable. Locations included their private residences. General questions were asked from the beginning to allow the participants to be comfortable sharing their insights regarding their experiences with gun violence. In-depth

interviews were conducted to collect data. In addition, I used other secondary and specialized methods of data collection to supplement the above methods.

Qualitative researchers depend relatively broadly on in-depth interviewing. Finlay (2012) described interviewing as “a conversation with a purpose” (p. 29). In qualitative research, an interview can be compared to the likes of having a conversation with a prearranged response group. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2013), quantitative research often utilizes structured questions in situations that may otherwise utilize close-ended questions. As such, participants only selected from answers that are part of a provided list of responses. In this research study about gun violence, however, although numeric data is available about the topic, quantitative method is not appropriate because it may limit the information collected. This is such because quantitative method limits the information to be acquired from participants, mainly because the researcher is unable to seek clarification on certain aspects of the discussion (Carvalho & White, 2014). Rather than conduct interpersonal interviews via in-person or over the phone, the quantitative method utilizes questionnaires, surveys or other informal methods of collecting information that prohibit the researcher from further elaborating (Carvalho & White, 2014). Taking this into consideration, the researcher believes that qualitative methodology is the most suitable technique to use for the research study. Not only does it provide a procedural and systematic way to achieve the objectives, but it also establishes a platform to allow participants to freely discuss their experiences (Birnbaum, 2013), which is fundamental to this research.

This study required four steps to carry out the interview process. These steps included developing a sampling strategy, writing an in-depth guide, conducting the

interviews and analyzing the data collected. The researcher began by developing a sampling strategy, which involved determining whom to interview, as well as how to find the people to be interviewed. The target population was any citizen that is 18 years and older who have directly experienced gun violence or has a relative who has directly experienced gun violence. Potential participants were contacted in two stages. The initial stage was recruitment to participate in an in-depth interview and the second stage was for those who agreed to participate at a prearranged time suitable for them to complete the interview.

Recruitment strategy: The researcher was utilizing three strategies to recruit potential participants. The first strategy was considered as the primary strategy, while the second and the strategies were treated as contingency strategies. The contingency strategies were only deployed if sufficient recruitment and participation cannot be obtained from the primary strategy. The first strategy was by intercept recruiting, which involved inviting potential participants to complete an interpersonal interview. Local churches were used to apply this primary strategy. The researcher requested a few minutes to make an announcement prior to the Sunday services, introducing the researcher and informing attendants about the availability of the recruitment letter (see Appendix A) near the exit door after the service. The researcher distributed the recruitment letter by hand. If the researcher is able to recruit initial participants from this method, other participants was identified and approached through referrals from the initial participants (snowball sampling). If the researcher is not able to recruit participants using this strategy, the researcher may resort to the second and third strategy that is being put together as a contingency plan.

The second strategy involved the use of posters and advertisements to display throughout the local community. The researcher placed an advertisement in the local newspaper outlining the characteristics of the potential participants and inviting them for an in-depth interview. The third strategy was an invitation to the potential participants by phone. These three strategies represented the requirements of a qualitative, phenomenological case study, which seeks to obtain three means of information to use throughout the study.

Following this step was the development of an interview guide. I introduced myself and provide the reasons that prompted this research to be conducted. The introduction topic was expected to be sufficiently informative. The researcher laid more emphasis on the social value of the research. Following the second step, the third step consisted of conducting the interviews. After being recruited for the interview, the participants were offered the opportunity to select the location where the interview was conducted, which may include home, workplace or an appropriate public place as long as it is private. The appointments were scheduled in advance so that the participant and I had adequate time to thoroughly discuss the topic. I began the interview by introducing myself and the study topic, with the objective of putting the participant at ease. Each interview took 30 to 60 minutes. During the interview, I explained to the participants that I will only be reading the questions and I will not be speaking interpersonally to him or her. I asked all participants to turn off all electronic devices, as well as sign an informed consent in my presence after having discussed the material presented via the consent form. Next, I turned on the recorder device and read and subsequently question without inflections or without showing any indication of personal judgment or emotion. I

recorded notes about the participant's body language in a journal and read every question in the same order with every participant. I recorded every exchange, from the initial comments to the end remarks. Upon completion of the interview, I switched off the recorder and spend approximately 10 minutes ensuring the participant does not have any follow-up questions and thank him or her for the time spent. It is imperative for the researcher to be close to the participant in case the participant is not willing to offer more details because they are uncomfortable in providing the details the researcher is exploring. In this case, the researcher ought to have excellent listening proficiency and be skillful when it comes to personal relations, structuring of the questions and the moderate inquiring for an explanation (Rubin & Babbie, 2016).

It is possible to obtain unique information that is imperative to the research study in focus during the interviewing process, though doing so requires a considerable amount of time to analyze the participants' responses. When the researcher is utilizing the in-depth interviews as the only method of data collection, he or she establishes, throughout the conceptual framework that the principle of the research is to unearth and portray the participants' viewpoints on proceedings. In other words, this means that the personal outlook of the participant is what is deemed most substantial (Mason, 2012). While executing the actual interview, it was prudent for the researcher to familiarize with the interview schedule, for this assisted in the process of appearing more natural and less rehearsed. Nonetheless, to ensure that the interview is as prolific as possible, I conveyed a collection of skills and practices to ensure that wide-ranging and comprehensive data were collected throughout the interview process. At the end of the interview, I thanked the participants for their time and contribution and asked them whether they had anything



else in mind that they would like to share. Depending on the response, the interviewing process either continued with these final statements on behalf of the participant or concluded.

I prepared memos that was based on the initial analysis preceding the collection of data. I also listened to the audiotapes collected from the interview and make note essential or interesting topics that were raised and entirely transcribe the passage. Data were then labeled so that all stakeholders were aware of who started the information and how it was collected. This data collection and organizing was conducted via the use of Excel. The necessary information included:

- The name of the participant
- The location of the interview
- The date and time of the interview
- Methodology applied to data collection, interviews

The researcher created a unique identification number, design a record database for necessary information and develop a filing system. Before these are analyzed, I evaluated the goals of the study, which assisted in organizing data and focus on the analysis. I examined contextual and demographic data. This information assisted in the analysis and the comprehension of the collected data. I started the process of analysis by carefully reading the field notes and interview transcripts and commenting on the margins on the key patterns, issues, and themes in the data. I used colored pens and post-it notes to code the various themes and issues in the data. Once I had developed a preliminary list of codes, I begin to organize data in related categories. The next step was to recapitulate the main themes as well as draw on appropriate information that can assist the researcher

in better understanding the findings. I then interpreted the findings, assessed the contributing themes and summarized, which involved transitioning the data into realistic perspective. This required the process of comparing my results with the initial achievement expectations. Following this was the triangulation of data sources, which entails the grouping of multiple methods and perceptions with several data sources so as to crosscheck the outcomes of the research. Once the analysis of the qualitative data is complete, I used various participatory techniques to measure the similar indicators and then compare the outcomes. If the outcomes appear to be similar, then they are likely to be accurate. I compared the themes in the observations, focus group, archival data with an interview and note the changes over the time. I approached the participants and ask them to explain the changes. This stage leads to the conclusion, recommendations, and preparation of the draft report.

### **Sample Procedure**

The choice of the population was based on the criteria of being directly affected by gun violence, either personally or through a family member. Participants were selected based on their ability to contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon under consideration is important. As a result, the phenomenological study is centered on obtaining an explanation, an understanding, as well as the clarification of the human experience. The assortment consists of a sequence of compelling, complete and saturated explanations of the case under research. The product of a qualitative case study ought to consider the understanding of the occurrence under investigation that is not based on how different subdivisions in the populace are knowledgeable.

