

KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDE, BELIEFS AND PRACTICES (KABP) INFLUENCING CIVILIANS' SMALL ARMS OWNERSHIP IN LIBYA



ABU SALIM AND ZUWARAH
FINAL REPORT
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Author: Nathalia Quintiliano and Lily Sannikova, with revisions by Pierre-Yves Malgorn.

ABOUT SREO

SREO Consulting Ltd. (SREO) is an independent monitoring & evaluation, and research consultancy committed to serving humanitarian, stabilisation and development actors operating in the most challenging environments worldwide by providing unbiased and actionable data, analysis and research. Our international team combines local insight with interdisciplinary expertise to deliver information from those in need to those who need it most.

Contact: comms@sreoconsultingltd.com

ABOUT DRC

DRC is an international non-governmental organisation that promotes and supports durable solutions to problems faced by refugees and internally displaced people worldwide. The Humanitarian Disarmament and Peacebuilding sector is the specialised technical unit of DRC, working to protect conflict-affected communities by improving safety, strengthening community resilience, and building local capacities to reduce and remove weapons-related risks and factors that may result in the use of weapons by civilians. DRC has been operational in Libya since 2011, providing essential assistance and protection services to safeguard the dignity, safety, and wellbeing of Libya's most vulnerable and at-risk populations, including migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), returnees, and host communities. DRC's interventions include protection assistance, legal aid management of informal settlements, shelter assistance, multi-purpose cash assistance (MPCA), food and non-food item distribution, economic recovery, community safety initiatives, and Humanitarian Mine Action.

ACRONYMS

CCS	Commission of Civil Society
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DDG	Danish Demining Group
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
EU	European Union
FR	Field Researcher / Enumerator
GBV	Gender-based Violence
GNA	Government of National Accord
GNC	General National Congress
GNU	Government of National Unity
HoR	House of Representatives
KABP	Knowledge, Attitudes, Beliefs and Practices
KII	Key Informant Interviews
LNA	Libyan National Army
MoI	Ministry of Interior
MV&E	Monitoring, Verification & Evaluation
NTC	National Transitional Council
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
R2P	Responsibility to Protect
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SA	Small Arms
SALW	Small Arms and Light Weapons
SSC	Supreme Security Committee
SSI	Semi-structured Interviews
ToT	Training of Trainers
WAM	Weapons and Ammunition Management

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DISCLAIMER

The present study assessed the social norms, knowledge, attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs influencing civilians' behaviour towards weapons ownership. Ownership of small arms by civilians is illegal in Libya, regulated by the following laws:

DETAILS	
Law No. (02) of 2014 - On adopting some provisions prohibiting weapons, ammunition, and explosives	Article 3 If the weapon is an unlicensed light weapon, the person concerned shall be punished with imprisonment for no more than five years and with a fine of no more than five thousand LYD and no less than two thousand five hundred LYD.
	Article 7 The punishment shall be increased by no more than one-third for carrying weapons in public places and shall be increased by no more than two-thirds in the event one of the acts outlined in this law is perpetrated in order to disturb public order, national unity, or social peace, is used in order to impose ideas or demands of any type, was obtained from any foreign party, or in the event, the possession or receipt is in the framework of belonging to a tribal, regional, party, and intellectual organisation, whether local or foreign.
	Article 8 Whoever hands over the weapons or ammunition in his possession to any police station, security directorate, Public Prosecution, or national army units within 90 days from the date this law enters into force shall be exempt from punishment. Following the administrative process, financial compensation shall be disbursed to whomever hands over the weapons or ammunition to the competent authorities through controls determined by the Minister of Interior. Whoever possesses or receives light weapons and submits a request to obtain a license within the deadline set forth in the previous article shall also be exempt from punishment.
	Article 10 The imprisonment sentence shall be replaced with life imprisonment, and the rest of the punishments decreased to half in the event he informs the competent authorities after they learn of the crime, but the notification leads to uncovering essential information relating to the crime or its perpetrators.
	Article 12 Following the administrative process, financial compensation shall be disbursed through controls determined by the Minister of Interior to whoever seizes weapons, participates in seizing them, reports on their existence, or guides to them.
	Article 9 No person may carry weapons while participating in a demonstration, even if he is licensed to carry weapons. In applying the provisions of this law, a "weapon" shall be considered any tool or instrument that cuts or pierces, or any tool that endangers public safety.
Law No. (65) of 2012 on regulating the right to peaceful demonstration	

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The aftermath of the 2011 uprising has led to the massive proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) in Libyan territory. Ghaddafi's depots of arms and ammunition were left unsecured following the fall of his regime, resulting in the looting of one of the largest stockpiles in the world. Eventually, small arms found their way into civilians' households while the security environment deteriorated. The increased availability of small arms gave civilians unrestricted access to weapons and their associated risks. Although the exact numbers are unknown, Libya is considered by the United Nations (UN) to have the world's largest uncontrolled ammunition stockpile, roughly estimated at 150,000 to 200,000 tons.

Within this context, DRC aims to enhance the safety and security of communities in Libya by raising awareness of the risks of small arms and engaging communities in dialogues on safety measures and community safety plans. DRC commissioned this study in Tripoli (more specifically, Abu Salim) and Zuwarah, aiming to understand the local community's knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and practices about small arms ownership. The present study replicates the research commissioned by DRC in 2021 in Tripoli's Hay Al-Andalous neighbourhood. The 2021 research informed a sensitisation campaign and a Training-of-Trainers (ToT) on safe practices related to small arms. Likewise, the current 2022 study will provide informed recommendations for future community engagement activities and inform a new sensitisation campaign to be soon announced by DRC.

DRC contracted SREO Consulting (SREO) in August 2022 to research and explore the norms, prevailing practices, cultural aspects, and key factors that might influence civilians' acquisition of small arms. The research also developed key messages and identified trusted and preferred media to inform the public awareness-raising campaign. The analysis was based on a thorough review of relevant secondary literature, open-source, and primary data to develop a solid background against which findings were determined. Primary data collection included 242 Knowledge, Attitudes, Beliefs and Practices (KABP) surveys in Tripoli's Abu Salim (121) and Zuwarah (121) municipalities. Moreover, 12 key informant interviews (KII) and four focus-group discussions (FGD) were conducted with representatives of local authorities, academia, activists, security providers and community leaders.

Data suggest that gun ownership is not a tradition in Libya and, according to most participants in Abu Salim and Zuwarah, **carrying an unconcealed small arm is not socially acceptable**, but **owning a small arm is largely tolerated if it is for self-protection, protection of others, or property protection**. Unconcealed weapons were largely associated with self-promotion and status-seeking, while concealed weapons were more associated with self-protection and protection of loved ones/property.

The study identified stark contrasts between respondents from Abu Salim and Zuwarah: **70% of participants from Abu Salim could see themselves obtaining a weapon in the future, compared to 15% of Zuwarah**. These contrasts have also been observed in terms of the attitudes and perceptions related to guns and gun owners: **In Abu Salim, most participants affirmed that gun owners are more influential (100%), powerful (96%), and more likely to be of a higher status (70%)**. Participants mentioned that owning a weapon is expensive (53%), and those who carry them have "the power to influence decisions" and "inspire fear". **In Zuwarah, most participants reported that gun owners are not considered more powerful (88%), respected (71%), influential (74%), and neither of a higher status (92%) than non-owners**.

Participants from Abu Salim demonstrated good knowledge of the negative consequences of small arms ownership to the mainstream society and even at the country level to a large extent. In Zuwarah, less awareness has been observed related to the risks of small arms to society, and participants were less likely to acknowledge that there is an impact at all. Nonetheless, survey respondents and key informants openly **supported the legalisation of civilian arms ownership** while **supporting stricter gun control and regulation** simultaneously.

Respondents from Abu Salim and Zuwarah have shown superficial levels of awareness about the dangers of small arms at the household level, such as the possibility of misuse, with **most respondents thinking that there are no risks in keeping a weapon in the household**. Thus, participants were not clear about ways to mitigate these risks. In addition, most survey respondents and key informants were unaware of any government plan or community-based initiatives to address or minimise the dangers of small arms in the area. In Abu Salim, participants highlighted that any government campaign asking civilians to hand over their weapons would most likely fail. In Zuwarah, however, respondents were likelier to believe such initiatives could succeed if they involved the exchange for cash. **Key informants and survey respondents have pointed out that awareness-raising sessions are needed to avoid accidents related to small arms** in the household, which suggests a willingness from the local community to learn how to mitigate these risks and engage in future activities with DRC.

Qualitative data suggests that young adults were less likely to feel safe and more likely to share feelings of uncertainty about the future when compared to their parents and other adults. The youth was more likely to believe that sometimes a man must use physical strength to be respected by others than their parents, indicating that young participants were more likely to justify violence to secure respect and reputation. In addition, KII and participants **identified young men as the demographic group most likely to become armed violence victims and perpetrators**, showing some awareness of small arms' impact on the youth.

Data revealed that men and women of all ages express traditional views on masculinity and gender roles. Men are mostly seen as the protectors of the household and, therefore, responsible for defending its members, their reputation, and their property, even with violence if they must. Indeed, data suggest that **men are seen as more likely to obtain weapons in the future than women**. Moreover, participants hardly acknowledge the impact of small arms on women and girls. Most respondents were unfamiliar with incidents where arms have been used within the household to threaten, injure, or kill another family member. Less than 2% of respondents across both locations recognised domestic violence as one of the major security concerns. Still, according to **community leaders' and local authorities' perceptions, domestic violence cases have become more lethal since weapons became more prevalent in civilian households**, supporting a correlation between the availability of small arms and the use of violence. Unfortunately, there appears to be no official data linking domestic violence and small arms incidents.

Counter-intuitively, **those who reported feeling safe in their neighbourhood were more likely to obtain a small arm in the future than those who felt very unsafe**. Instead, **willingness to obtain a weapon seemed more expressively linked to feelings that the security context was more (or remained) dangerous compared to 5 years ago**. This finding supports SALW literature that suggests that this diffuse perception that the world/country/region is getting more dangerous, unpredictable, and threatening is a stronger indicator of desiring a weapon for self-protection than perceived objective risks, such as feelings of safety within their communities. This finding is also consistent with the sentiments shared by KII participants regarding the state of gun violence in Libya. Even though most reported living in safe areas, participants from Zuwarah and Abu Salim revealed feeling afraid for

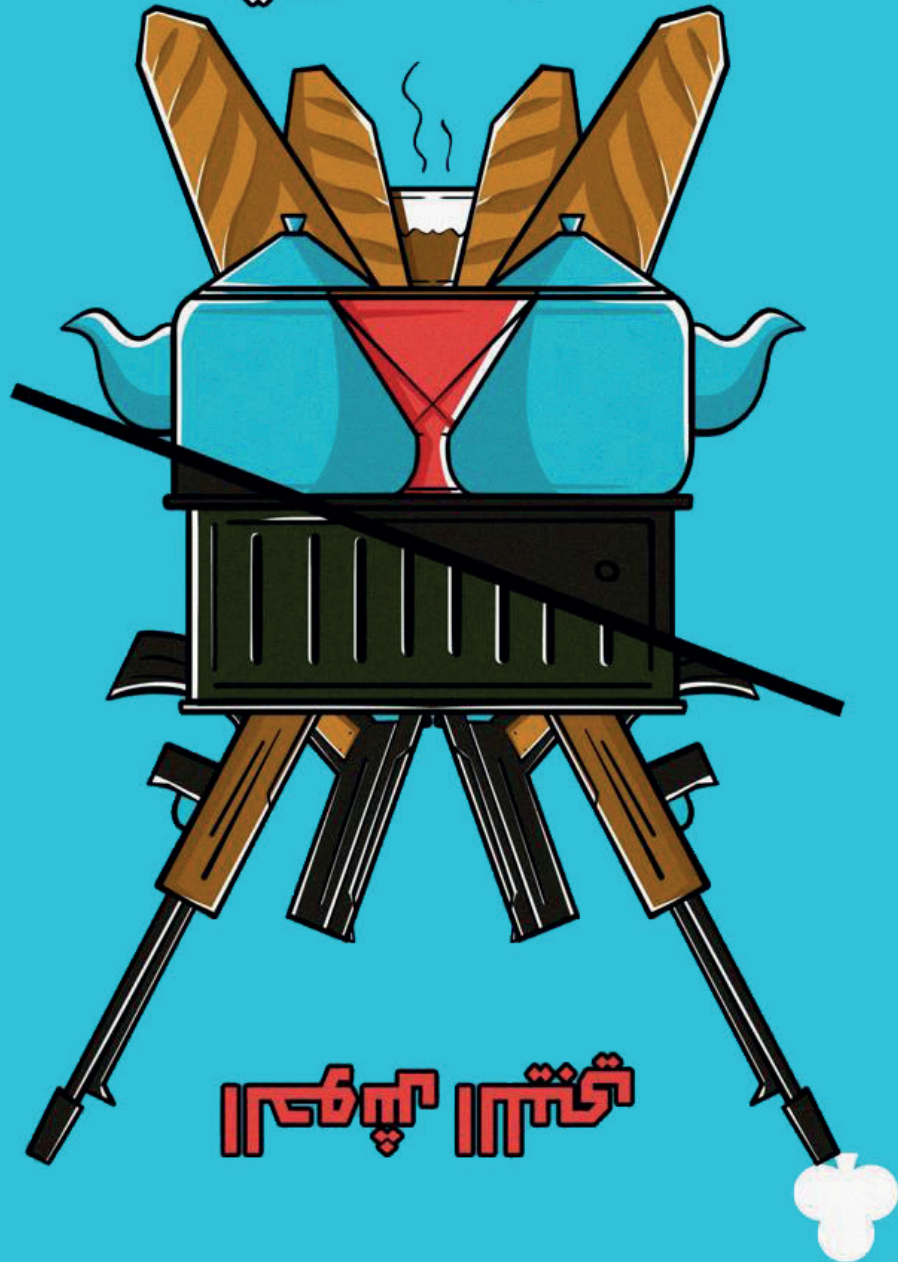
the future of the country and a high level of awareness of the widespread insecurity and instability in other locations within Libya.

