Title: Parental Attitudes, Beliefs, and Practices Related to Firearm Storage: A Qualitative Study
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Background: Firearm injury is a leading cause of death among U.S. children. The practices of storing firearms locked, unloaded, and keeping ammunition locked and separate from firearms are associated with reduced odds of childhood firearm injury. However, many households do not implement these practices. We sought to characterize parental attitudes and beliefs related to firearm storage and identify facilitators and barriers to safer firearm storage.

Methods: Eligible participants were the parents or guardians of a child less than 18 years old and kept at least one firearm. Participants were recruited from three general pediatrics clinics and a pediatric emergency department in New Haven County, Connecticut. Semi-structured, qualitative interviews were conducted to identify reasons for using different firearm storage methods and strategies to prevent firearm injury. Interview transcripts were independently reviewed, and descriptive codes were assigned. The constant comparative method was used to revise and categorize codes iteratively. Themes were derived and revised as data collection occurred. Data collection concluded once thematic saturation was achieved.

Results: We completed semi-structured interviews with 20 participants. Participants were majority male (60%), white (90%), and aged 32 to 53. Children present in the home had a mean age of 8 years. 85% of participants stored firearms locked, 60% stored firearms unloaded, 65% kept ammunition locked or did not keep ammunition, and 45% stored ammunition separate from firearms. The following themes were identified: 1) firearm storage must be compatible with a specific context of use; 2) firearm storage is often ‘safe enough,’ and not necessarily maximally safe; 3) firearm practices are influenced by one’s social network and lived experience; 4) parents who own firearms may be open to changing storage practices; 5) firearm safety may require a multimodal approach, involving storage, education, and legislation.

Conclusions: Parents who keep firearms value convenience and utility, which may be at odds with safer storage practices. However, some parents may be open to adopting safer practices. Family and peer relationships, education, and legislation represent important facilitators of firearm storage practices. Understanding parental attitudes and beliefs on firearm storage may inform future interventions to improve storage practices.

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