### **Sample Size**

In qualitative research, it is challenging to determine the exact number of a sample because the analysis requires a flexible approach to arrive at a saturation point (Mason, 2012). It should be noted, however, that in qualitative research, the sample size is determined by the nature of the research questions under consideration (Mason, 2012). According to Seidman (2013), the participants should be brought on board until the objectives of the study are achieved. As previously stated, this research study included 10 participants, depending on the process of recruitment. However, there is no given number of participants to be involved in a study. Tripathy and Tripathy (2015) explained, "The validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information-richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than with sample size" (p. 101).

### **Data Analysis Plan**

The phenomenological study used in-person in-depth interviews. After finishing interviews with all participants of the study, each of the participants' meetings was interpreted verbatim with the utilization of a PC support mechanism to evaluate the qualitative information correlation. In other words, technology was used to process the responses of all of the participants and signify distinguish similarities that arise with the participants' collective shares. All participants were recorded as a number, for instance, GW01 for participant 1, so as to avoid using participants' name to maintain confidentiality. The transcribed information was printed and evaluated several times by the researcher, so as to thoroughly comprehend the information about each of the participants' experience as it was depicted by the participant's point of view. All

previous individual encounters, convictions, and states of mind of the participants was disregarded during the transcript reading, remaining mindful of the objective to fully comprehend the extent of the participants' encounters. After translation of the information, data were returned to the participants to review. It was done to guarantee accuracy. All transcribed files and tape-recorded interviews was placed in a safety deposit box with TD Bank for a period of 5 years with no personal or identifying information relating the participants to this material. After 5 years, all paper data were shredded, and the thumb drives, hard drives, audio and visual records was deleted and destroyed. Once the codes are developed, all-encompassing and repeating codes are lessened to significant topics. Once the themes appear, and classes are given, the researcher can then make accurate findings with the encounters of the members. After the data is understood and coded, part-checking was used to guarantee legitimacy.

### **Trustworthiness**

According to Yin (2013), reliability and validity in qualitative research do not maintain a similar significance as they do in quantitative research. The prerequisite of reliability maintains that a qualitative researcher should ensure that the conclusions are aligned with participants' opinions. The researcher did not formulate that resolution but instead offered information to enable such estimations to be achievable. The procedure of conformability necessitated the researcher to test methods approved to join forces and substantiate the conclusions. Furthermore, other adequate measures included the use of several researchers, the use of different sources of information, lengthened commitment and continual surveillance in the area, operating with discrepant information, expounding investigator's bias, constituent examination, offering a wealthy substantial explanation,

and external audit (Marcus et al., 2016). The use of numerous springs of information enabled the researcher to obtain verification of outcomes that had materialized from diverse groups of participants (Rubin & Babbie, 2016). In addition, these measures provided quality standards for the procedure.

### **Credibility**

This involves the process of conveying that the outcome of the qualitative study is believable from the perspective of the participants in the study. From this angle, the function of the study is to offer an explanation of the phenomena from the participants' perspective, and the participants, therefore, are the only subjects capable of legitimately judging the credibility of the outcome. The researcher explained to the participants the purpose of the study. He also asked the participants to ask questions in the areas that seen unclear, which ensured that the participants were aligned with the research needs. Due to the participants' critical involvement, the participants' confidentiality and security was discussed.

### **Participant Protection**

Upon the fulfillment of the IRB requirements, it included the principles of beneficence and respect for the participants and justice. Additionally, it also included the informed consent; the assessment of the risks that participants were exposed to as well as the selection of the participants. Upon approval by the IRB, the researcher posted the approval number to ensure that it is accessible to all the stakeholders of the study.

Participants' protection was of significance to this study. To ensure the well-being of participants, certain measures are recommended. To guarantee participants' confidentiality, they were recruited based on an express approval. All interviews were

conducted in person using a private room either in the church or a public library. For cases where the participant is not able to travel on the scheduled date of the interview, the researcher may resort to a telephonic interview. The rationale of the investigation and the use of the interview were explained to them. Participants were informed that they may cease participation in the study at any time, and the interview process will cease at any moment at their request. The researcher was aware of the impact that gun violence has had on the community, and some of the participants may have been directly affected. This was made known to the participants by the researcher. Before the interview begins, the participants were informed that they may cease the interview if they find it necessary without facing any consequences (Carter, Goldzweig, Kilbourne, & Juarez, 2012).

The researcher acknowledged the sensitive environment of the meeting and demonstrated understanding in question to create a condition of the interview becoming psychologically stimulating. In addition, participants were guaranteed anonymity and privacy throughout the execution of the study and follow its completion. Participants' privacy was highly respected and was offered the opportunity to determine when to conduct the research (Seidman, 2013). Data collected during the research was only accessible by the researcher and the stakeholders until the publication is done. The information was protected via a password-protected computer and remain locked in a private cabinet until the researcher receives a signature of approval from the dean concerning the initiation of the study. At that moment, all of the files, data, recordings, and notes are to remain in a safety deposit box with TD Bank for 5 years with no personal or identifying information relating the participants to this material. The material was protected by a 4-digit code, which the participants could use to get into contact with the

researcher. After 5 years, all paper data will be shredded, and the thumb drives, hard drives, audio and visual records will be deleted and destroyed.

### **Ethical Procedure**

Ensuring human subjects through examination of morals and controls is more common now than any other time in recent memory (Schultz & Avital, 2011). Applying the Belmont standards to a study is a suitable start for the investigator. Besides, the researcher must put the participants' rights, welfare and security above all individual and investigative concerns. An additional point to acknowledge in examination ethics is providing educated consent to participants what wish to withdraw from the study prior to its completion (Schultz & Avital, 2011). Applicable IRB and moral issues for this study incorporated maintaining the participants' confidentiality, wellbeing, and rights. An introductory letter was distributed to every potential participant clarifying the purpose of the study. Consent was acquired prior to the interview process. It was no expense or predictable dangers to the participant connected with this study. No installment or another type of motivator offered to meet participants was allowed

Confidentiality of the participant was secured by assigning a number to every participant. All information was transcribed by pseudonyms and this was the main source of recognition data that is connected to any of the participants. Privacy of the participants was ensured by locking the interpreted information in a secured file organizer for a period of 5 years. Only after then, all information was destroyed. Data were discharged as a major aspect of a doctoral dissertation and the outcomes may be published. The information was utilized for auxiliary investigation as a part of future research. For this situation, personalities of the participants were ensured and the venture

was analyzed by the suitable fitting ethics review committee. Publications resulting from the secondary analysis did not identify participants' statements with any description of them. Production resulting from the auxiliary examination did not distinguish participants' declarations or any depiction of them.