Nonetheless, participants believe they would be more protected if they held a weapon. Gun ownership motivation is complex because it is usually based on subjective emotions – mostly fears and anxieties – and how they impact an individual's risk assessment and decision-making. It is a less-than-rational process that involves several shortcuts and cognitive biases that are difficult to assess at the individual level.

Finally, social media are the most used platform selected by participants of most age groups, more precisely, Facebook. As expected, the younger generations are more inclined to online activities than the older generations, especially in Zuwarah, where those over 36 years old are more likely to watch TV than follow social media. In Abu Salim, social media was higher across all age groups. The Al-Ahrar and Salam channels were the most watched by participants of all age groups. Respondents rarely use radio and other digital media, such as blogs and online magazines.



الحوش الليبي



تختنا الحوش

INTRODUCTION

In 2021, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) contracted SREO Consulting to conduct a knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and practices (KAPB) survey on civilian-held small arms (SA) in Hay Al-Andalous neighbourhood, Tripoli, and provide a comprehensive understanding of the prevailing practices, norms and cultural beliefs that influence gun ownership. The findings were used to inform a media awareness-raising campaign and a training-of-trainers (ToT) on small arms risk prevention. In August 2022, DRC commissioned SREO once again to replicate the study in two different municipalities in west Libya: Abu Salim, Tripoli, and Zuwarah. According to DRC, these locations were selected due to the high levels of small arms proliferation in civilian households, complementarity with other DRC programming, relationship with local authorities, and the communities' perceived acceptance of the DRC campaign.

The overall goal of DRC intervention is to improve human security and public safety by reducing SA-associated risks and armed violence. It intends to raise awareness of the dangers of SA and engage local communities in dialogue on safety measures and community safety plans. The findings will provide recommendations for a new sensitisation campaign and community engagement activities tailored to the local context. The current study will build on the results of the 2021 KABP research, complementing the conclusions of that study and expanding upon relevant topics.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The Challenge of Small Arms

Small arms (SA)¹ are often used by military forces, law-enforcement institutions and non-state armed groups involved in conflicts against each other or state institutions. However, research estimates that 84% of the global small arms stockpile is, in fact, in civilian hands, with approximately 857 million civilian-held firearms worldwide mostly unregistered.² Despite robust evidence suggesting that there are more negative than positive impacts of small arms' ownership, civilian possession is expected to increase in the upcoming years.³ One of the main challenges surrounding the gun debate revolves around the fact that weapons ownership is usually based on subjective factors, such as the perceived risk of victimisation and a sense of empowerment, rather than the objective risks of an attack. Understanding the factors that lead people to obtain handguns is crucial to develop effective policies and evidence-based behaviour change programmes.

Although not considered the cause of violence, the wide availability of small arms is thought to prolong conflicts by intensifying their lethality and making their resolution more arduous. In post-conflict settings, it exacerbates insecurity and instability by encouraging violent outcomes to conflict resolution and propagating inter-communal distrust.⁴ Following conflict, small arms can become tools for other intentional forms of violence, such as criminal activities, ethnic/political violence, human rights violations and domestic violence.⁵ Moreover, accidental shootings are more likely if a weapon is available.⁶ SA proliferation is considered one of the major obstacles to human and state development. Its long-term effects represent a societal burden, negatively impacting health, income, businesses, living standards and community participation. It might prevent NGOs and development agencies from accessing areas in need and divert government expenditures from other critical sectors to purchase weapons and ammunition.

In terms of public health, SA represents a heavy burden to the sector, which often lacks human and physical resources to respond to high rates of violence-related traumas. In addition, the psychological cost of SA proliferation is no less important: children and youth exposed to gun violence may experience adverse short and long-term psychological effects, including anger, withdrawal, post-traumatic stress, and desensitisation to violence.⁷ Research also indicates that children may be at higher risk for negative outcomes if exposed to gun violence. Possible effects include an increased risk of future violence, drugs and alcohol abuse, risk behaviour and suicide among direct and indirect survivors.⁸

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- 1 Small Arms are man-portable lethal weapons designed for individual use that expels or launches a shot, a bullet, or a projectile, except for antique weapons designed before the 20th century. Small Arms include revolvers and self-loading pistols, rifles and carbines, sub-machine guns, assault rifles and light machine guns.
 - 2 Karp, Aaron (2018) "Estimating Global Civilian-held Firearms" <https://smallarmssurvey.org/sites/default/files/resources/SAS-BP-Civilian-Firearms-Numbers.pdf>
 - 3 Ibid, 2018
 - 4 Ibid, 2018
 - 5 <https://www.cwla.org/the-impact-of-gun-violence-on-children-families-communities/>
 - 6 UNDDR 2006, Introduction
 - 7 <https://www.cwla.org/the-impact-of-gun-violence-on-children-families-communities/>
 - 8 <https://namica.org/advocacy/criminal-justice-advocacy/the-truth-about-mental-health-and-gun-violence/>

The Libyan Context

During the rule of Muammar Ghaddafi (1961–2011), Libya amassed one of the region's largest and most diverse arsenals, despite suffering a series of international sanctions and weapons embargoes from 1992 to 2003. At the beginning of the 2011 civilian uprising, the country had a wide-ranging arsenal of 400,000–1,000,000 firearms to support its 76,000 active troops and 40,000 reserve forces.⁹ Additionally, foreign powers supplied the local opposition with extra weapons, which increased the flow of arms and ammunition into the country. Nonetheless, during the Ghaddafi regime, a considerable amount of social control existed to regulate individual behaviour around guns and mitigate some of the potential negatives of civilians' weapons ownership to the regime.¹⁰ According to the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons submitted to the UN¹¹ in 2010, civilians could not own small arms in Libya without permission. Such permits were only granted to armed forces, police officers, judicial officials, and prosecutors. However, the looting of Ghaddafi's stockpile in 2011 supplied arm traders, armed groups, militias, terrorists, and criminal organisations inside and outside Libya, eventually finding its way into civilian households.¹²

Following the power vacuum created by the ousting of Ghaddafi and the several interim governments that were unsuccessful in forming political unity, Libya has experienced several waves of violent conflict that led to higher demand for weapons not only by actors involved in the fighting but also by civilians who resorted to acquiring guns for self-protection. Despite being prohibited under Libyan law,¹³ weapons are widely traded in the traditional open markets throughout the country and on social media platforms.¹⁴ Moreover, the high demand has allowed illegal traders to sell stocks gathered in south-western Libya to armed groups in Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Nigeria.¹⁵

Although little is known about the accurate burden of mortality and injury resulting from the long-standing Libyan conflict, a study¹⁶ reported that 16,126 individuals were killed and 42,633 injured as a direct result of the conflict between 01 January 2012 and 31 December 2017. Those with secondary and primary education levels had the highest mortality rates. The highest rate of injury was among males (80.6%), particularly among those aged between 41–50 years (34.1%), followed by those aged below 19 years (29.2%). Moreover, between 1 April and 30 June 2020, the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) documented 358 civilian casualties (106 deaths and 252 injuries), representing an overall increase in civilian casualties of 173%, with a 65% increase in deaths and 276% increase in injuries. The victims include 261 men (fatalities and injuries), 45 women (deaths and injuries), 44 boys (fatalities and injuries), and eight girls.¹⁷ Ground fighting was the leading cause of civilian casualties, followed by explosive remnants of war and airstrikes. Finally, in August 2022, at least 32 civilians were killed and more than 150 injured following clashes between armed groups.¹⁸ No data could be found on unintentional death/injuries due to firearms.

9 Salah Mansor and Zuhir Bodalal, "The Impact of the Method of Gunshot Injury: War Injuries vs. Stray Bullets vs. Civilian Fighting", 2015

10 Forbes, Adam. "Small Arms/Light Weapons and physical security in Misrata", 2012

11 Parker, S., & Green, K., "A Decade of Implementation of the United Nations Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons: Analysis of National Reports", 2012

12 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/sep/02/west-warns-smugglers-looting-libya-arms>

13 Law No. (2) of 2014 on adopting provisions on prohibiting weapons, ammunitions and explosives

14 <https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/sites/default/files/resources/SAS-SANA-WP26-Libya-web-trafficking.pdf>

15 <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/arms-trafficking-from-libya-to-niger-is-back-in-business>

16 Trends and patterns of deaths, injuries and intentional disabilities within the Libyan armed conflict: 2012-2017

17 <https://unsmil.unmissions.org/civilian-casualties-report-1-april-30-june-2020>

18 <https://reliefweb.int/report/libya/deadly-clashes-libyas-capital-result-civilian-casualties>

Study Objectives

This research study provides recommendations and insights on prevailing beliefs and norms linked to weapons ownership in Abu Salim (Tripoli district) and Zuwarah (Nuqat al Khams district). The findings will inform the awareness-raising campaign to enhance community safety, a ToT, and future DRC programming. The study will also include recommendations for future interventions and at least five key awareness-raising messages that can be disseminated in the awareness campaign.

The research's primary areas of interest are as follows:

- Brief history and tradition of arms and how it influences how arms ownership is perceived in Libya today. This was built on and complemented the DRC 2021 KABP study.
- How mainstream society and media represent arms and reproduce them as symbols. I.e., what culturally acceptable images of arms are reinforced through mainstream society, including a gender lens, particularly how conceptualisations and perceptions of masculinity shape small arms use and misuse and the role of women in increasing or reducing risk-taking behaviour.
- Youth perception of weapons, ideas of masculinity and drivers of civilian youth weapon ownership.
- The impact of arms proliferation on women and particularly gender-based violence.
- The implication of small arms presence in communities for children.
- What arms-related behaviours, if any, are rendered acceptable by communities and why.
- Understand the consequence of unsafe behaviours of arms.
- Understand the locally perceived best practice in safe behaviours.
- Understand community willingness and readiness to address small arms safety issues at the community level.
- What implication do these findings have for interventions aiming to decrease the risk of small arms accidents and misuse within communities?
- Arms ownership is linked to GBV and psychological violence.
- Political, social, and economic impacts of SA, including factors driving increased demand for small arms.

In addition, the research will expand on some topics of interest already explored in the 2021 KABP study, such as:

- Focus on promoting safe behaviour and responsible ownership.
- Capacity building of local civil society organisations (CSOs).
- Primary prevention approaches are designed to enhance the social environment for youth and children.
- Mosques and Islam teachers' engagement to encourage religious motivation.
- Promote responsible gun ownership to mitigate risks at individual and community levels while emphasising the benefits of not obtaining small arms.
- Engagement of key advocates to encourage community members not to own small arms.

Challenges and Limitations

Data availability: Measuring the impact of small arms in post-conflict Libya is challenging because surveillance data are sparse. Recorded data quantifying the extent of availability of small arms and the figures on lethal and non-lethal injuries, victims and perpetrators are unknown. As a result, it is difficult to measure the impact of small arms ownership on women, men, children, and youth.

Topic sensitivity: SREO could not ask survey participants if they were small arms owners, as it is illegal to own them in Libya. Instead, SREO questioned participants if they could see themselves owning a small arm in the future if allowed by law. Thus, although it serves the purpose of this research, SREO could not develop a more detailed profile nor compare the perspectives of small arms owners and non-owners.

Response bias: The fact that the topic of the present research refers to an illegal – albeit largely tolerated – practice might have made respondents more susceptible to social desirability bias, especially underaged participants that had to answer their questions near their parents. Desirability bias occurs when respondents give answers that they believe will make them look good to others instead of sharing their true experiences and opinions. SREO tried to reduce social desirability bias throughout the project cycle by ensuring anonymity and carefully wording and structuring indirect questions that made respondents to predict what someone like them would think or act in that situation. Moreover, it is impossible to assume that all people who presented themselves as open to the idea of gun ownership do not own a gun already or that they will eventually obtain one. Likewise, it is impossible to presume that those unwilling to obtain a weapon do not already live in a household with a gun.

Sample size: This research took place in two municipalities in Libya, and its findings may not represent the knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and practices of the larger Libyan community. Moreover, most survey participants (80%) were between 15 and 35 years old, which means that findings reflect the perceptions of the youth and younger adults more strongly than other age groups. Nonetheless, it brings insights that can be further explored in future research and replicated in other locations.

METHODOLOGY

Field research for this study was conducted in 2 locations: Abu Salim (Tripoli) and Zuwarah city (Nuqat al Khams district). Data collection covered the general community members in each location, including an adequate number of individuals from different age groups, focusing on diverse socio-economic areas and gender. The details of quantitative and qualitative data collection are discussed in more detail below.

Desk Review

SREO conducted a thorough desk review of relevant primary and secondary literature regarding the use and availability of small arms in the Libyan context. The small arms literature review was used to inform the tool design and served as a base to analyse the collected data, helping to highlight trends and hypotheses that could be triangulated. SREO used the desk review previously conducted as part of the 2021 study as a base.

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

SREO conducted 12 KIIs in Tripoli (Abu Salim) and Zuwarah with stakeholders from the security and development sectors, community leaders and local authorities. Each interview guide included 10-20 questions (primarily open-ended) and took around 45-60 minutes. KIIs were audio-recorded with a participant's verbal informed consent.

Table: List of KIIs

CATEGORY	POSITION	LOCATION
Police and Security Providers	Security Officer	Abu Salim
Civil Society Organisation	Women's rights associations	Abu Salim and Zuwarah
	Youth Associations	Abu Salim and Zuwarah
	Sheikhs / Tribal leaders	Abu Salim and Zuwarah
Stakeholders	Trauma Hospital Manager	Abu Salim
	School/University Deans	Abu Salim and Zuwarah
	MHPSS workers	Abu Salim and Zuwarah
Total		12

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

4 FGDs were conducted in the selected locations (2 per location) with youth and parents. Focus groups explored the "why" and "how" of discussion topics, offering a richer picture of a phenomenon that represents a specific group's experience. These FGDs enable the exploration of primary prevention entry points and provide a clearer understanding of parents' knowledge about risk prevention and weapons ownership. SREO used local contacts to find participants willing to participate in the FGDs.

Focus group discussions were conducted by two highly experienced and well-trained field researchers who have received training on conducting FGDs with both female and male adults. One was the designated lead in the FGD, while a second field researcher would be the designated note-taker.