### **Research Biases**

The responsibility of the researcher as the major appliance for data compilation coupled with his background placed him in close contact with the information. In this study, few procedures were practiced by the researcher to solve the likelihood of bias. Mainly, I maintained a high amount of awareness about the possibility of partiality and implement neutrality throughout the process. As illustrated, research conclusions were subject to associates examination and immediate evaluation to boost the integrity of the research findings (Seidman, 2013). The outcomes were subjected to a closer look by an expert in the sphere of remarks and responses. A scholar who is a professor evaluated the information, and his observations and answers were incorporated to boost the integrity of research outcomes. The researcher acknowledged the method of group improvement and makes the procedure of data analysis open to increase the dependability of findings. This process confidently diminishes or eradicates the frequency of researcher's partisanship (Clark & Moore, 2012)

### **Limitation of the Research Design**

The most regularly quoted restriction of qualitative exploration is the likelihood that the discoveries cannot serve as implications for the more significant population (Carvalho & White, 2014). Consequently, the accompanying is a few potential



impediments to the study: participants were haphazardly chosen, and the sample size may possibly become being too little to be illustrative of the total populace.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

Research methodology focused on the qualitative research, which assisted me in obtaining a better comprehension of the practices and proceedings and the relationship between the community and liberal state of affairs regarding the issue of gun violence. On the sampling and participant selection, I considered a population of a small Northeastern State. This population was selected based on their experience on the issue of gun violence. For participation in the study, a person must be a citizen of the United States, 18 years of age or older, be a resident of a small Northeastern State and be a victim of gun violence or have a family member who is a victim of gun violence. The excluded class included pregnant persons, persons on probation, and the population of fewer than 18 years of age. To proceed, I had to obtain authorization from the IRB to conduct the research. I also had to obtain informed consent from the participants, which involved highlighting all the areas they are expected to cover as well as the purpose of the study. I was expected to uphold a high level of confidentiality regarding the anonymity and privacy of the participants. I also considered ethical issues about the study.

In this study, I considered various methods of data collection. These methods included in-depth interview and observation. I verified the research by using various types of reliability, trustworthiness, and conformability. The data analysis was later outlined in detail. Chapter 4 will focus on the data analysis and findings, which will involve the context of the study and the coding process. The research was concluded by

Chapter 5, which will contain the discussions, implications, and recommendations of the study.

## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological case study was to add to the existing body of knowledge concerning gun violence by presenting the firsthand perspectives of gun violence victims. Throughout this research, the term *victim* refers to a participant who had personally been shot or a participant who had a family member who had been shot within 10 years of data collection. One research question was used to guide the study: How do people who have experienced gun violence perceive problems and solutions associated with the production, distribution, and ownership of guns?

Chapter 4 includes a description of the setting in which data collection occurred, followed by a description of the demographic characteristics of the study participants. Next, the chapter includes descriptions of the implementation of the data collection and data analysis procedures described in Chapter 3. The chapter then includes a discussion of evidence of the trustworthiness of the study's results, followed by a presentation of the results of the data analysis. The chapter concludes with a summary of the results.

### **Setting**

Semi structured interviews were conducted at places of the participants' choice, depending on where they were most comfortable. Most of the participants preferred using the church meeting room for their interview, but a couple preferred the local public library. I sought to make the environment as comfortable as possible to allow the participants to discuss topics freely and naturally, in alignment with the recommendations (Mason, 2012). By maintaining an adequate comfort level during the interview, I was able to probe for greater depth with the interview questions.

### **Demographics**

The sample population consisted of 10 Northeastern State residents. Each participant had been directly or indirectly affected by gun violence. Some participants had witnessed shooting between gangs in their neighborhood, whereas others had experienced gun violence in the form of armed robbery. A couple of participants had experienced use of guns associated with home violence and suicide. All participants were 18 years of age or older. Six were female and four were male. Three of the participants were 18-40 years old, four were 41-60 years old, and three were 61-75 years old. Four of the participants had a high school diploma, and six participants had a college degree. The sample contained a representation of all groups defined by me. Perceptions collected represented at least three generations of Americans: Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y. The variation in generational perceptions provided depth in understanding the underlying phenomenon by allowing insight into the perceptions of multiple generations.

### **Data Collection**

A single private, in-person, semi structured interview was conducted with each of the 10 participants. Interviews were conducted in a mutually agreeable location. The average duration of the interviews was approximately an hour. The interviews were audio-recorded using a digital recording device. There were no variations from the data collection plan described in Chapter 3, and no unusual circumstances were encountered during data collection.

## **Data Analysis**

Recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim, yielding 46 pages of transcriptions. The transcriptions were uploaded into NVivo 11 software and analyzed thematically. I analyzed the data using the 6-step procedure for thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In Phase 1, I conducted an in-depth review of the collected data to become familiar with its content. The second phase consisted of the generation of initial codes based on key descriptive words and phrases, referring to the most basic elements of the data that could be evaluated in a meaningful way. A full evaluation of the collected data allowed me to identify repeated patterns to be used for coding purposes. The third phase consisted of searching for themes. In this phase, I used the codes developed in the previous phase to develop potential themes in the data. This process included an analysis of the codes, and the similarities between different codes were used to form themes. The 4<sup>th</sup> phase consisted of reviewing the themes. In this phase, I refined the themes developed in the previous phase. Theme refinement was conducted by reviewing the identified themes and searching for any subthemes within the content. The 5<sup>th</sup> phase consisted of defining and naming themes. In this phase, I further refined while defining the themes. Lastly, the 6<sup>th</sup> phase consisted of producing the presentation of results noted later in this chapter. Not all of the participants could be contacted again for member checking, but two participants were able to provide feedback on the validation and credibility of the data and were able to relate to the identified themes and acknowledged the validity of the findings. Table 1 includes the themes that emerged during data analysis, the codes that contributed to the themes, and a representative quotation from each theme.

Table 1

*Themes, Codes Contributing to Themes, and Representative Quotations From Themes*

Theme	Codes contributing to theme	Representative quotation from theme
Theme 1: Acceptance of legal firearms. The manufacture and legal ownership of firearms were not perceived as problematic because guns were seen to have legitimate uses; distribution was seen as problematic when guns came into the possession of people who would use them to perpetrate gun violence	Demographic differences; distribution; manufacture; ownership; violence	“[Gun] ownership alone cannot cause pain and harm to people, but when the intended purpose is violated, then the gun violence related activities begin to happen.” (GW07)
Theme 2: Poverty and weak implementation of the law. Perceived risk factors for gun violence included widespread poverty, ineffective gun regulations, and ineffective enforcement of existing laws	Community high gun violence; connection of number of guns with violence; existing laws inadequate; implementation/enforcement ; lack of police response; not enough regulation; socioeconomic status	<p>“It is clear that impoverished areas with unstable and underdeveloped economies create an opportunity for individuals to obtain weapons they can use to commit crimes, especially for use in theft and drug peddling activities.” (GW01)</p> <p>“Existing gun laws are not effective in controlling gun violence in this county.” (GW09)</p>

Theme 3: Community self-help. Perceived solutions to gun violence included community initiatives designed to educate and help potential offenders, to develop a culture of vigilance, and to increase collaboration between citizens and law enforcement	Education; identify/help high-risk groups; methods and campaigns; police and individual collaboration; positive communication; tackling underlying issues	“Citizens should be informed of the harmful effects of committing gun violence” (GW03)
Theme 4: Solution to gun violence. Perceived solutions to gun violence included stricter enforcement of existing laws and making gun laws tougher	Distribution and oversight; enforcement; reduce the number of guns; revision of laws	“Sensible gun laws should be implemented, for instance, banning of high capacity magazines.” (GW04)

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Additional sample quotations from each theme and code are provided in the presentation of results to allow the reader to arrive at an independent judgment of the validity of the analysis process.