The FGD conducted with children were accompanied by a consent form signed by the child's parents or a caregiver.

Table: List of FGDs

LOCATION	PARTICIPANTS	DETAILS
FGD: Abu Salim	School Students	6 participants (3 girls and 3 boys, 15 – 17 years old)
	Parents/caregivers	6 participants (all women)
FGD: Zuwarah	School Students	6 participants (3 girls and 3 boys, 15 – 17 years old)
	Parents/caregivers	6 participants (all men)

KAPB Surveys

SREO conducted 242 KABP surveys with the general population across Abu Salim and Zuwarah to understand the communities' perspectives on small arms proliferation and ownership. The SREO field team visited public spaces, school areas, sports clubs, and other public areas where target profiles were invited to participate. SREO used stratified random sampling to select respondents by ensuring adequate representation of gender, residency status and age groups, including the youth (+15 years old). SREO secured parents' approval before interviewing participants under 18 years old.

Respondents' Demographics

A total of 242 community members from different backgrounds, ages and gender were surveyed, 50% from Abu Salim and 50% from Zuwarah. 48% of respondents were female, and 52% male. Respondents' age ranged from 15 to over 65 years old, with 50% falling into the 15-24 age range, 29% within the 25-35 age range, 12% within the 36-45 age range, and finally, 9% more than 46 years old. As 80% of the sample are between 15 and 35 years old, survey findings will most likely reflect the perceptions of the youth and younger adults.

In both locations, most respondents informed being students (23%), government workers/civil servants (20%) or unemployed (13%), followed by teachers/lecturers (12%), small business owners/traders (11%) and secondary school students (8%). Others (20%) include medical workers, homemakers, taxi drivers, military and police officers and retired individuals. Among women, most identified as students (27% compared to 18% of their male counterparts), teachers (20% compared to 4% of men), civil servants (17%) or unemployed (17% compared to 12% of men). Male participants were primarily civil servants (23%), small business owners/traders (18% compared to 4% of female participants) and students (18%).

Among unemployed respondents (13%), 62% were from Zuwarah. Furthermore, 52% were female, and 68% belonged to the 18-35 years old age group,¹⁹ supporting research data on higher levels of unemployment among the youth. Nonetheless, most answered being able to purchase most (50%) or all (35%) of their necessities on a regular month, with 8% informing being unable to buy essentials or being very poor. All participants reported having at least one employed family member, with an average of 1.8 employed members per household. No relevant differences have been observed in terms of gender or location.

60% of the surveyed participants informed sharing the household with at least one child/young person, being 31% with a child (0 to 15 years old) and 29% with a young person (15 – 25), with an average of 1 child and 2 young people per household.

¹⁹ 40% belonged to the 18-24 age group and 28% to the 25-35 years old age group.

FINDINGS

Sense of Safety

Abu Salim

Located in Tripoli, Abu Salim municipality has witnessed continued tensions and fighting between rival governments, local militias and foreign actors backing each side in Libya's political and military dispute over capital control. In Tripoli, clashes erupted overnight last August, sparking fears of the country plunging into a new civil war. KII respondents mentioned pockets of safety and security in specific areas and neighbourhoods. Still, they reported that gun violence is prevailing since the beginning of the war in 2011, especially in the southern areas of Tripoli. When describing their municipality, some participants mentioned that it was safe compared to other areas and highlighted the easy access to essential services.

Do you generally feel safe in your community?

"Not completely. I feel afraid sometimes at night or when I go to other areas."

Parent (female), Abu Salim

When asked to list the most common safety issues, Abu Salim respondents mentioned kidnappings (72%), armed robbery (66%) and homicide (54%). 98% believed that accessing a weapon is easy/very easy, and 42% of respondents reported having been a direct victim or knowing someone who has been a direct victim of gun violence. Armed robbery (71%), unintentional shooting (30%), public dispute that turned violent (11%) and armed conflict (21%) were the most common experiences reported by survey participants. Notwithstanding, most respondents from Abu Salim reported feeling somewhat safe (60%) in their municipalities, followed by 36% who reported feeling safe, and 3% who reportedly felt unsafe.

All respondents from Abu Salim agreed that young men account for the majority among perpetrators and victims of gun-related violence. As potential victims, participants also mentioned migrants (57%), children (53%), young women (42%) and wealthy individuals (32%).

Zuwarah

The sense of security among participants from Zuwarah was considerably higher than those in Abu Salim. In Zuwarah, an unprecedented armed struggle against criminal networks involved in smuggling drugs, fuel, arms, and especially migrants has shaped the city's security and social landscape. Key informants interviewed by SREO mentioned that the municipality is known for being free from "kidnappings, homicide, and rape." When asked to describe their community, participants noted that the two most attractive points of the city are a. its security and stability, as it is safer than other municipalities, b. the cost of living, especially compared to Tripoli, and c. the high levels of trust among community members. The disadvantages pointed out by participants include access to essential services, such as a lack of schools and healthcare facilities in the surrounding areas, which they all believed to be compensated by security stability.

71% of participants mentioned no crimes in their municipality. Among those 29% who believe there are crimes being committed, accidental shooting (13%), domestic violence (9%) and unarmed robbery (9%) were mentioned. All other forms of violence, such as kidnapping, carjacking, armed robbery,

and homicides, have been mentioned by less than 5% of respondents. Furthermore, 11% reported having been a direct victim or knowing someone who has been a direct victim of gun violence. Public disputes/arguments that turned violent (35%), unintentional shooting/accident (28%) and armed robbery (28%) were the most common experiences reported by participants. 67% of respondents believed that it is difficult for an ordinary citizen to obtain a weapon illegally. This is supported by the fact that 63% of survey participants rated Zuwarah very safe, 20% rated it safe, 13% reported feeling somewhat safe, and nobody mentioned feeling unsafe.

“The security apparatus and agency in Zuwarah somewhat secured the situation in the area, as they managed to control the firearm skirmishes and random gunfights in the city for a while. However, as long as firearms are still available at the hands of civilians, the situation can never be completely safe.”

Doctor (male), Zuwarah

80% believed that men in general (young and adults) are more likely to be the perpetrators and the victims of armed violence. Among other potential victims, young women (21%), adult women (18%), migrants (10%), children (7%) and the elderly (5%) were identified by participants.

Weapons Availability

Civilian-held firearms used to be traditionally rare in Libya (please see Introduction), with 93% of participants across the sample revealing they did not grow up in weapons-owning households. However, following a decade of conflict and instability, survey participants reported the wide availability of weapons kept in homes in both Abu Salim and Zuwarah.

In Abu Salim, 66% of respondents believed that more than three-quarters of the municipality's households owned at least one small arm, followed by half to three-quarters (33%). A KII with a security provider reinforced this finding adding that 9mm handguns and popular rifles such as the Kalashnikov AK-47 can be easily found in civilian households of Abu Salim. 89% of survey participants believed that more people own guns now compared to 5 years ago. The increase in weapons availability perception was attributed to the ongoing conflict and insecurity in the region.

“About 80% of all civilians keep firearms in their homes. Honestly, I don't believe any homes don't have firearms.”

Professor (male), Zuwarah

In Zuwarah, when asked to estimate how many households owned weapons in the municipality, most survey respondents (63%) did not know, followed by 16% who believed that half to three-quarters of the municipality's households owned at least one small arm. Nonetheless, most FGDs and KIIs participants revealed that “almost all households own weapons in Zuwarah”. 77% of respondents did not know if more or fewer people owned weapons now compared to 5 years ago, while 12% mentioned that fewer people owned weapons, followed by 11% who thought more people possessed weapons. This finding suggests uncertainty about the proportion of firearms available in the municipality. A female KII working for a local CSO mentioned the Byada Zuwarah as an example of a neighbourhood where weapons availability is more evident.

Impact of Small Arms Proliferation

When talking about small arms availability in Libya, few participants revealed that they knew people who had been directly affected by armed violence, including themselves or loved ones: a doctor from Zuwarah reported that he lost his 6 years old brother to a stray bullet in 2012 while he witnessed everything. Other participants mentioned knowing of individuals who either died or are currently living with a disability due to gun violence. Furthermore, medical staff said receiving cases of accidents and unintentional shootings in households and celebratory events is not so rare.

“Once there was a celebratory shooting when a person I know came back from war, and a woman was injured and bled. It is concerning because no one knows where the bullet could fall on such occasions.”

Sheikh (male), Abu Salim

The widespread availability of weapons and feelings of physical insecurity also take their toll on the population's mental health: a psychiatrist interviewed by SREO commented that he has dealt with cases where children have post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) due to exposure to gun violence. The psychiatrist points out the importance of treating and caring for traumatised citizens, as they can later “become perpetrators of violence due to negative coping mechanisms”, such as the rapidly growing epidemic of illicit drug use in adolescents and adults. Furthermore, an academic from the Faculty of Medicine reported that the proliferation of weapons in Libya has a significant impact on the country's public health:

“The simplest of examples is that when a small dispute erupts between two people, the situation rapidly escalates to the use of firearms ending in bloodshed, overwhelming the system with something that could have been prevented.”

Academic (male), Tripoli

Unfortunately, data on intentional and unintentional gun-related crime is sparse. KIIls indicated that more robust statistics on conflict-related deaths, injuries and disabilities might be found in the Ministry of Health. The Faculty of Medicine in Tripoli informs²⁰ that data can be obtained at the National Death Registry, the Ministry of State for Families of Martyrs, Injuries and Missing Persons, hospitals, local authorities in each region, and the Libyan Red Crescent. Nevertheless, key informant interviews with academics and hospital staff could not indicate if and where centralised data that can be disaggregated by the circumstances of the casualties, gender, age groups, etc., can be found in Libya.

Demographics of (Potential) Gun Ownership

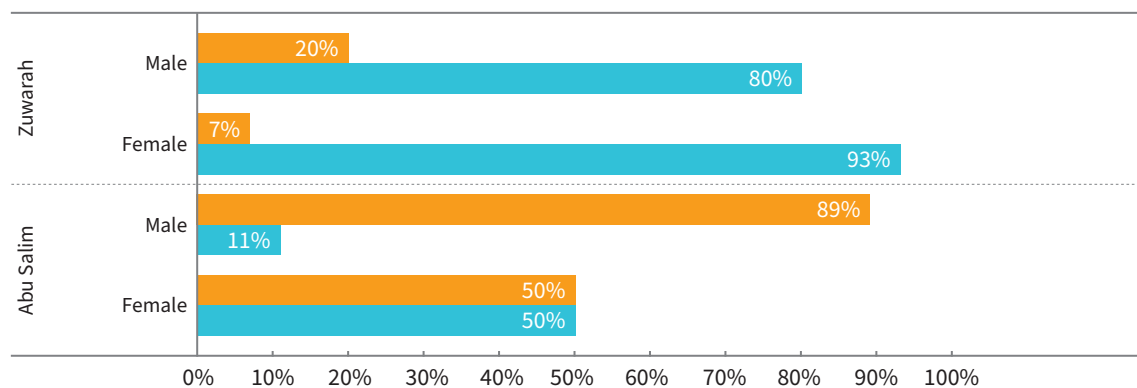
As small arms ownership is a sensitive topic in Libya, SREO could not ask participants if they lived in a household with weapons or were already gun owners. This limitation prevented this study from drawing rigid conclusions on the demographics of gun ownership and its motivational bases. Instead, SREO inquired if participants could see themselves owning small arms in the future, provided it was legal in Libya.

20 Daw MA, El-Bouzedi AH, Dau AA. Trends and patterns of deaths, injuries and intentional disabilities within the Libyan armed conflict: 2012-2017.

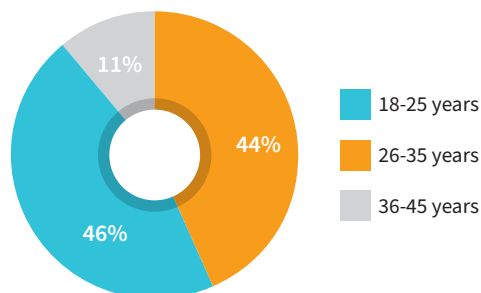
The results were contrasting across the study locations: 70% of Abu Salim's respondents revealed they could see themselves as future gun owners compared to 13% in Zuwarah. Women were less likely to see themselves as prospective gun owners, making up 34% of the sample in Abu Salim and 25% in Zuwarah. Overall, self-protection was by far (99%) the most common reason for obtaining a gun in the future, with only one participant mentioning trade.

Provided it was legal, can you see yourself buying a gun in the future?