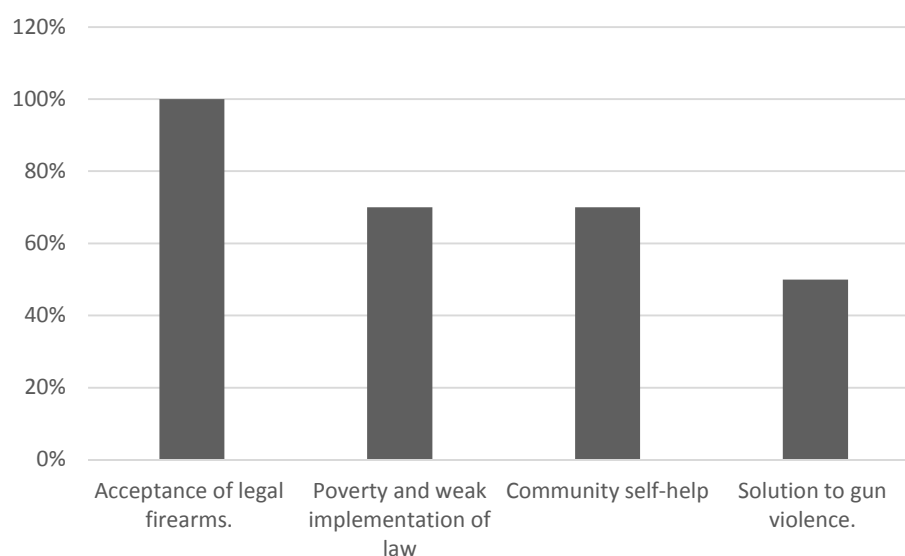
### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

According to Yin (2013), reliability and validity in qualitative research do not have the same significance as in quantitative research. The prerequisite of reliability maintains that a qualitative researcher should ensure that the conclusions are aligned with participants’ opinions. This study will add to the body of knowledge to help others continue data collection in efforts to potentially find a solution to the gun control problem. Other measures included the use of diverse sources of information, lengthened commitment, continual surveillance in the area, acknowledgment of discrepant information and possible sources of investigator bias, constituent examination, substantial explanation, and external audit (Marcus et al., 2016).

Credibility involves the process of conveying that the outcome of a qualitative study is believable from the perspective of the participants. From this angle, the function of the study was to explain the phenomena from the participants' perspective, and the participants, therefore, were the only subjects capable of legitimately judging the credibility of the outcome.

### Results

The research question used to guide the study was the following: How do people who experienced gun violence perceive problems and solutions associated with the production, distribution, and ownership of guns? Figure 1 shows the findings organized as themes that emerged during data analysis. The figure indicates what percentage of participants contributed to each of the identified themes. The discussion that follows covers the details of each of the identified themes.



*Figure 1.* Four key themes that emerged from thematic analysis.



### **Theme 1: Acceptance of Legal Firearms**

According to the coding collected under this theme, the manufacture and legal ownership of firearms were not perceived as problematic because guns were perceived to have a legitimate use. The problem was seen to reside in the distribution of guns and possession of guns by people who would use them to perpetrate gun violence. All of the participants perceived gun manufacturing as an ethical activity. Participants who explained the perceived permissibility of gun manufacturing considered firearm production justifiable because guns were often used for purposes that were legitimate, including hunting, target shooting, and self-defense. GW01 noted,

Gun manufacturing is the process in which guns are made from raw materials to usable or functional guns that people can use for various purposes. From an ethical perspective, manufacturing of guns is not illegal because guns are initially manufactured for use in activities like hunting, shooting competitions, and for self-defense. For these reasons, there are thousands of federal licenses issued to sell firearms in America and to accommodate the high demand for guns; gun manufacturing has expanded massively. (GW01)

GW04, in describing gun manufacturing as legitimate, expressed that firearms were used primarily for legitimate purposes: “From an ethical point of view, gun manufacturing is not a harmful activity. This is because guns are primarily manufactured to be used well, for example, for the security of the country.” GW06 expressed the perception that the manufacture of firearms was an acceptable practice because gun makers intended for their products to be used only for legitimate purposes:

Gun manufacturing involves the process of mass production of guns by licensed gun manufacturing industries with the intention of right use in mind. The major goal of gun manufacturing industries is to make effective weapons that can help the right users to enhance their protection. (GW06)

GW09 cited the federal regulation of gun ownership as a legitimizing circumstance: “Gun manufacturing would be producing or making of guns to be used for security purposes but under license from the government.”

All of the participants likewise perceived the distribution of firearms as a legitimate activity, if the distribution was in accordance with regulations designed to keep guns out of what four participants described as “the wrong hands” or what three participants described as “the black market.” Thus, distribution was not perceived as necessarily entailing gun violence; rather, the blame for the misuse of firearms was perceived as lying with weak legislative safeguards or insufficient enforcement of existing regulations. GW01 referred to the perceived dangers of ineffectively regulated gun distribution:

Gun distribution entails the diverse ways in which manufactured guns reach the users. There are numerous distribution channels in America. One thing to note here is that many firearms are sold in black markets where in most cases fall into the wrong hands. (GW01)

GW10 expressed that gun distribution was problematic when firearms ended up on “the black market,” in part because weapons sold illegally were difficult for law enforcement personnel to trace if they were misused:

Some guns are bought for sports, such as hunting, and some are bought for self-defense. The guns bought legally can be accounted for when an incident happens. I understand that some of the manufacturing guns end up in the black market. Such guns cannot be accounted for. That's why sometimes it is hard to trace the origination of a gun when it is used to commit a crime. What I think from an ethical perspective gun manufacturing is not the problem, but gun distribution seems to be the problem here. (GW10)

GW04, suggesting that legislation should be passed to prevent firearms from being diverted into illegal markets, expressed a perceived limitation of legislative solutions in stating that most firearms used in crimes had been purchased legally:

Gun distribution is the cause of many problems. During this stage, some guns get lost, some are sold to the black market, and they end up being misused. During gun distribution, measures should be put in place to ensure that guns don't fall into the wrong hands and all of them should reach the gun market as intended. This can reduce gun violence even though most guns used in crimes related to gun violence are licensed. (GW04)

GW07 indicated that gun manufacturing contributed to the availability of guns for legitimate purposes, whereas distribution sometimes put guns in the wrong hands because of ineffective regulation. GW07 said that distribution

ensures the firearms reach the intended users through adherence to the right channels and the correct process. From an ethical perspective, distribution plays key role in accessibility to the firearms and therefore contributes more to violence

caused by guns compared to manufacture who just ensures that these guns are available even though they may not be in the hands of right individuals. (GW07)

Eight of the participants defined *gun ownership* as the legal possession of a firearm, such that gun ownership was perceived as legitimate and ethical. One participant expressed the perception that *gun ownership* might refer to the possession of firearms by persons who might be “a threat to the security of the larger community” (GW01). GW07 expressed the perspective that was predominant among participants in describing gun ownership as ethical, provided that the firearm was not misused: “Ownership alone cannot cause pain and harm to people, but when the intended purpose is violated, then the gun violence related activities begin to happen.” Notable in this response was the implication that the intended purposes of firearms did not include causing pain and harm for people.

GW03 referred to gun ownership as a “right” and an “entitlement” that facilitated legitimate uses of firearms: “Gun ownership is the right to keep and possess firearms. It is the entitlement for an individual to possess, own and carry guns. They are purposely possessed for personal defense as well as performing military services by the government” (GW03). GW06 also described gun ownership as a “right” that enhanced gun owners’ ability to defend themselves:

Gun ownership is the right conferred to any individual deemed fit to own a gun by the state or federal security agency. It is meant for protection against any potentially harmful aggression that can endanger an individual life. (GW06)

GW07 described gun ownership as legal by definition:

According to my understanding, gun ownership involves acquiring and being in possession of a firearm for personal protection but within the necessary statutes. For anyone to have ownership, they must fulfill specific requirements to ensure they will not misuse or use the gun to harm someone. (GW07)

GW01 was the only participant who equated gun ownership with gun possession, with the corollary that gun ownership might be illegal and conducive to violence:

*Gun ownership* is a term used to refer to gun possession. In this country, people have a constitutional right to keep and bear firearms, and this right is protected by the Second Amendment of the American Constitution. The right to possess guns has in many ways made it possible for guns to be available even to people who are a threat to the security of the larger community, for example, availability of guns to mentally ill people and criminals who use guns to cause gun violence. (GW01)