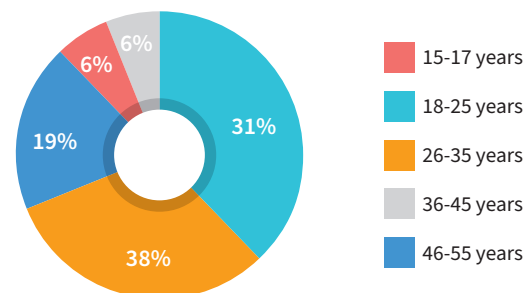
yes no



% of respondents who are willing to obtain a weapon in the future in Abu Salim per age group



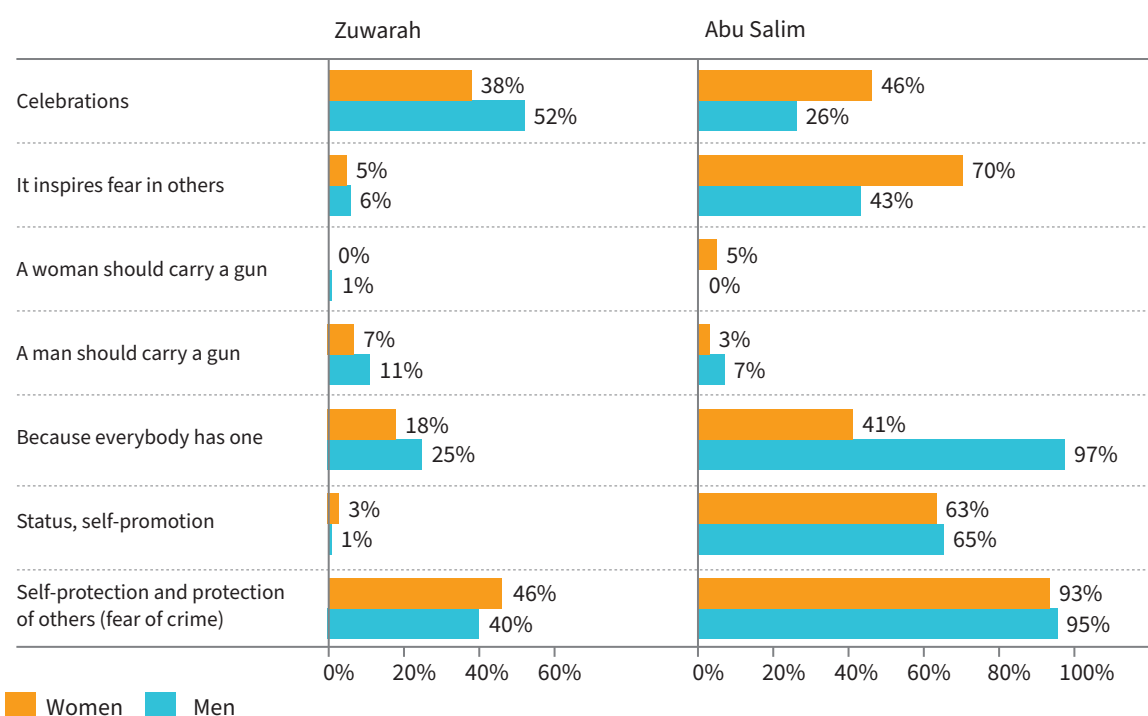
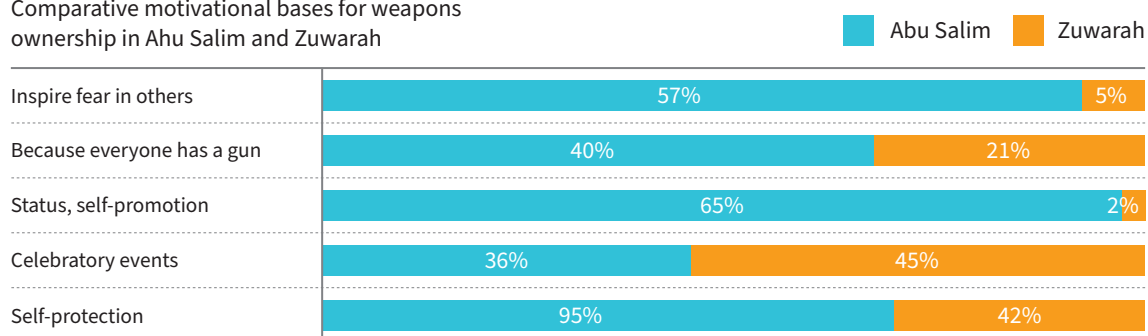
% of respondents who are willing to obtain a weapon in the future in Zuwarah per age group



Motivational Bases

While most participants mentioned more than one reason for obtaining a weapon, self-protection/ protection of loved ones tops the list, with 70% of participants across the sample saying this is the primary reason to acquire a gun. Nonetheless, data suggest different motivational bases for gun ownership in Abu Salim and Zuwarah: when compared, Zuwarah respondents were much less likely to mention status/self-promotion (2% compared to 65% in Abu Salim), self-protection (42% compared to 95% in Abu Salim), and inspire fear in others (5% compared to 57% in Abu Salim). Conversely, respondents from Zuwarah seemed more likely to use weapons in celebratory events (45% compared to 36% in Abu Salim), which has been supported by KILs, who also mentioned that hunting events are common practice in the region. **There was little variation in terms of gender**, as seen in the graphs below. In Zuwarah, men were more likely to cite celebratory events than their female counterparts (38% compared to 52%), whilst in Abu Salim men were significantly more likely to cite that one of the main reasons for obtaining a weapon is because “everyone else has a weapon”.

Comparative motivational bases for weapons ownership in Abu Salim and Zuwarah

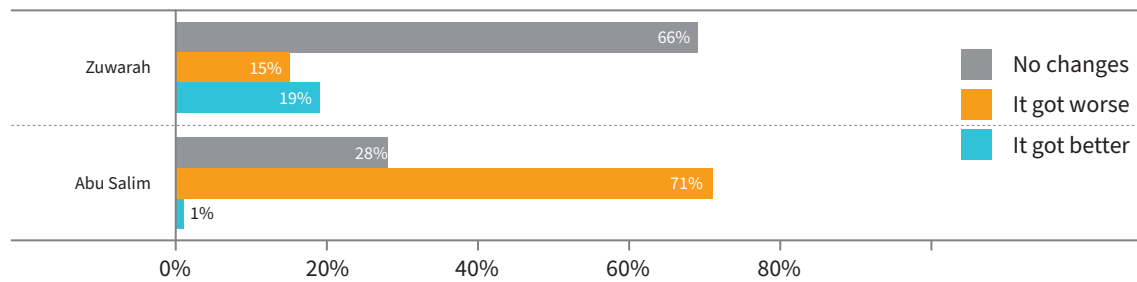


Counter-intuitively, those who believed their municipality was unsafe were not significantly more inclined to obtain a weapon in the future than those who said they lived in a safe municipality. In fact, only 4% of the participants who declared self-protection as the underlying motivation for their willingness to obtain a weapon reported feeling unsafe. In comparison, the vast majority reported feeling somewhat safe (55%), safe (32%) and very safe (11%). As studies also indicate that weapon owners are likelier to feel safer than non-owners,²¹ it is impossible to conclude to what extent respondents feel safe because they already own a weapon. However, willingness to obtain a gun seemed more expressively linked to feelings that the security context was more (or remained) dangerous compared to 5 years ago. This finding is consistent with SALW literature that suggests that this diffuse perception that the world/country/region is getting more dangerous, unpredictable, and threatening is a stronger indicator of desiring a weapon for self-protection than perceived objective risks, such as feelings of safety within their communities.²²

21 <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2017/06/22/americas-complex-relationship-with-guns/>

22 Stroebe, Wolfgang & Leander, Pontus & Kruglanski, Arie. (2017). Is It a Dangerous World Out There?: The Motivational Bases of Gun Ownership.

Perceptions of the security context in Abu Salim an Zuwarah



This finding is also consistent with the sentiments shared by KII participants regarding the state of gun violence in Libya (please see perceptions of security section). Even though most reported living in safe areas, participants from Zuwarah and Abu Salim revealed feeling afraid for the future of the country in addition to high levels of awareness of the widespread insecurity and instability in other locations within Libya.

"It makes the community desperate and afraid of the future. I feel anxious"

Youth (male), Abu Salim

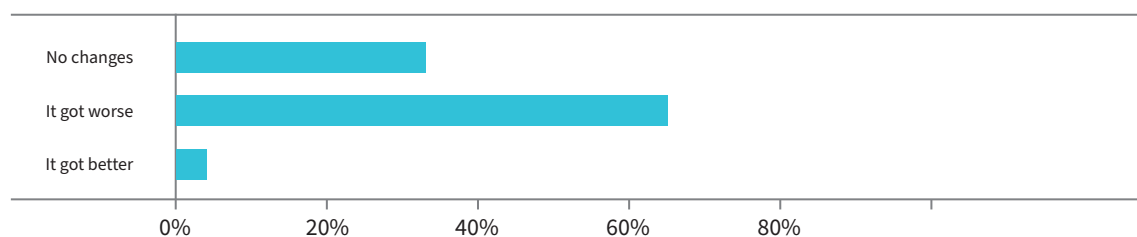
"In my city, most people have weapons at their houses, but they don't use them. They keep them because the situation in this country is so unpredictable."

Sheikh (male), Zuwarah

"Society's fear increases when we hear about such things."

Youth (female), Zuwarah

Perceptions of the security context in Abu Salim an Zuwarah



Despite increasing both intentional and unintentional mortality risks in the household, research indicates that gun owners with children are slightly more likely to share beliefs that guns keep their families safe.²³ It is noticeable that a slight majority of those who see themselves as future gun owners share the household with at least one child (61%) or youth (56%), of which 95% never received risk awareness sessions related to gun owners.

²³ Ye GF, Thatipamala P, Siegel M. Assessment of Reasons for Ownership and Attitudes About Policies Among Firearm Owners With and Without Children

Local Perceptions of Guns and Gun Owners

Abu Salim and Zuwarah have different opinions of how people in their communities perceive gun owners. In Abu Salim, most participants affirmed that gun owners are more influential (100%), powerful (96%), and more likely to be of a higher status (70%). Participants mentioned that owning a weapon is expensive (53%), and those who carry them openly have “the power to influence decisions” and “inspire fear”. However, only 29% believed they were more respected, and 85% thought they were more likely to be affiliated with armed groups. **Despite indicating that gun owners exist in a social context where gun ownership is the norm, 99% of respondents from Abu Salim believed that owning a weapon is not socially acceptable.** Moreover, FGDs with community members suggested a difference in perception of those who keep weapons concealed/in the household compared to those who display them publicly: while the first is primarily tolerated and associated with self-protection motivations, those civilians who carry them publicly – or brag about them – are perceived to be motivated by self-promotion and are less respected by community members.

“The ones who conceal their weapons are the ones who use their weapons to protect themselves, but the juvenile reckless youth and adolescents display their weapons when riding military vehicles because they believe that doing it is a manly trait.”

Sheikh (male), Abu Salim

Furthermore, norms perception is a subjective and dynamic factor. The average person does not know the actual rates of weapons' ownership in Libya, and their perceptions of norms are not based on comprehensive, evidence-based information but on personal experiences and unreliable information about what others think. One possible explanation for participants' perceptions of weapons ownership as a socially unacceptable behaviour despite knowing it is widely tolerated, is the fact that social norms are often understood as a reflection of community values and representations of group identity. If weapons are associated with negative traits such as aggression, for example, individuals that have a strong sense of belonging to that society and do not identify with this trait will be less likely to perceive it as a social norm. However, evaluating these different models is beyond the scope of this study. Despite these limitations, people are motivated to understand what is normative in the communities to which they belong. These perceptions ultimately guide their behaviour, regardless of its accuracy to facts or personal adherence to the norm.²⁴

In stark contrast, in Zuwarah, most participants reported that gun owners are **not** considered more powerful (88%), respected (71%), influential (74%), and neither of a higher status (92%) than non-owners. 44% of the respondents did **not** believe that gun owners were more likely to be affiliated with armed groups, while 33% thought they were, and 24% did not know or preferred not to answer. No expressive differences have been found across gender and age groups.

Perceptions of Armed Groups

KIIs in Abu Salim and Zuwarah revealed different assessments of local perceptions of armed groups: while participants from Abu Salim seemed to perceive them as “part of the problem”, participants from Zuwarah were more likely to perceive them positively. This positive perception might be influenced by the unprecedented participation of armed groups and civil society organisations in the struggle against organised crime factions that used Zuwarah as a base for smuggling migrants to Europe.²⁵

²⁴ Tankard_Paluck_2015_SIPR.pdf

²⁵ <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Zuwarah-PB-web.pdf>

What do you think is the general perception of armed group members?

"Everyone wants them to go away as soon as possible."

Parent (male), Abu Salim

What do you think is the general perception of armed group members?

"In Zuwarah, people trust them because they helped to secure stability in the city."

Parent (female), Zuwarah

Risk Awareness

Abu Salim

In Abu Salim, the vast majority (96%) believed that weapons availability increases armed crime. 99% believed that guns obtained illegally contribute to armed violence, 53% believed that owning a gun is not a deterrence to armed crime, and 40% were neutral. When initially asked, only 34% of respondents felt there are risks associated with gun ownership, citing incorrect use and accidental shootings that could harm/kill someone. However, when given the multiple-choice options, possible risks identified by participants included: young adults might use it in a street fight (77%), children can find a weapon and unintentionally injure/kill themselves or someone else (67%), accidental shooting (58%), and the gun being stolen and used to harm/kill other people (37%).

Possible measures to mitigate these risks included: keeping guns locked and out of reach (73%), participating in gun safety awareness sessions (45%), keeping guns unloaded (42%) and storing firearms and ammunition separately (38%). Only 39% considered not keeping guns in the house an effective way to mitigate such risks, and 10% mentioned talking to children about gun safety. Most survey respondents also believed that gun owners were likelier to become victims of armed violence than non-owners (70%). No discrepancies have been observed across age groups or gender. Most key informants have mentioned the need for awareness-raising sessions for civilians, both online and in person. However, none of them was aware of organisations or institutions focused on raising awareness of the risks of firearms ownership.

"There is an urgency to provide awareness-raising sessions on the risks and harms of firearms. We shouldn't wait for the government to do something about this. There needs to be a social movement to protect ourselves because, in the end, this damage falls upon us, community members. Families with children are the priority."

Hospital worker (male), Abu Salim

"The community needs more awareness through the internet and other channels."

Security Officer (male), Abu Salim

Nonetheless, hospital workers have mentioned increasing CSOs aiming to strengthen mental health and psychosocial service response in Tripoli. The growing influence of the triple-nexus approach reinforces the understanding that public health interventions can and should contribute to achieving positive effects on peacebuilding. As SALW proliferation is increasingly understood as a public health matter in academic literature, SALW programming is at the core of the nexus approach. This could be an entry point for DRC programming (see Recommendations).

Despite acknowledging the risks, most respondents would still recommend a male cousin/friend (71%) to buy a weapon, and 48% would recommend a female cousin/friend to acquire one. Interestingly, female participants were less likely to recommend a male cousin/friend to buy a weapon (45% compared to 94% of their male counterparts) but were more likely to recommend a female cousin/friend acquiring one (50% compared to 44% of male participants).

Participants believed that female-headed households (66%) and especially households with young adults (89%) are more protected if a gun is in the house. The exception seems to be households with children, where 76% believed they would be less protected by a weapon. No differences related to gender or age groups have been observed.

Zuwarah

31% of participants from Zuwarah believed weapon owners are more likely to become victims of gun violence, with 44% believing there is no impact and 9% reporting they did not know. 79% of participants were either neutral or thought that the availability of weapons did not increase armed violence. In addition, 66% were neutral when asked to what extent they thought having a gun was a deterrence to armed crimes.

Participants were divided between those who believed that weapons obtained illegally contribute to armed violence (49%) and those who did not (51%). Also, 70% of participants did not think or did not know the risks associated with keeping a weapon in the household. However, when given the multiple-choices, participants selected the following dangers: young adults might use it in a street fight (44%), children can find a weapon and unintentionally injure/kill themselves or someone else (50%), accidental shooting (22%), and the gun being stolen and used to harm/kill other people (29%).

30% considered talking to children about gun safety, participating in gun safety awareness sessions (32%), keeping guns locked (26%), keeping guns unloaded (23%), and storing firearms and ammunition separately (11%) as ways to mitigate these risks. Only 20% considered that not having a weapon in the house could potentially reduce risks.

Nonetheless, 74% of participants would **not** recommend a male cousin/friend to buy a weapon, and 73% would **not** recommend a female cousin/friend to obtain one. 70% did not think female-headed households, households with young adults and households with children were more protected with a gun. Contrasting with Abu Salim, women were less likely than men to recommend other women to acquire a firearm (17% compared to 41% of their male counterparts).

Despite considering owning a weapon an effective way to protect oneself or a loved one from external threats, 91% of the participants across the sample did not know of anyone who had successfully defended themselves/family/property from criminals by using their weapons.

While Abu Salim's respondents displayed a much higher risk awareness rate than Zuwarah, they were still much more likely to declare willingness to obtain a weapon in the future. This finding suggests that applying a consequentialist knowledge-deficit²⁶ model to small arms might be insufficient to promote behaviour change in Abu Salim.

"It's not that they don't understand that firearms are bad; it's just that the tense security situation forced each household to own a firearm as a deterrent. As they say, balance the scales between households, areas and families."

Doctor (male), Abu Salim

²⁶ The knowledge deficit model assumes that people keep weapons in the household because they are not aware of the risks, and that by explaining the risks will modify behaviour.

Gun Policy

In Abu Salim and Zuwarah, most respondents believed that nobody should be allowed to legally own a weapon except for law enforcement officials (68% and 66%, respectively). KIs supported this finding but expressed their reservations regarding the current context: to most of them, especially in Abu Salim, as long as the state is incapable of providing security for its citizens, they should have the right to keep their weapons. Nonetheless, a few KIs, especially from Zuwarah, have mentioned that some people would be interested in returning their guns in exchange for cash.

Views on Social and Gender Norms, Masculinity,²⁷ and Their Impact on Women and Youth

Libya's social fabric is profoundly influenced by traditional identities, such as family and religion, and conservative concepts rooted in tribal structures that predate the Islamic era²⁸ and are a fundamental aspect of Libyan society. Historically, tribal structures have been a source of local governance (through tribal customary law), stability and social cohesion, filling the gaps when the state was too weak to govern in times of war and uncertainty.²⁹ Tribal leaders - *Sheikhs* - have an essential role as mediators: tribal justice coexists with the formal justice system, sometimes considered more transparent, faster, and more effective than the latter, as such decisions are based on traditional concepts that are familiar to the community and widely accepted. In Abu Salim, when asked whom they trusted the most to act in theirs/their family's best interests, *Sheikhs* (85%), community leaders (72%), and *mukhtars* (53%) were the most selected options. 66% believed that the most authority on the security and safety topic is the tribal/community leader, followed by local armed groups/militias (26%). Conversely, in Zuwarah, 86% selected the local government to act in their best interest, followed by tribal/community leaders (19%), which can be explained by the high levels of homogeneity within the municipality.

However, social norms do not happen in isolation: by promoting old traditions, old gender stereotypes and patterns of social exclusion might be reinforced and replicated. Research conducted in Libya indicates different expectations from men and women in the private, civic, and professional spheres, often putting men in a position to safeguard their family and community from external enemies while securing income and wellbeing. Men add to their honour when they show prowess in this protective role. At the same time, he boosts his community and family reputation, which serves as a form of protection of itself. In times of war and conflict, these views on masculinity and manhood are usually exacerbated: men are usually required to prove their value "as a man" through explicit adherence to masculine gender norms.³⁰ Women are generally linked to domestic responsibilities, household chores, educating children and teaching them morals.

"The role of men is to protect women and children."

Female, CSO staff member, Zuwarah

²⁷ The term "masculinity" refers to the roles, behaviours, and attributes that are associated with maleness and considered appropriate for how men should behave and look. UN Women Training Center, "Understanding Masculinities and Violence Against Women and Girls," (2016)

²⁸ <https://www.frstrategie.org/web/documents/programmes/observatoire-du-monde-arabo-musulman-et-du-sahel/publications/en/14.pdf>

²⁹ Ibid, 2012

³⁰ Marco Palillo (2022) 'He must be a man'. Uncovering the gendered vulnerabilities of young Sub-Saharan African men in their journeys to and in Libya, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 48:9, 2131-2147, DOI: 10.1080/1369183X.2020.1816813

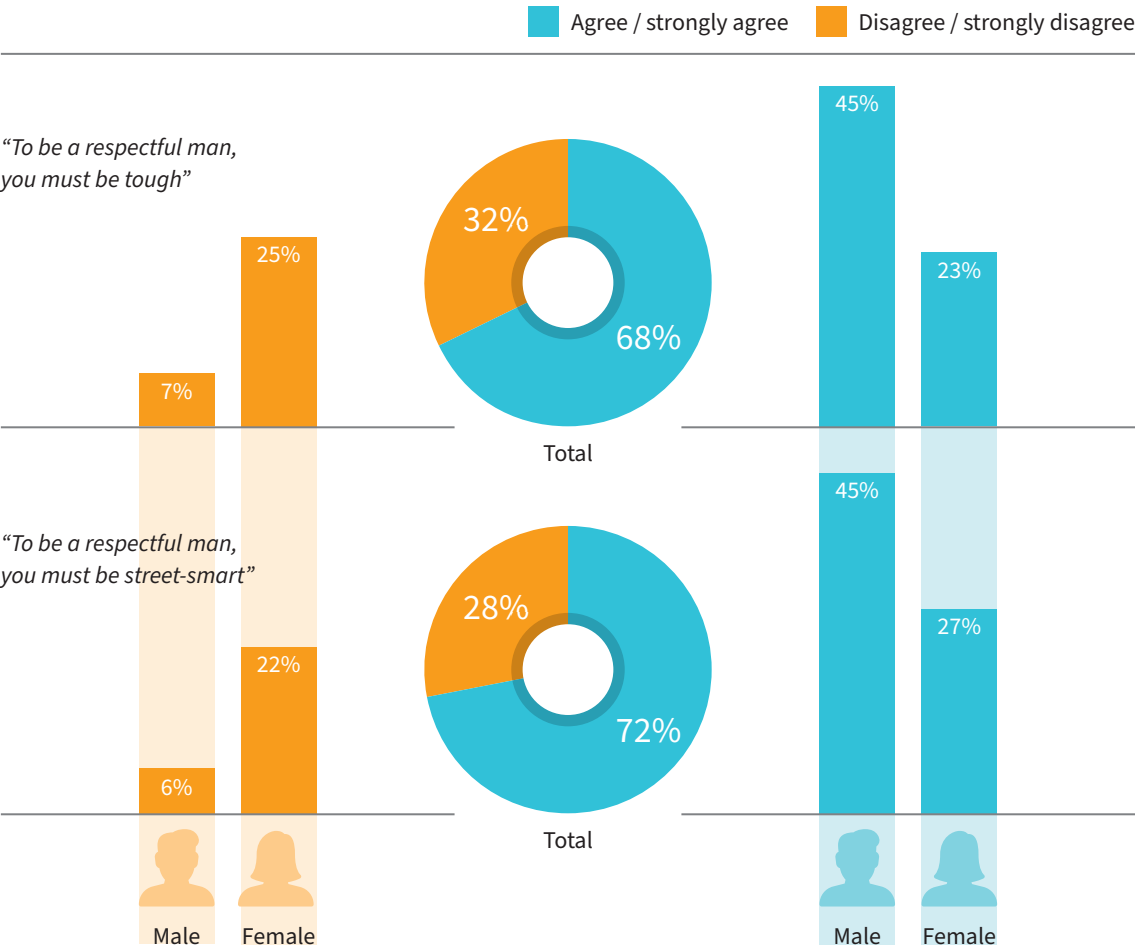
Participants in both Abu Salim and Zuwarah reflected strong alignment with traditional gender roles, with most believing that to be a respectful man you must be tough (68%), street-smart (72%), have a family (73%), provide for his family (93%), and have a good job (91%). 65% mentioned that it is important for others to see them as respectful men. Responses did not vary when disaggregated by location. Female participants were only slightly less likely to agree with such statements, indicating they have a similar alignment to gender norms. While having a family, raising children, and studying were the interviewed parents’ expectations to their female and male children, securing a good job was a common wish to their sons. Modesty was the most common attribute used to describe a respectful woman. A few participants revealed that the roles of women depended on their wealth and education level, suggesting there may be significant factors influencing how people perceive gender roles.

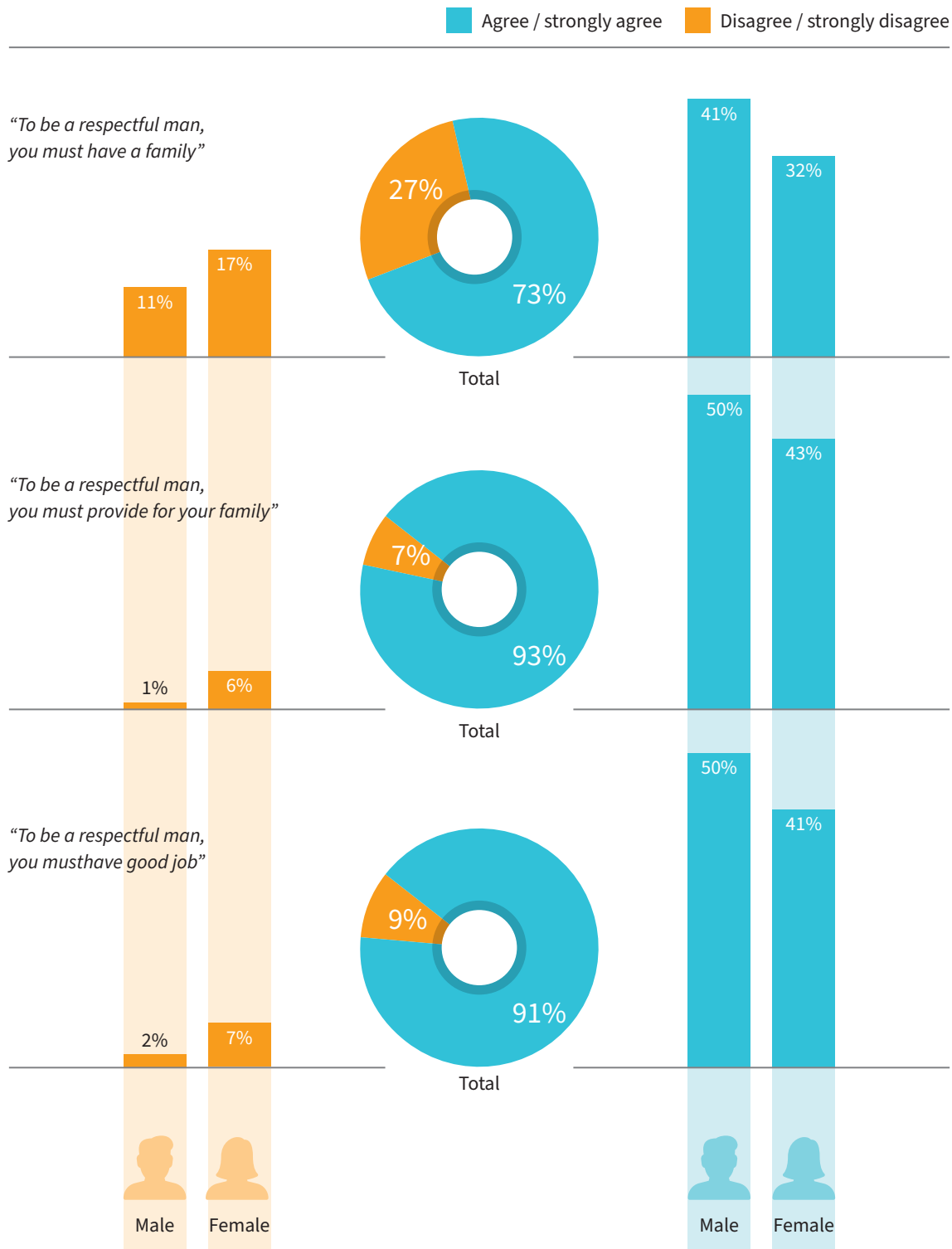
“The main traits of women respected by the community are respect, modesty, politeness, and not crossing the community limits.”

FGD participant (female), Zuwarah

“Respectful women are those who wear modest clothes. Women who flaunt and put on makeup and perfume and go out so people smell them and see their beauty, are not respected. Women should be respectful and righteous; I’m talking about real women who are eager to raise their children appropriately and respect their husbands.”

FGD participant (female), Abu Salim





Conformity to violence norms may also present a potential association with the likelihood of weapons ownership: individuals who believe that violence is sometimes justifiable or necessary are more likely to obtain a weapon. In both Abu Salim and Zuwarah, most participants felt that resorting to violence to protect oneself, a loved one, and one's community is acceptable, including one's family reputation, to which 92% of the total sample either agreed or strongly agreed. The exception, though, was responding when provoked, where 63% disagreed or strongly disagreed that violence should be employed in such cases.

While using violence to protect someone’s physical integrity is widely accepted worldwide, the emphasis on family reputation might be related to the high price of reputational damage in Libya’s society, as the acquisition of respect, pride, and avoidance of shame are at the core of tribal social interactions. All FGD participants revealed that a family’s reputation influences its members’ social connections to a high degree, with many mentioning that “everyone knows each other”, even those living in higher-density locations, such as Abu Salim. The mentioned consequences for reputational damage were ostracism, stigmatisation, loss of social status, and inability to secure jobs and marriages for family members. As underscored by a key informant, “it can destroy a family”.