## **Theme 2: Poverty and Weak Implementation of the Law**

Perceived risk factors for gun violence included widespread poverty, ineffective gun regulations, and ineffective enforcement of existing laws. Seven of the participants indicated that widespread poverty was a risk factor for a high incidence of gun violence in a neighborhood. Participants attributed the perceived link between poverty and gun violence to social conditions associated with poverty, including the ready availability of black-market firearms, the lack of opportunity, and the high rate of crime. GW01 described the perceived association of gun violence with impoverished communities:

Certain neighborhoods may be perceived as “hotbed of gun violence” because of their social and economic status. Low-income and disadvantaged neighborhoods

in a small Northeastern State are perceived to experience high rates of gun violence than the high-income and privileged neighborhood where people live safely with each other. In other words, there is an existing relationship between poverty and gun violence in a small Northeastern State. Impoverished areas with unstable and under-developed economies create an opportunity for individuals to obtain weapons they can use to commit crimes especially for use in theft and drug peddling activities. (GW01)

GW04 linked gun violence to poverty, which was perceived because of racial discrimination:

Neighborhoods with various ethnic groups are always hotspots [of gun violence], which result from racial discrimination. Well-off neighborhoods have fewer cases of gun violence since most individuals are educated. On the other hand, slum areas have high incidents of gun violence since there are high levels of drug abuse, many people are poor, and there are a high number of school dropouts. (GW04)

GW08 indicated that the association between poverty and gun violence was due to the likelihood that firearms would fall into “the wrong hands” in poor communities:

Some neighborhoods are perceived to be the hotbed of gun violence due to the number of violence that occur in the community and also the number of guns that are in the wrong hands...However, there are some neighborhoods which appear to organize well, and the people from such community seemed to be more civilized. I firmly believe that socioeconomic status may have played a critical role in shaping our communities. The privilege class neighborhood does experience less

gun violence because they are more educated and have enough security in their community. (GW08)

GW10 associated gun violence with poverty because of the perceived link between poverty and crime, with a high crime rate being a predictor of widespread illegal gun possession:

The gun violence in Wilmington mostly occurs on the east side of town which is very poor, drug infested and very few jobs. While west Wilmington has absolutely no violence, a well to do section in the city and the gun owners have them legally. Most guns used in violence most of the time are illegally owned and occur on the east side of Wilmington. (GW10)

Seven of the participants indicated that gun violence was in part a result of the inadequate regulation by the government of gun distribution and ownership. GW03 stated, "I think current gun restrictions are not sufficient enough to moderate gun violence in the county." GW04 expressed the perception that the inadequacy of existing gun laws had been proven by the fact that the incidence of gun violence was rising despite them: "The existing gun laws won't solve gun violence in this county since it has been in use for a long time and gun violence has been on the rise." GW06 expressed a similar perception, indicating that the tendency of firearms used in crimes to have legal sources demonstrated the inadequacy of existing regulations: "I think the existing gun laws are not effective in the control and prevention of rampant gun violence witnessed in the county. As widely known most of the guns used to commit crimes are legally acquired by the killers." GW09 linked between existing rates of gun violence and the inadequacy of legislative controls explicit:

Existing gun laws are not effective in controlling gun violence in this county. For example; one must receive a license before possession of a firearm which means that it will be identified under the owner's name and ID. In case it is used somewhere else illegally, and then the owner is held liable. It helps to control gun violence as individuals take charge of their guns. However, we still experience multiple incidences of gun violence now and then. It implies that the existing legislation and enforcement is not yet sufficient to control gun violence. (GW09)

GW06 indicated the perceived relationship between tougher gun legislation and lower rates of gun violence:

If tougher gun laws are put in place guns landing in the hands of potential criminals will be minimized. Implementing thorough background checks will prevent seriously mentally ill people and domestic abusers from acquiring guns. (GW06)

Participants GW05 and GW08 disagreed with other participants, stating instead that existing gun regulations were adequate. GW05 expressed the perception that gun violence occurred when guns got into "the wrong hands":

Gun law is meant to regulate the possession, sale of weapons, use of ammunition and firearms in my county. Gun laws aim to decrease the crime rate in the United States of America. Through strict rules on gun ownership, there have been fewer incidences of gun violence. Furthermore, in most cases, gun violence takes place when a gun ends up in wrong hands. Therefore, gun laws are effective in controlling gun violence. (GW05)

GW08 stated, "Yes, the gun laws can efficiently control gun violence."



Five out of 10 participants expressed the perception that enforcement of existing laws and regulations was inadequate, and that this was a risk factor for gun violence. GW02 connected inadequate police responses to gun violence with the rise in the rate of gun violence:

It is just like a routine to see people with guns, and the local police inadequate response seems like no one cares about what is going on. People are shot dead, some are nursing wounds, for instance, I was nursing my wounds from the street gunshot, and the violence goes on and on without anything done about it. Homicide cases have been increasing but very few cases are brought to justice. As a result, having guns in homes has increased for the people to defend themselves and their properties due to the increasing crime rate. This is as a result of ignorance by the local police to ensure the community's safety thus, increase the incidence of gun violence. (GW02)

GW05 and GW07 linked to gun violence with a lack of "security" in a neighborhood, with GW05 associating high security with low violence: "a neighborhood where it is not a hotbed of gun violence is where there is high security and few or no incidences [*sic*] of gun violence." GW07 expressed the same perception: "the provision of enough security in the violent areas might play a role in reducing some instances [of gun violence] as well." GW10 had perceived a difference in the promptness of police responses to incidents of violence, depending on the socioeconomic status of the affected community:

The approach or steps I think the small Northeastern State officials may take in the reduction of gun violence is in the community are to respond to any gunshot swiftly and on time. As I mentioned earlier, calls coming from a specific part of

town, such as east Wilmington is responded to, with a longer answer time than a call from west Wilmington. (GW10)

### **Theme 3: Community Self-Help**

Perceived solutions to fund violence included community initiatives designed to educate and help potential offenders, to develop a culture of vigilance, and to increase collaboration between citizens and law enforcement agencies.

Seven participants expressed the perception that community-based initiatives designed to educate and help potential perpetrators would reduce gun violence. GW01 proposed three levels of intervention for potential offenders, all to be facilitated by the county government, including intervention by police at the time of a crisis, intervention by parents to steer children away from aggressive behaviors, and medical or therapeutic interventions for persons who were at high risk for committing gun violence:

County Officials should advocate the development of community-based programs that involve police training in crisis intervention, training programs for helping parents raise emotionally healthy kids and for helping socially troubled individuals to divert their criminal behaviors to something else away from thoughts of committing crimes. (GW01)

GW03 proposed educating potential offenders about the dangers of gun violence and educating other citizens about how to avert violence: how does this relate to what is already being done in this area?

Citizens should be informed of the harmful effects of committing gun violence.

They can also choose to attend defense seminars so that they can easily detect

people at-risk behaviors and how to respond accordingly hence safeguarding other people's life sensitively. (GW03)

GW08 also perceived a need for education of potential offenders, as well as for the discouragement of high-risk lifestyles:

Education remains a better option in reducing this menace. As people who adhere to the law and understand ourselves better, we should discourage the gangster life and educate our people on the importance of conserving life as well as their role in society. (GW08)

GW09 perceived a need for the county to educate citizens: "The County should hold seminars and rallies to educate the members of the community on the effects of gun violence." GW01 perceived a need for the county to orchestrate treatment interventions for mentally ill persons as a means of averting gun violence:

Although it is important to recognize that most people suffering from mental illnesses are not dangerous in the community, for those persons at risk for gun violence due to mental illness, suicidal thoughts, or even feelings of desperation, development of mental health programs that promote treatment can often help in the prevention of gun violence in the community. County Officials should develop policies and programs that identify and provide treatment for all persons who have a mental illness. By so doing, cases of gun violence caused by mentally ill persons will be reduced in a small Northeastern State . (GW01)

GW07 perceived a need for general education about firearms in the community to reduce the inadvertent misuse of guns: "Education of the community about the application of

guns is important since ignorance has led some into misusing guns.” GW01 perceived a need for interventions for incarcerated criminals:

When the criminals go to prison, there should program in place to educate them about gun violence. So, when they leave prison, they can become reasonable and law-abiding citizens. Some of these crime violators are gang members. While in prison they should have a counseling program in place to take them out of the gangs. Some of these crimes are committed due to peer-pressure from other gang members. If they are successfully taken out of the gangs and give them opportunities to have a regular job, another life would have been safe. (GW01)

Nine out of 10 participants perceived community-based initiatives designed to create a culture of vigilance and encourage cooperation between citizens and law enforcement as a potential solution to gun violence. GW01 perceived a need for citizen-led interventions for the mentally ill:

Individuals have a role to play towards reducing incidences of gun violence. They can help mentally ill persons get treatment and by so doing, they reduce their chances of engaging in violent activities which may involve the use of guns.

(GW01)

GW03 thought a potential for community-based events to reduce gun violence by raising awareness of the danger:

Individuals can as well act as campaigners claiming that we as citizens we must stamp out policies shootings and gun violence to preserve human rights.

Individuals can also participate by attending open security debates and contribute by discussing threatening aspects that torture our lives. (GW03)

GW04 perceived a need for a cultural shift toward more responsible use of firearms and community self-policing:

A gun safety culture should be established. This ensures that every individual is protected...Individuals should volunteer and get involved in focused deterrence policing: a form of community policing aimed to discourage certain habits in the community, such as violent behaviors, drug dealing, and gun violence. (GW04)

GW06 believed that a culture of vigilance involved citizens policing their own community and being prepared to intervene when a crime seemed likely to occur: "Every individual should be vigilant and learn how to identify when someone is at risk of committing a crime. Individuals should respond immediately if at-risk behaviors are identified." GW10 expressed the perception that mentoring programs for young people would encourage young people to take an active role in reporting crimes:

When the adults mentor community young people, they will regard themselves as part of the community and report any criminal activity or suspicious activity to the police. By so doing the community will be safe from criminal activity and I believe this is a win situation. (GW10)

GW02 perceived citizens as responsible for providing police with information about crimes: "I believe that gun violence is an issue that is a responsibility of every individual. I think that individuals can collaborate together to help the police with information of those who engage in these crimes." GW05 also believed that gun violence would be reduced if citizens were cooperative with police: "Security starts with you and me. Anyone who may suspect a terrorist act or even witness a gun ownership in the wrong hands should report to the police department." GW08 perceived a need and an

obligation for citizens to report misuses of firearms: “As patriotic citizens, we should report those who are misusing their firearm to cause harm on others but live amongst us.” GW10 proposed a community watch as one way in which police and citizens could effectively collaborate:

The police working with community-based organizations would result to an effective crime-solving tool because each in the community will be working as a neighborhood watch and will report criminal activities or suspicious activities to the police. (GW10)

#### **Theme 4: Solutions to Gun Violence**

Perceived solutions to gun violence included stricter enforcement of existing laws and introducing tougher laws for gun ownership. Five participants expressed the perception that gun violence would be reduced if existing laws were more strictly enforced. GW01 believed that licensing requirements for gun dealers should be enforced to compel dealers to perform background checks: “the licensing of gun dealers, emphasis on background check when purchasing a gun, and close oversight of retail gun sellers can reduce the diversion of guns to criminals in the community.” GW02 noted that collaboration between law enforcement and gun dealers could serve as a means of reducing gun violence:

There are many approaches that can help the county officials to reduce instances of gun violence including collaboration between the law enforcement agencies and the gun sellers to help monitor gun purchase and use...The police should provide [gun sellers] with the lists of those with criminal records to assist in the assessment before the guns are sold. (GW02)

GW05 shared preemptive enforcement of laws as an effective solution to gun violence:

“The county officials should ensure the strict law of owning a gun is followed by the citizens. Also patrol the hot spots now and then to increase security to the public.”

GW09 also perceived a need for more extensive policing of the community as a means of preventing gun violence from occurring:

Security personnel should be made available in every location to ensure that events of gun violence are either anticipated and stopped; or dealt with before they can get out of hand. This would ensure that the issue of gun violence is resolved or limited. (GW09)

GW10 discussed a need for police to respond more promptly to calls from neighborhoods where gun violence was prevalent:

Calls coming from a specific part of town, such as east Wilmington are responded to, with a longer answer time than a call from west Wilmington. The police department should look into their internal policies to come up with effective methods in investigating a crime. (GW10)

Three participants indicated the perception that gun violence might be reduced if existing controls on gun distribution were tightened: “The county officials should plan to address gun violence by focusing on the general investigations for gun sales, banning attack weapons again while increasing the overall criminal fines for unlawful gun traffickers.” GW04 stressed on a need for a revision of laws that would reduce the prevalence of gun ownership and ownership of dangerous gun accessories:

The government should revise gun laws in an attempt to reduce gun violence...sensible gun laws should be implemented, for instance, banning of high

capacity magazines...Similarly, the government can reduce the number of individuals owning guns since there is a relationship between gun ownership and high rates of gun violence. This can lead to a reduction of gun-related violence.

(GW04)

GW06 stated, “If tougher gun laws are put in place guns landing in the hands of potential criminals will be minimized.”

### **Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological case study was to add to the existing body of knowledge concerning gun violence by presenting the firsthand perspectives of gun violence victims. In order to achieve this, semi structured interviews were conducted with 10 residents of a small Northeastern State, who had been affected by gun violence, either directly or through a family member. The research question used to guide the study was: How do people who experienced gun violence perceive problems and solutions associated with the production, distribution, and ownership of guns?

Results indicated that production and legal ownership of guns were not recognized as problems, but that gun distribution was problematic when inadequate regulation and enforcement allowed firearms to be acquired by persons who were likely to commit gun violence. Participants reflected that criminals, the mentally ill, and domestic abusers as groups with a heightened propensity to commit gun violence. Other mentioned that risk factors for gun violence included widespread poverty, ineffective gun regulations, and ineffective enforcement of existing laws.

Expressed solutions to gun violence included community initiatives designed to educate and help potential offenders, to develop a culture of vigilance, and to increase



collaboration between citizens and law enforcement. Participants proposed neighborhood watches, encouragement of cooperation with police in crime prevention and detection and increased public awareness both risks associated with firearms and of indications that an individual was at risk of committing gun violence. Other perceived solutions to gun violence included stricter enforcement of existing laws and making gun laws tougher. Stricter enforcement of existing laws was perceived as involving increased policing of neighborhoods where gun violence was prevalent and stricter enforcement of laws affecting gun dealers. Tougher gun laws were perceived as including a ban on assault weaponry and a tightening of licensing requirements for gun owners. Chapter 5 includes interpretation and implications of these results.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological case study was to add to the existing body of knowledge concerning gun violence by presenting the firsthand perspectives of gun violence victims. The problem was viewed through the lens of social contract theory to understand how people who experienced gun violence perceive problems and solutions associated with the production, distribution, and ownership of guns. The results of the study indicated a breach in the perceived social contract, where people stopped relying on lawmakers and attempted to find their own solutions to a social problem.