“Families with bad reputations are vulnerable. They are outcasts, and nobody likes them. In this community, all people know each other.”

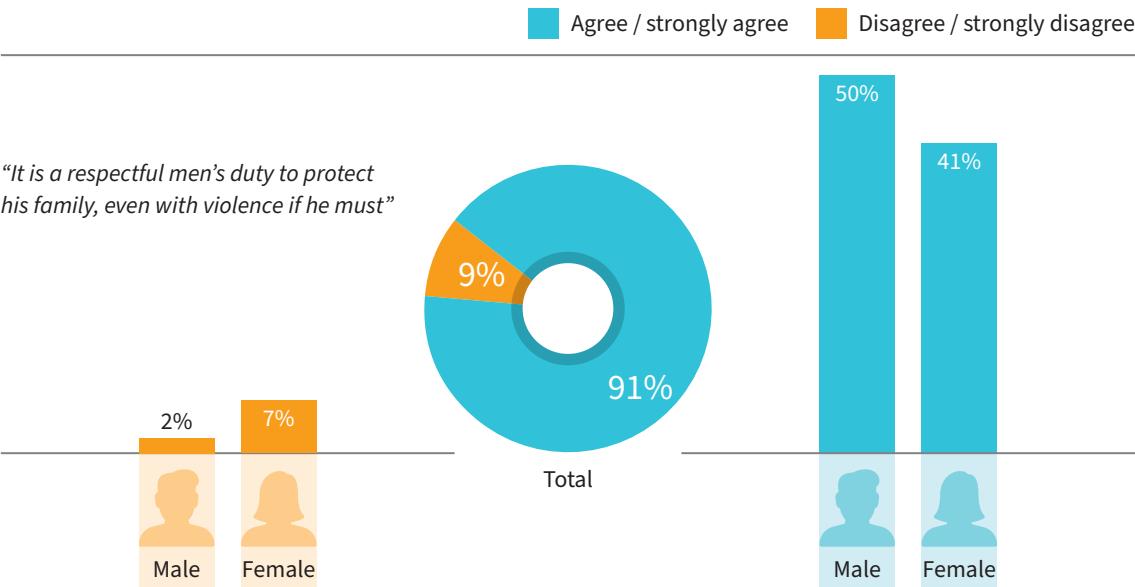
Parent (female), Abu Salim

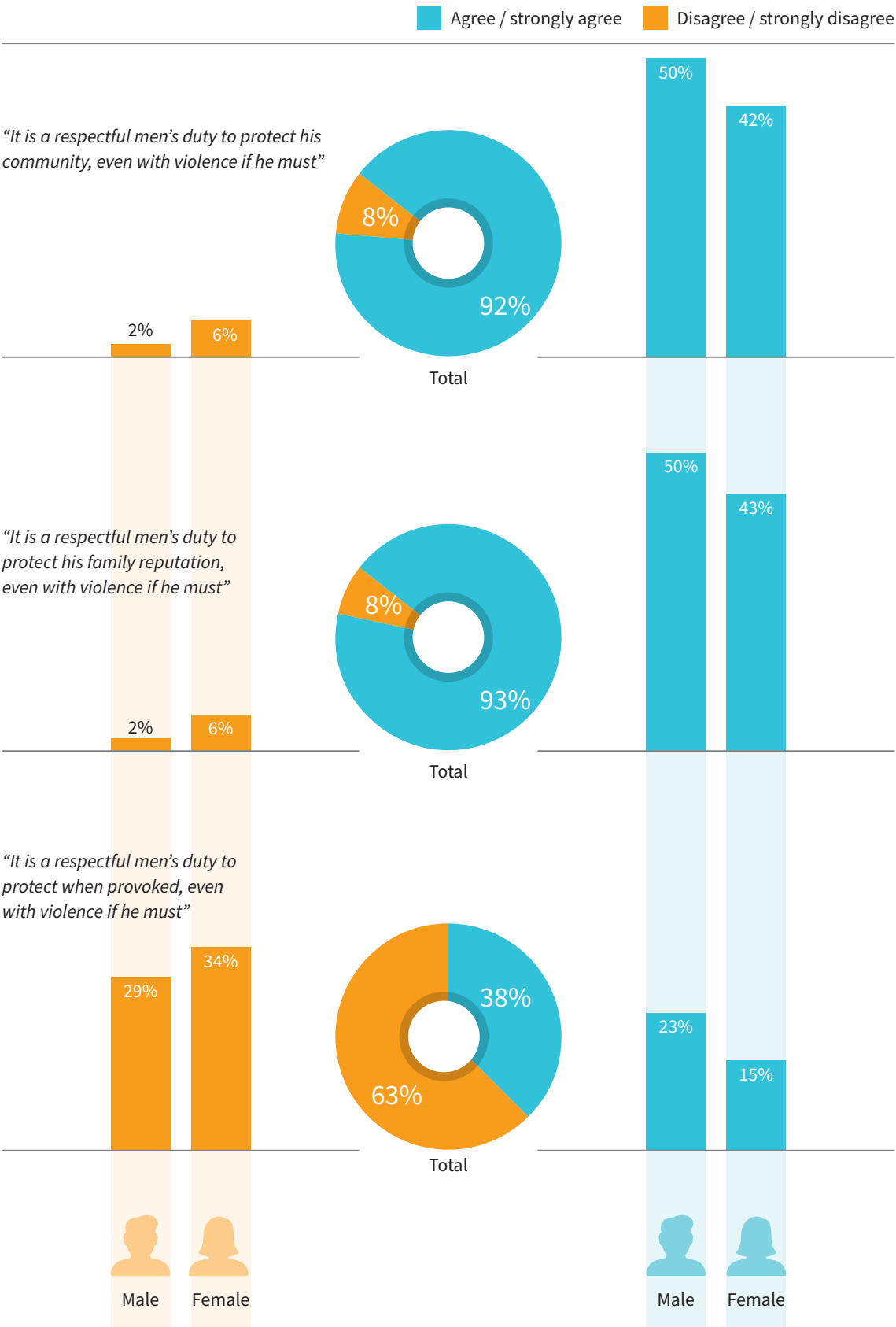
In tribal structures, each individual is accountable for the collective reputation of their families/tribes, meaning that if one person misbehaves, all family members will most likely suffer the consequences. For example, some participants reinforced that they would not allow their children to interact with other children from households that do not enjoy a good reputation, suggesting social exclusion can impact individuals of all ages. Therefore, it is possible to affirm that family reputation can influence physical integrity to a certain degree. When asked what kind of behaviour would negatively affect a family’s reputation, many participants mentioned having a family member do what is not considered “part of our traditions”, “correct”, or “good”. It was noticeable, however, that many participants mentioned “having a family member addicted to alcohol and drugs”.

Not responding when provoked, however, seemed more associated with wisdom and self-control – especially among older adults (see the section below for youth). When asked how they would describe a man who does not respond when provoked, FGD participants mentioned “a wise man”, “a man with good morals”, “a mature man”, and “a man who can protect himself from unnecessary troubles”.

The Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, said: “The strong man is not the one who wrestles, but the strong man is, in fact, the one who controls himself in a fit of rage.”

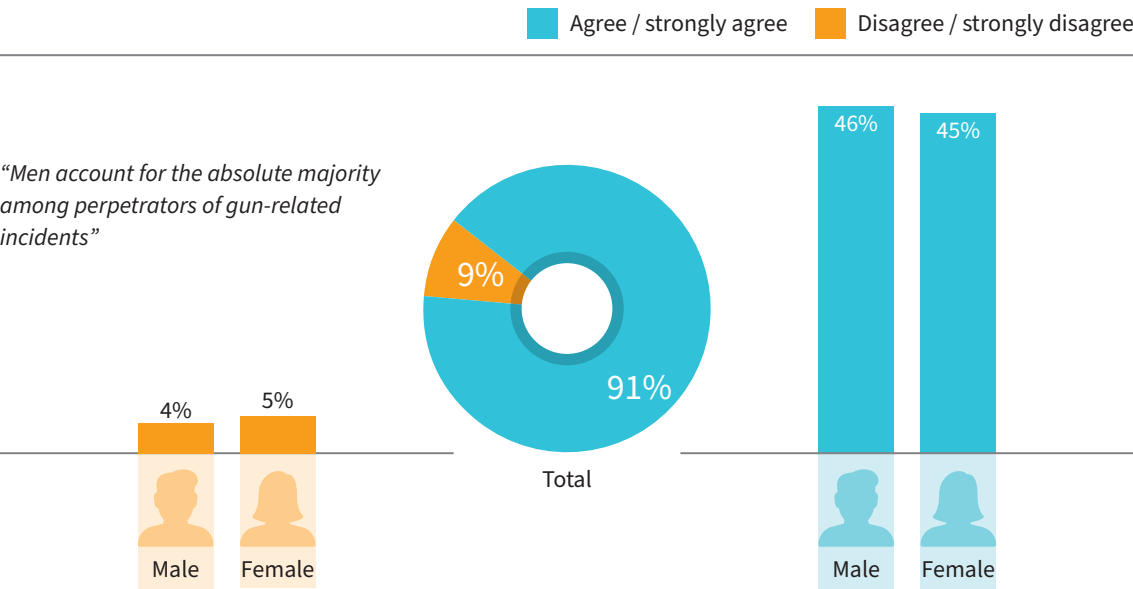
Parent (female), Abu Salim





Gender-Based Violence

The issue of armed violence is highly gendered, regardless of whether it happens in the public or private sphere. Worldwide, gun ownership is disproportionately male, with men being the victims and perpetrators of armed violence at a disproportionate rate.³¹ Women, however, often suffer from the invisible effects of gun violence. In the private sphere, women are at higher risk of being threatened, harassed, or subjugated at gunpoint than their male counterparts.



Across the sample, less than 5% of respondents mentioned domestic violence as a problem in their community. According to key informants, Libya does not have strict laws against gender-based violence, and victims have limited options, often counting on their male family members (father or brother) to intervene on their behalf. Although a male informant from Zuwarah mentioned that women could reach the police in such cases, a female informant highlighted that GBV is still taboo in Libya’s society, often making women reluctant to seek help due to social repercussions and impact on the family’s reputation.

“GBV is a commonly rejected topic. When people are subjected to it, they remain silent. We see this, especially among violated women and their children. For instance, we see people complaining that a woman got beaten, not just once, but multiple times and the problem keeps escalating until it ends with a divorce or a disaster. The same goes for the children, as there is no follow-up with them by the governmental authorities to determine whether they are subjected to violence inside their homes.”

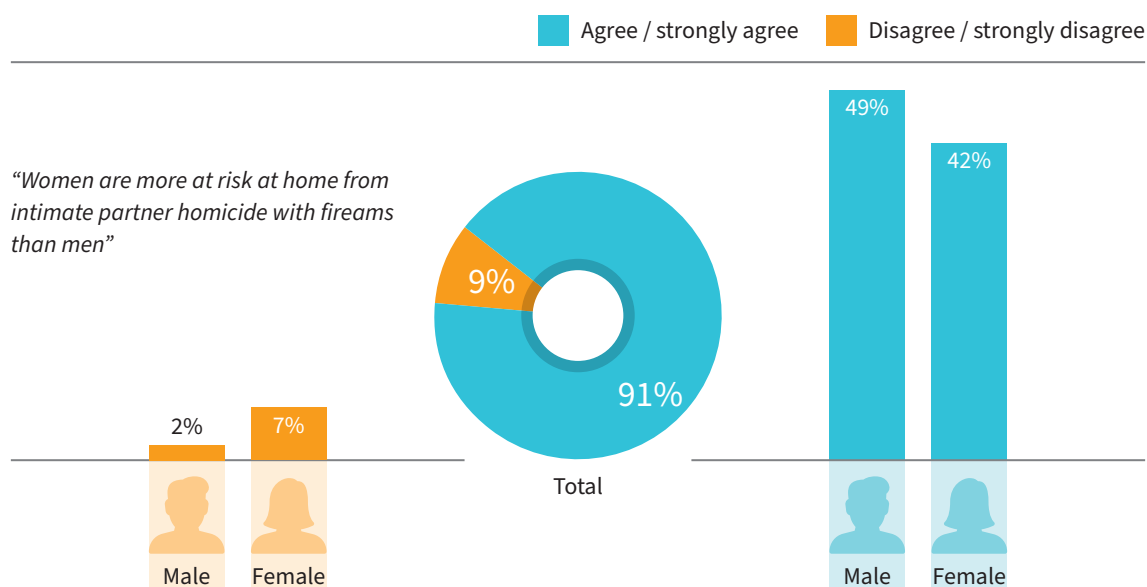
Women’s rights activist (female), Zuwarah

20% of participants were familiar with cases where a weapon was used to threaten/injure/kill a family member, of which most perpetrators (99%) and victims (73%) were males. Women were more likely than men to strongly agree that women are more at risk from intimate partner homicide with firearms than men, but both genders mostly agreed with this statement.

31 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/arms-control/gun-violence/>

"I heard some stories about wives being hit by their husbands. Some women provoke men and don't know how to deal with them. Men are very pressured in our living situation, and women should be wise and clever and learn how to deal with them. However, I'm against violence; I'm just trying to explain the reasons for it."

FGD participant (female), Abu Salim



Most KIs interviewed by SREO concluded that there are no links between domestic violence and weapons ownership, as *"domestic violence is a problem that predates weapons proliferation in Libya"*. Nonetheless, they gave examples of how they believe the lethality of domestic violence might increase in the presence of firearms. This perception that domestic violence is a problem in itself can mislead the general public into the idea that it happens in isolation – instead of in correlation – to other social issues such as weapons proliferation, poverty, drug use, and so on. A women's rights activist mentioned that women often do not participate in the decision-making process of obtaining a gun but are usually aware of it.

"In Libya, only the head of the family has the right to own a gun and inform other family members or not."

Women's rights CSO representative (female), Abu Salim

Youth Perceptions of Masculinity and Weapons Ownership

Social pressure and rigid gender norms are fertile grounds for acting out and "proving manliness". In this context, the youth may perceive firearm ownership as a behavioural manifestation of masculine identity and a fast track to manhood. Psychologically, young adults are more exposed to social pressure and more susceptible to ideals of manhood and the rites of passage that turn "boys into men".³² Consistent with this finding, FGD participants revealed that status-seeking, inspiring fear

³² Patton GC, Sawyer SM, Santelli JS, Ross DA, Afifi R, Allen NB, et al. Our future: a lancet commission on adolescent health and wellbeing. 2016

in others, and self-promotion are the motivational bases for weapons ownership among juveniles. Prior research literature^{33 34} highlights that risk-taking behaviour – such as firearm carrying – can become a marker of mature status among youth. Those who display such behaviours may benefit from increased popularity in adolescence. Furthermore, several key informants expressed concerns about the growing epidemic of illicit drug use in Libya. As both substance abuse and firearms carrying are behaviours associated with higher risk appetite and tolerance levels, there are potential synergies that could be explored in future programming between the risk/protective factors contributing to these behaviour patterns, as well as between efforts to address them.³⁵

“It’s fine when adults carry firearms to defend themselves, but it has reached the point when the youth are carrying firearms just to show off like it’s a source of pride. They feel valued, respected, like grown-ups.”

Youth (male), Zuwarah

Despite mentioning that seeing weapons in weddings and celebrations was common, especially in Zuwarah, all young participants affirmed that youth ownership of weapons is not socially accepted in Libya. In contrast, firearm ownership for self-protection was perceived as *understandable* if the individual was an adult. These responses seem aligned with their adult counterparts’ perceptions of social norms (see local perceptions of guns and gun owners). Moreover, qualitative data indicated that young participants from reportedly crime-free areas within Zuwarah and Abu Salim shared feelings of insecurity and uncertainty about the future. One participant from Abu Salim stated that he could not attend school one day due to a dispute on the road. When the other participants were asked if they had been through similar experiences, they stated, “no, but who knows about tomorrow?”.

“If the situation remains like this, even the people who don’t want to will own firearms. Thus, we don’t know... Maybe in time, I will get a weapon myself.”

Youth (male), Zuwarah

While describing the main attributes of respectful men in their society, young participants answered “toughness”, “loyalty”, “strength”, “honesty”, and “good morals”. While describing the attributes of respectful women, they mentioned “beauty”, “modesty”, and “decency”. Some youth participants also showed adherence to traditional gender roles by claiming that a man has an obligation to protect the family’s honour and reputation. Nonetheless, most young participants from Zuwarah mentioned that each individual should be responsible for their reputation, showing some flexibility to social norms. During the FGD, young participants seemed more likely to justify using violence to secure respect and reputation than their parents. Moreover, youth survey respondents showed that those between 18-24 years old were only slightly more likely to state that being respected by others was important when compared to other age groups.

33 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5665398/>

34 Nonetheless, chronically violent youth were less popular in adolescence than other youth; showing that There does seem to be a limit in the degree to which delinquent behavior is socially accepted. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5665398/>

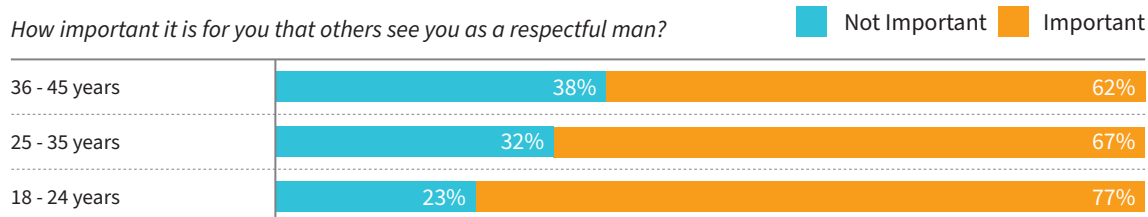
35 A study conducted in Tripoli identified accessibility and affordability of drugs, peer influence, disruption of social life, lack of healthy recreational activities, and conflict-related distress as the main risk factors that increase the vulnerability of young people to substance abuse. Meanwhile, religious beliefs and practices, good parent-child attachment, high self-esteem, and future aspiration act as protective factors associated with lower likelihood of illicit drug use.

"Make yourself a sheep, and the wolf will eat you". Sometimes, one has to use violence to protect his rights."

Youth (male), Abu Salim

"Sometimes you have to impose your respect, not request it"

Youth (male), Abu Salim



Strong alignment to traditional masculine role norms is exponentially more dangerous when associated with firearm ownership.³⁶ According to participants, children as young as 13 years old, primarily boys, can be seen carrying weapons. When asked how gun-carrying juveniles could afford a gun, most said from armed groups membership or using a household weapon. A few mentioned that, in some instances, parents are aware of their kids' behaviour. Both adult and youth participants from Abu Salim and Zuwarah stated that they thought the number of people publicly carrying weapons had decreased. This is especially positive among the youth, as recent studies revealed that adolescents that overestimate the prevalence of weapons ownership among their peers are more likely to desire to own a weapon.

"For example, if you bring a young 20 years old man today, who was probably 10 years old in 2011, he would probably be able to list all types of guns and firearms with all their specific details just like a military man. The reason is that the atmosphere of the time forced itself on him and indirectly taught him all this information."

Sheikh (male), Abu Salim

"I talked about the cases when the man is an addict and could use a gun against the wife or even his children."

Sheikh (male), Abu Salim

Media

In Abu Salim, social media was by far the most selected media, and Facebook was the most trusted and used media across generations. Television was the second most common media, chosen by 74% of the 18-35 age group and 88% of the 36 – 55 age group. Most (98%) participants thought the media negatively portrayed gun ownership in both national and international media. Media consumers selected radio to a much smaller extent among those between 18 and 35 years old (44%) and those over 36 (45%). When asked what type of media content they preferred, 99% of those in the 18-35 age group responded entertainment, followed by local news (76%) and domestic social issues (23%). For

³⁶ McDermott, R. C., Brasil, K. M., Barinas, J. L., & Borgogna, N. C. (2021). Associations between men's and women's conformity to masculine role norms and firearm ownership: Contributions beyond, race, gender, and political ideology.

the older generations (36+), local news (85%) was the most selected content, followed by entertainment (77%), domestic politics (50%) and domestic social issues (50%). No relevant discrepancies were observed in terms of gender.

18 – 35 AGE GROUP	
Social Media (99%)	Facebook (99%)
	Instagram (40% - 60% of those up to 25 years old)
	YouTube (39%)
	TikTok (25% - 33% of those up to 25 years old)
	Twitter (11%)
Television (74%)	Salam Channel (71%)
	WTV Channel (53% - more prevalent among those up to 25 years old – 65%)
	Al-Ahrar (31%)
	Libyan National TV (31%)
Radio (42%)	Lebda (63%)
	Al-Wasat (44%)
	Al-Wataniya (31%)
	Shababiya (58% of young female respondents)
	Tripoli FM (26% of young female respondents)

36 – 55 YEARS OLD	
Social Media (99%)	Facebook (99%)
	YouTube (50%)
	Instagram (23%)
Television (88%)	Al-Ahrar (50%)
	Salam Channel (73%)
	WTV Channel (60%)
Radio (41%)	Al-Wasat (57%)
	Al-Watanyia (50%)
	LebDA (71%)

In Zuwarah, social media and television were less consumed than in Abu Salim. Facebook was the most selected platform among the younger generations (15 – 35 years old), but television was more selected by participants older than 36 years old, followed by social media (Facebook) and radio. Participants demonstrated interest in content related to entertainment (50%), domestic politics (22%), domestic social issues (27%) and local news (22%). When asked how the national and international media portray weapons ownership, 58% did not know how to respond. The remaining participants were divided between negative (22%) and positive (20%).

15 – 35 AGE GROUP	
Social Media (80%)	Facebook (80%)
	Instagram (56%)
	YouTube (43%)
	TikTok (33%)
	Twitter (13%)
	Snapchat (41%)
	Telegram (21%)

Television (53%)	Salam Channel _____ (20%) Al-Ahrar _____ (22%) Libya Rasmia Channel 'LRC' _____ (32%) Libyan National TV _____ (22%) Others (MBC 2, Netflix) _____ (35%)
Radio (28%)	Kasas FM _____ (84%)

36 – 45 AGE GROUP

Social Media (67%)	Facebook _____ (70%) Instagram _____ (29%) YouTube _____ (48%) TikTok _____ (18%) Twitter _____ (7%) Snapchat _____ (25%) Telegram _____ (71%) Clubhouse _____ (1%)
Television (77%)	Salam Channel _____ (19%) Al-Ahrar _____ (50%) WTV Channel _____ (19%) Libya Rasmia Channel 'LRC' _____ (29%) Libyan National TV _____ (41%)
Radio (37%)	Kasas FM _____ (98%)

46+ AGE GROUP

Social Media (53%)	Facebook _____ (99%)
Television (78%)	Salam Channel _____ (50%) Al-Ahrar _____ (50%) WTV Channel _____ (19%) Libya Rasmia Channel 'LRC' _____ (29%) Libyan National TV _____ (40%)
Radio (53%)	Kasas FM _____ (98%)

Across the sample, most participants (70%) believed that seeing friends or other people with guns is what most promotes gun ownership, followed by videos/media showing guns (39%), armed groups (35%) and social media (34%). When asked about the best places to raise awareness of the local population, participants mentioned social media (83%), face-to-face activities (77%), television (58%), billboards and posters (43%) and finally, radio (31%). For those who selected billboards and posters, the most cited places were community centres (68%), mosques (52%), universities (76%) and cafes/restaurants (60%). Moreover, KIIs with parents and youth have highlighted how young adults attend community centres, sports events (especially football), and even hunting events (to a less extent) where they socialise with other teenagers. MHPSS and medical staff mentioned the importance of sports and recreational events to “keep the youth from drugs, weapons, and bond with other community members”.

CONCLUSIONS

Small arms availability and accessibility

- Despite having dramatically different security and social contexts, Abu Salim and Zuwarah reported the widespread availability of small arms in civilian households.
- In Abu Salim, 98% of participants believed it is easy/very easy for an ordinary citizen to obtain a weapon, while 67% of respondents from Zuwarah believed it is difficult/very difficult.
- 70% of respondents from Abu Salim could see themselves obtaining a weapon in the future, compared to 15% of respondents from Zuwarah. Men were more likely to see themselves as future gun owners than their female counterparts.

Small arms' motivational bases

- Participants identified more than one reason to own a firearm, but self-protection was by far the most selected option in both Abu Salim and Zuwarah.
- Those who declared feeling safe or very safe in their municipalities were more likely to see themselves obtaining a weapon for self-protection than those who felt unsafe.
- In Zuwarah, celebratory shooting was more commonly selected as the motivation for obtaining a weapon than self-promotion.

Small arms risk awareness

- In Abu Salim, participants were aware of the risks associated with small arms ownership in the public sphere. Still, they displayed a lower awareness of the dangers of keeping small arms in the household.
- In Zuwarah, most participants were unaware of the dangers of small arms ownership in the public sphere. Lower awareness of the risks of maintaining a weapon in the household has also been observed.
- Qualitative and quantitative data have revealed the interest in (and the need for) awareness-raising/risk education sessions.
- There was very little awareness about the impact of civilian-held small arms on domestic violence and GBV. Qualitative data showed that participants understand domestic violence as a problem in itself and cannot see the link to small arms, despite acknowledging that the lethality of domestic violence incidents might increase with a firearm.
- Only one participant mentioned suicide as a possible negative outcome of gun ownership.

Small arms and local institutions

- Most survey respondents and key informants were unaware of any government plan or volunteer/community-based initiatives to address or mitigate the risks of small arms in the area.
- In Zuwarah, key informants mentioned that campaigns to hand over weapons in exchange for money might be successful.
- In Zuwarah, participants displayed a positive view of the local authorities and local armed groups, contrasting with Abu Salim.

- In Abu Salim and Zuwarah, most respondents supported gun control/regulation. They affirmed that no one should be allowed to legally own a weapon except for law enforcement officials (68% and 66%, respectively).

Small arms and social norms

- Gun ownership is not a tradition in Libya, despite being widely accepted as a means for self-protection/protection of loved ones/property.
- According to most participants, carrying weapons is not socially acceptable unless you are in law enforcement.
- Young adults showed adherence to traditional gender norms and social norms, as well as older adults. Men are in a position of defenders and protectors of their families/communities.
- Youths were likelier to say that being respected by others was important and more likely to justify using violence to protect the family's reputation.
- In Abu Salim, participants revealed that gun owners are usually considered more powerful, influential, and of a higher status than non-owners. Nonetheless, they are not more respected than non-owners.
- In Zuwarah, participants were more likely to perceive gun owners more negatively, stating they are not more powerful, influential and neither more respected than non-owners.
- Participants from Abu Salim and Zuwarah seemed to differentiate between gun owners that keep weapons in the house for self-protection (broadly accepted) and those who carry weapons for self-promotion (not socially accepted).

Media usage

- Facebook was by far the most trusted platform selected by participants of most age groups and across locations. The only exception was for participants older than 36 years old in Zuwarah, where television was the first option, followed by Facebook.
- Across the sample, most participants (70%) believed that seeing friends or other people with guns is what most promotes gun ownership, followed by videos/media showing guns (39%), armed groups (35%) and social media (34%).
- When asked about the best places to raise awareness of the local population, participants mentioned social media (83%), face-to-face activities (77%), television (58%), billboards and posters (43%) and finally, radio (31%). For those who selected billboards and posters, the most cited places were community centres (68%), mosques (52%), universities (76%) and cafes/restaurants (60%).