According to Halbrook (2013a), no community or culture is exempt from the perils of gun violence. The aftermath of such violence is serious and debilitating for communities, cities, and the nation, as it leads to severe injury, trauma, or death. Because of the growing severity of gun violence, the federal government has attempted to implement more stringent regulations, such as the National Instant Criminal Background System (NICS). However, no significant federal regulations have implemented since the NICS in 1998.

Views of gun control vary dramatically. Over the years, various measures have been taken to control gun violence, such as the introduction of NICS and the Hand Brady Violation Act of 1998. Nonetheless, increasingly frequent incidents of mass shooting have put to question the thoroughness of gun control efforts. Although past studies have gathered a large amount of numerical data concerning gun violence in the United States, few researchers have conducted qualitative studies on best policies and workable

solutions for gun control based on the perceptions of people who have been affected by gun violence.

In this study, interviews were conducted with individuals who had been directly or indirectly affected by various forms of gun violence. The interview questions were created around the main research question, which concerned solutions to gun control as perceived by the population of individuals who have been affected by gun violence. The results of this qualitative study were reported in Chapter 4. An interpretation of the results is presented in the current chapter, along with limitations and implications of the research. Recommendations for future researchers are also included.

### **Interpretations of the Findings**

The four themes identified from the data were acceptance of legal firearms, poverty and weak implementation of the law, community self-help, and solutions to gun violence. The top 50 keywords interwoven in these themes, which depict what was on the minds of the participants, are presented as a word cloud in Figure 2. Whereas I expected *violation* to appear in the cloud as a central word, I found it quite intriguing to see words, such as *community*, *people*, and *ownership* closest to the central word. These word choices seemed to indicate how members of communities affected by gun violence may be viewing their participation as a missing piece in the solution to this problem. The group of people participating in finding a solution to this problem can be identified throughout the emerging themes.



*Figure 2.* Word cloud depicting top 50 high-frequency words shared by the participants in the study.

Theme 1, acceptance of legal firearms, provided somewhat surprising but informative results. All participants in the study viewed gun manufacturing and legal gun ownership as acceptable. These results were surprising, given that the participants had been direct or indirect victims of gun violence. This finding is somewhat in contrast with literature that seemed to present extreme views on the issue. For instance, Squires (2012) argued that some aspects of American culture seem to accommodate what is identified as “gun culture,” a phrase that was presumably adapted from Hofstadter’s writings on America as a gun culture. Conversely, most Americans who support gun control proposals tend to condemn the longstanding gun culture (Brent et al., 2013). In contrast to these two opinions, the victims of gun violence appeared to maintain a nonpolar narrative. They had suffered the consequences of weak gun control laws, while on the

other, they looked at legal firearms as a means to protect themselves against violators in the wake of increasing gun violations.

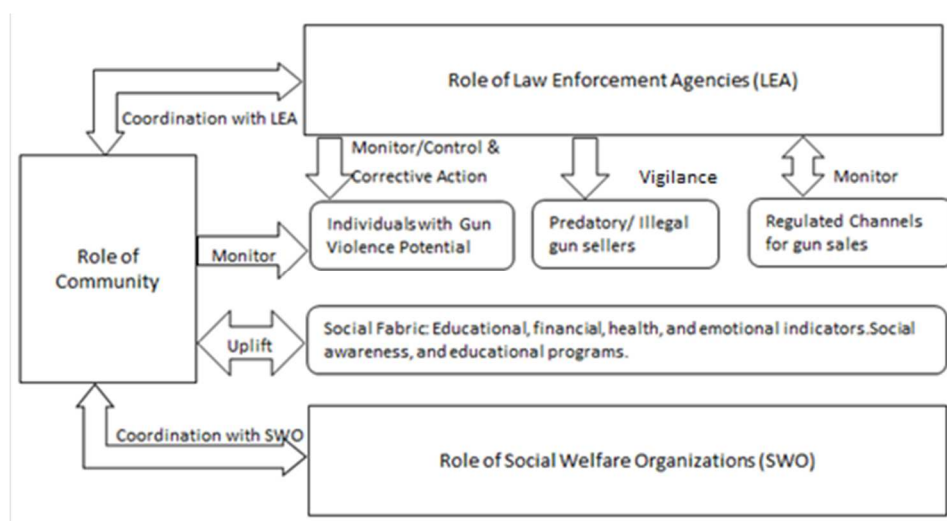
As individuals who have lived the consequences of gun violations, the participants seemed to have a more in-depth understanding of the variables of the issue. The results that comprised Theme 2 demonstrated that participants drew a clear demarcation between legal and illegal channels of arms sales. The participants also indicated their awareness of social factors, such as poverty and lack of education, that may result in communities not only harboring unsafe arms buyers, but also being seen as more attractive markets for illegal or irresponsible arms sellers. The distinction of social factors appeared to be a logical separation between the problematic and safe variables of the issue. Themes 2 and 3, viewed together, almost seemed like a well-thought-through, 2 pronged approach to tackling gun violence, where responsibilities were divided between the community and the law-enforcing agencies.

From the lens of Theme 2, the participants seemed to have delegated to the law enforcement agencies the task of closer monitoring and stricter vigilance against illegal arms sellers. Curbing illegal arms sales may be one of several variables that could prevent guns from falling into shaky hands within a community. A noteworthy emphasis on illegal arms sales could be observed through this theme. Although the participants did mention the role of law enforcement agencies in stricter implementation of gun control policies and in promoting more efficient use of power to control gun violence, these suggestions appeared as part of the overall solution captured under Theme 4.

From the lens of Theme 3, the participants appeared to have a clear awareness of their role as members of a community in mitigating social factors, such as poverty and

lack of education, thereby making their communities less susceptible to violence. To mitigate risk, furthermore, the participants also perceived as their duty identifying potential violators to law-enforcing agencies and other organizations that could provide counseling or other kinds of social support.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Theme emerging from the results, solutions to the problem, appeared to demonstrate how the participants perceived dealing with gun violence as an exercise between communities and law enforcement agencies to uplift the social fabric of a community plagued with gun violence. The responses seemed to reflect a deep understanding and acceptance of flaws that need to be corrected from both perspectives. A solution for mitigating gun violence that was developed from synthesis of the emerging themes is presented in Figure 3. The figure indicates how well-defined roles and coordination among the community, law-enforcing agencies, and social welfare organizations can be instrumental in tackling gun violence.



*Figure 3.* Conceptual solution to gun violation problems developed from emerging themes.

The word cloud consisting of the top 50 most frequently used words presented in Figure 2 depicts participants' focus on self-help. It was evident in the interviews that the participants did not place the blame for the situation only on the law-enforcing agencies or the lawmakers. The gun control literature discussed in Chapter 2 includes the works of authors, such as Mann and Michel (2016) who focused on the dynamics between gun lobbyists and policymakers. Although the politics behind framing gun policies remains an engaging topic for politicians and scholars, this topic did not appear as a primary concern for the participants, who resided in a community riddled with gun violence. Lack of interest in the dynamics of political circles could reflect a loss of hope among the participants about getting any resolution to the problem through political channels. A loss of hope about getting help through political reforms might explain the grassroots approach of the participants, who focused on working with variables within their control. This observation seems to reflect a perception of a broken social contract, in that the participants seemed to have stopped waiting for lawmakers and to have sought a solution to the problem themselves.

The responses and solutions shared by the participants also appeared to be somewhat misaligned with the existing public demand to reform gun laws, which has accelerated in the wake of the recent high school shooting at Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, in February 2018. One possible explanation for this variance in approach is the perceived experiences of gun violence may differ between the participants in this study because of the participants' location and the occurrence of gun violence in the participants' communities. Whereas a horrific event, such as a shooting at a high school or other public place is received as a shock and trauma by an otherwise

peaceful community, the residents of communities, such as those represented by the participants of this study have lived for decades with a constant sense of insecurity.

Although public shooting events are unacceptable in any society and cause pain, shock, and mass social reaction, they account for just a fraction of lives lost to gun violence each year. For example, from January 1<sup>st</sup> to March 7, 2018, Americans had lost at least 67 lives across 39 verified incidents of mass shooting throughout the country; during the same time frame, the total number of gun-associated deaths in the country was recorded at 2,575 (Gun Violence Archive, 2018). According to Gun Violence Archive (2018), 2.6% of human injury resulted from a mass shooting event. In other to put things further in perspective, out of the 39 verified mass shooting events that took place, the social outcry only surfaced in reaction to a single event in which the nation lost 17 high school students. Other events were either not reported in the media or got buried in other news. This leads to the following question: Why did the other 50 lives lost to a mass shooting, and the 2,508 lives lost to isolated gun-related incidents, not qualify for social outcry? Pondering this question may lead to a better understanding of the perceptions of the participants in this study.

The social media outcry coming from communities that have had minimal to no exposure to the atrocities of gun violence may appear to the participants in this study as an emotional appeal that has not been well thought through and that has the potential to be misdirected and politicized by interest groups. Although the participants in this study are likely to feel the pain of families who have lost loved ones in a mass shooting, they may view the efforts of some of the support groups as an attempt to leverage such incidents to promote their political views for or against certain lobbies. Choosing not to



react to 97% of causalities or to study those cases to find a social solution can be viewed as a skewed reaction.

Gun violence and the frequency of mass shooting events are consistently on the rise. Around the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Corlin (2001) reported a consistent rise in gun-violence-related deaths over the previous two decades. A similar trend was reported by Tonry (2013), who predicted that the trend would continue if measures were not taken to control gun distribution. Together, the works of Corlin and Tonry present evidence of increasing gun violence in the United States since the 1980s, with minimal changes made to gun control policies from a lawmaking perspective. In light of these data, there may be merit in seeking a grassroots-level solution to gun violence based on principles of self-help and non-reliance on lawmakers.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Although this study was carefully conducted, it was subject to limitations. The complexity of automating qualitative data may have made the research less effective. The interviews required many hours of probing in addition to my review process of the data following the interviews. These factors may have had an impact on the data analysis and findings. Moreover, many underlying assumptions guided this study. The first was that a relationship exists between firearms and violence. Notwithstanding the limitations of this study, the recommendations that follow are based on the questions that have arisen because of this research.

### **Recommendations**

This study led to several recommendations, which further highlight the challenges that society faces in relation to gun control. The participants in this study proposed

establishing a grassroots system focused on uplifting living conditions at a community level and on identifying elements that are linked to susceptibility to violence. The recommended system would be established based on a partnership involving community members, social welfare organizations, and law enforcement agencies. Each of the partners would focus on a specific scope of work.

Community members would primarily help create awareness about gun safety and about issues created by gun violence. They would also assist individuals who might need counseling in seeking help from social welfare organizations. Community members would also help by identifying individuals who might be a threat to the community to law enforcement agencies. Overall, the community would strive to prevent irresponsible buyers from making arms purchases.

The law enforcement agencies would primarily stay vigilant with the aim of eradicating illegal arms sales. They would also follow leads from the community to intercept illegal arms transactions. Additionally, the law enforcement agencies would monitor legal arms sellers more closely to ensure compliance with existing laws and policies. The social welfare organizations, meanwhile, could facilitate counseling, and other initiatives in the community that would serve to elevate the community's lifestyle.

These recommendations are based on what participants in this study considered to be a pragmatic approach to solving their issues with available resources within the existing legal framework. Longitudinal research could be conducted by implementing the recommended framework in a community with a history of gun violence in order to study the effectiveness of this approach. A qualitative approach to this study may help bring attention to various communities nationwide, therefore potentially increasing the

level of awareness in communities that do not have a history of gun violence or only have a history of mass shooting events.

### **Implications and Social Change**

Although recommendations suggested by the participants in this study seemed logical, they may not be very easy to implement. To be applicable at any level, the recommendations presented in the previous section may require initiating social change. Grassroots activism may be necessary to create awareness about the concepts shared by the participants, followed by formation of volunteer committees at the community level to run a test implementation of a coordinated effort to turn around the gun-violence-ridden neighborhood.

The findings of this study may create general awareness about the experiences of communities that have had prolonged exposure to gun violence. Moreover, it may offer information about the measures that members of such communities would like to take to mitigate the risks they continuously face at the hands of irresponsible gun sellers and owners. Further, it may increase awareness of how members of communities under current and present gun violence danger react when they cannot afford to protest or wait for policymakers to take corrective actions.

The plague of gun violence has penetrated U.S. society far above and beyond the bigger incidents that cross the threshold of media attention a few times every year. Precious lives are lost to guns on a daily basis in smaller isolated incidents. Awareness of the bigger picture and the conditions of communities with prolonged exposure to gun violence may help researchers and thinkers identify more variables related to the problem. The results from this study may help create awareness that blaming a single

channel may not help to solve the problem of gun violence, and that there may be a need to address the issue with multiple approaches.

In order to protect society, actions must be taken at various levels. For example, where politicians and pressure groups can continue pursuing implementation of stricter gun laws, gun experts, such as retired military personnel, can conduct seminars, and provide gun-safety training. Social organizations can deploy programs to uplift social conditions susceptible to gun violence at the individual and community level.

Community monitoring systems can be deployed to maintain a healthy lifestyle at a community level. As gun violence has become a growing issue, knowledge must be disseminated that can lead to multiple layers of an organized effort to stop loss of life to gun violence.

### **Conclusion**

The literature review presented in Chapter 2 revealed that increasing rates of gun violence and lengthy debates on refining the policies around gun control required a new perspective of looking at the issue that may contribute to understanding the phenomenon. This study has added to the growing body of research about perceptions of victims of gun violence. While the participants in this study recognized that gun-makers intended for their products to be used only for legitimate purposes, they shared their perception that social factors, such as intense poverty, mental illness, substance abuse, and lack of education can influence a person to misuse firearms. How to control access of firearms to individuals whose better judgment may have become impaired by any of these social factors is a prevalent topic. While nothing has yet worked to manage gun violence fully, the perceptions of the victims of gun violence may contribute towards developing

awareness about the role communities can play in implementing a responsible distribution of firearms. I hope that this research can be replicated in the communities with higher rates of gun violence to help community members reflect on their situation and realize how they can mobilize a community effort to control gun violence within their communities.

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## Appendix: Interview Protocol

Analysis of the Perceptions of People's Experiences Regarding Gun Violence in a small Northeastern State

Date:

Time of Interview:

Place:

Interviewee:

Interviewer:

Position of interviewee:

Brief description of study:

Interview questions:

1. Have you directly or indirectly experienced an incident of gun violence that you would like to share?
2. How do you think the experience has impacted your personal life?
3. How do you feel about living in a community with a higher rate of gun violence?
4. Do you think residents of this county may have developed differences based on gun violence?
5. From an ethical perspective, how do you differentiate between gun manufacturing and gun distribution?
6. How do you differentiate between gun ownership and gun violence?
7. Gun-ownership is a widespread phenomenon across U.S.A, why do you think certain neighborhoods may be perceived as "hotbed of gun violence", while others are not?
8. Do you think existing gun laws are effective to control gun violence in your county?)
9. What approach or steps do you think your County officials may engage upon to reduce the presence of gun violence in your community?
10. How do you think individuals can contribute towards reducing gun violence?