KEY MESSAGES

TARGET	MESSAGE
Adults / Gun owners motivational base: protection	Your family is safest when firearms are stored outside their home. If there is a weapon in your home, make sure they are safer by always storing your gun unloaded, in a locker, and separated from ammunition. We know you care. Treat all guns as loaded. Always assume a gun is loaded. Never point a gun towards yourself or others. Accidents can happen. Keep your fingers off the trigger. Gun owners have an essential role in educating their families and friends about gun safety, especially non-owners. Make sure everyone is aware. You may know how to handle a gun, but your loved ones may not. Protect your family by keeping them well-informed and safe from gun fatalities. Talk to your loved ones about gun safety. You have a gun in your house to protect your family from harm. But you are not always there. If your family stays at home with an unlocked weapon, they might be in danger. Guns are designed to kill without distinctions. Be sure your gun does not end up in the wrong hands. Guns are designed to kill. Do not take guns for a walk. If, for any reason, you must transport your weapon, remember to use a storage device, keep it out of sight, and do not leave your car. Never bring a gun if there are kids in the car. Protect the children, not the guns. It has been claimed that around half a million people are victims of small arms every year worldwide. That means that while we are talking, two people have been killed. Do not increase the chances of that being someone you love – lock your guns away.
Parents motivational base: protection	Model responsible behaviour. Your family is safest when firearms are stored outside their home. Weapons at home can kill your children. Do not take the risk. Ensure weapons are locked, unloaded, and separated from ammunition. You can play a role in keeping your family safe. Tell your children and loved ones that you do not want to risk losing them by keeping your weapons locked, unloaded, and separated from ammunition at all times. A child's thumb has twice the strength of her/his other fingers. When a toddler's thumb pulls a trigger, the gun barrel invariably points at themselves. Never leave a weapon insecure or within sight of a child. Kids are curious about everything, including guns. Talk to them about gun safety in the home. It's a small action that could prevent a parent's worst nightmare. You have borne your child and know how to protect them. Do not take the risk. (for mothers) Even if your kids have been exposed to firearms from a young age (through celebratory shooting, for example), you must always store your guns locked, unloaded, separately from ammunition and out of sight of children. Kids are naturally curious. Do not assume they cannot reach or find a weapon hidden in the house. Keep them locked away at all times.

TARGET	MESSAGE
Youth Motivational base: respect, self-promotion	You can't take back a bullet. Having a firearm during an argument increases the chance of using it. Guns only look cool in films. Life is not a film; You cannot undo it once you've pulled the trigger. You want to be respected. Do not hide behind a gun. You are the future of your family and nation. Do not increase the chances of not being part of it. Gun proliferation is one of the main challenges of Libya. Be part of the solution, don't walk around with a weapon. You belong to this community. Help to build it and not destroy it.
Celebratory gunfire Motivational base: habit, tradition	Bullets shot upwards do not vanish into space. Firing random shots may result in the death and injuries of loved ones on what should be the happiest day of their lives. Those hit by falling bullets are more likely to be struck on the head. The chance of the wound being fatal is higher than in a typical shooting. Don't ruin the party. Let the tears be of joy. Say no to celebratory gunfire.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Focus on risk education and responsible gun ownership: Despite supporting gun control and reporting feeling safe in their municipalities, participants from Abu Salim and Zuwarah revealed that community members handing over their weapons is still unlikely due to the current security context and political uncertainty in Libya. Nonetheless, respondents from Zuwarah believed that a government campaign to hand over their weapons in exchange for cash might be effective in their municipality in the near future. SREO suggests DRC campaign focus on firearms risk education rather than gun regulation or disarmament in both Abu Salim and Zuwarah. However, Zuwarah likely presents a unique opportunity to prepare the ground for future gun control and advocacy.

Consider helping establish a reporting system for small arms-related death and injuries: Data on intentional and unintentional gun-related crime is sparse. KIs indicated that more robust statistics on conflict-related deaths, injuries and disabilities might be found at the Ministry of Health, the National Death Registries, the Ministry of State for Families of Martyrs, Injuries and Missing Persons, hospitals, local authorities in each region, and the Libyan Red Crescent. The data, however, is not open to the public. Initiatives to unify and centralise weapons-related data would allow for better oversight and evidence-based interventions that will likely generate more effective outcomes.

- **Consider building the capacity of law enforcement, hospitals, and first responders** to collect reliable and timely data on the number of fatal and nonfatal injuries caused by intentional or unintentional shootings based on transparent and standardised criteria. Data should be made widely available and easily accessible to the general public.

Consider expanding research on civilian gun ownership to complement the KAPB surveys for advancing knowledge and improving interventions and outcomes. Suggestions for future research that SREO believes could enhance the effectiveness of SA programming include the following:

- **Risk and Protective factors assessment for primary prevention activities:** To better understand the dynamics between firearms carrying/ownership and young adults, a four-level socioecological model is usually recommended to explore the multi-layered factors associated with high-risk behaviour. This assessment involves identifying the individual, relationship, community, and societal factors associated with increased vulnerability to/lower likelihood of engagement in risk-taking behaviour. The assessment can inform primary prevention programming activities to promote protective factors and, where possible, remove risk factors.

If such an assessment is not feasible, DRC should consider factors identified in previous studies, such as availability and affordability of firearms, peer pressure, lack of healthy recreational activities, disruption of social life, and conflict-related distress. Meanwhile, religious beliefs and practices, suitable parent-child attachment, high self-esteem, and future aspiration are protective factors associated with a lower likelihood of illicit drug use. As those who engage in one type of high-risk behaviour are likely to engage in others, common risk/protective factors will likely be associated with a variety of behaviours linked to high-risk appetites, such as substance abuse, firearm carrying, unsafe driving, etc.

- **Barrier Analysis to identify incentives and barriers to behaviour change for identified at-risk groups:** Barrier Analysis is used to determine the mechanisms that drive individual behaviours and those that drive behavioural change. In addition to the determinants of behaviour, it is recommended to use the survey to determine who are people's "influencers." That is, who do they listen to and most trust regarding how they should act. This information, coupled with their reasons for action, helps those designing interventions know what to influence and who to get messaging to have the most significant effect.³⁷

37 https://www.gichd.org/fileadmin/GICHD-resources/info-documents/EORE_Advisory_Group/Barrier_Analysis_Paper_01.pdf

- **The COM-B model to overcome the attitude-behaviour gap:** Influencing human behaviour is a challenging task beyond knowledge and retention. The COM-B model is commonly used to identify what needs to happen for interventions effectively generate behaviour change. It identifies three factors that need to be present for any behaviour to occur: capability, opportunity, and motivation. These factors interact over time so that behaviour can be seen as part of a dynamic system with positive and negative feedback loops. The COM-B model can help identify the most effective behaviour change techniques for achieving expected results.³⁸

Consider promoting primary prevention principles based on the identified risk and protective factors,³⁹ reinforcing the Humanitarian-Development-Peacebuilding nexus: Primary approaches can focus on preventing high levels of risk-appetite among the youth lead to high-risk behaviour such as firearms carrying/ownership, illicit substance abuse, reckless driving, excessive smoking, etc. DRC could potentially capitalise upon its community liaison and EORE platforms in Libya or other mine action and development partners, reinforcing the triple-nexus approach. If context and funding allow for it, a few primary prevention principles that could benefit the programming are:

- **Youth centres:** This model addresses the root causes of youth and weapons relationships. KIIs with parents, youth and psychologists revealed that several teenagers in both Abu Salim and Zuwarah have access to recreational centres, sports, and social activities. A psychiatrist interviewed by SREO highlighted the passion young men display for football and sports and the positive impact of outdoor activities on the youth. Moreover, the youth interviewed revealed that outside activities are part of their weekly routine. *Youth clubs* play an essential role in primary prevention interventions, as they enhance the social environment for children, teenagers, and parents. Community activities – such as sports and collective events – provide a unique opportunity to promote a sense of belonging, healing, and recovery by engaging children, their families, and the larger community in a natural, non-forced environment. DRC could build the capacity of youth clubs and promote psychosocial support (PSS) and armed violence prevention/reduction (AVP/R) to address the identified risk factors for risk-taking behaviour. Attention must be taken to ensure that girls are also engaged in these activities, as well as children/youth with disabilities.
- **Engagement:** community members should get involved to support and suggest primary prevention activities directed to the youth and children. KIIs with youth members revealed high anxiety and uncertainty about the future. Based on the principle of sustained attention as a treatment, the approach keeps community-level attention focused on building healthy environments for young people.
- **Building community-specific problem-solving mechanisms:** Through connecting youth, parents, and civil society organisations, this model encourages authentic assessment of the problem and the solution, creating teams of adults who are invested in and working together to support the success of young people in the community.

Consider combining intervention types for behaviour change:

According to research on effective interventions to promote safe firearms practices,⁴⁰ enablement interventions are, so far, the most effective way to promote safe firearm storage practices. Removing economic and time barriers improve adherence to public health recommendations.⁴¹ Apart from

³⁸ The motivational aspect is guided by the PRIME theory of motivation framework and used together.

³⁹

⁴⁰ Rowhani-Rahbar A, Simonetti JA, Rivara FP. Effectiveness of Interventions to Promote Safe Firearm Storage. *Epidemiol Rev.* 2016;38(1):111-24. doi: 10.1093/epirev/mxv006. Epub 2016 Jan 13. PMID: 26769724.

⁴¹ Ohrt CK, McKinney WP. Achieving compliance with influenza immunization of medical house staff and students. A randomized controlled trial. *JAMA.* 1992;267(10):1377-1380

educating people on safe storage practices, future interventions should consider facilitating access to trigger locks at a discount (if feasible) or any other secure storage device (e.g., firearms cabinets, lockboxes, cable locks, etc.).

Other interventions that can motivate safe practices are:

- **Persuasion:** Use impactful words or images to get gun owners to feel concerned/tense/fearful about leaving an unsecured/loaded weapon in a household with children to influence behaviour. This technique can be put into practice during the media campaign. Positive reinforcement could be added to the strategy, for instance, with messages comparing safe practices to heroic deeds, suggesting that keeping guns locked saves children's lives and protects a family from loss and suffering. Moreover, positive reinforcement is found to be effective with children. "Be a hero! If you find a gun, report to an adult," and similar messages could be considered. However, the persuasion technique would still require some discomfort/impact to be most effective. Nonetheless, persuasion is one of many techniques that could potentially be used in communication.
- **Modelling:** Providing an example for people to imitate, learn from or aspire to. This could be done by involving gun violence survivors to share their personal stories related to the importance of keeping safe firearm practices. Peer influence is a double-edged sword: it can provoke rule violations and reduce pro-sociality, but it can also prompt rule compliance, promote pro-sociality, and facilitate the integration of social information to form beliefs about the world. Another option could include a respected celebrity promoting safe practices.⁴²
- **Environmental restricting:** Distributing materials containing safe storage practices messages to work as a reminder for gun owners.

Consider adapting the strategy and the messaging according to motivational bases for gun ownership: Despite showing a certain level of awareness of gun ownership-associated risks, participants from Abu Salim still demonstrated high levels of willingness to obtain a weapon in the future and recommend weapons acquisitions to loved ones. This finding suggests that any campaign aiming at reducing the risks associated with weapons ownership should consider how gun owners (and potential gun owners) might discount the risks according to motivated reasoning and cognitive biases.

For the campaign to resonate with different gun owners, the messaging must be relevant, simple, accurate, accessible, and culturally sensitive. However, beyond developing messages that speak directly to the needs and experiences of different groups, risk education activities can be planned to target those specific subpopulations and the people who have the most influence over their behaviour.

SREO suggests that motivational bases aligned with behaviour change techniques should underlie the strategy and the messaging of the media campaign and future interventions. For instance:

- **Protection of self and others:** Those who keep weapons for self-protection are less likely to store them locked and unloaded because they perceive safe storage as a barrier to accessing a firearm during a threatening event.⁴³ For these individuals, intervention strategies and messaging might focus on motivating behaviour change by reinforcing personal values of family safety. As there is public consensus regarding the consequences of unsupervised access to weapons by children, parents are possibly the most effective target group. However, specific biases work as barriers to making knowledge translate into action.

⁴² <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9240690/>

⁴³ Wiktor SZ, Gallaher MM, Baron RC, et al. Firearms in New Mexico. *West J Med* 1994;161:137.

- **Gaining respect, status, and self-promotion:** young adults and teenagers are usually⁴⁴ attracted to weapons and armed groups for protection, enjoyment, respect, money, or because a friend is there. In such cases, safe storage messaging is less likely to be effective. In fact, a multi-dimension strategy is needed to promote behaviour change, such as providing the youth with viable alternatives to weapons ownership or armed groups membership. Media campaigns should emphasise their value to their community, highlighting their strengths, aptitudes, and positive opportunities.
- **Celebratory firing, the force of habit:** Cognitive biases can also play a role for those who insist on maintaining perilous traditions. In this case, messaging should focus on motivating behaviour change by reinforcing values of community responsibility and safety. Responsible community members should not expose their peers to danger. Messaging should also concentrate on attendants that tolerate it but do not initiate it.

Train “firearms safety counsellors” to promote behaviour change through the motivational interviewing technique:⁴⁵ motivational interviewing method has been specifically developed to help motivate ambivalent patients/individuals to change their behaviour, bridging the gap between knowledge and action. The simple but effective technique involves the following steps:

- Engaging: establishing a collaborative - instead of combative - relationship with the gun owner.
- Focusing: guiding the discussion towards the topic of safety.
- Evoking: eliciting change talk by asking the gun owner to describe his/her personal reasons for increasing safety.
- Planning: summarising change talk and identifying options for increasing firearm safety.

MHPSS practitioners, primary care medical staff and other relevant staff could be trained in this technique to counsel new parents about gun safety practices in households with children. Attention should be taken to address the gender gap in gun ownership decision-making: mothers are most likely the ones that will receive the information at hospitals/pediatric clinics. However, fathers are more likely to be the ones who will put them into practice. Engaging parents, siblings and other household members in the discussion is crucial to ensure gun safety.

Engage specialised CSOs to raise awareness of the impact of gun ownership on women: Participants had shallow awareness of the effects of gun ownership on women. Even CSOs representatives interviewed by SREO could not identify the links between gun ownership, gender norms and domestic violence/GBV, for instance. DRC could engage grassroots movements and women activists working on initiatives to promote meaningful participation of women in peacebuilding.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ <https://www.crimepreventionottawa.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Getting-Out-Youth-Gang-Exit-Strategies.pdf>

⁴⁵ Bischof G, Bischof A, Rumpf HJ. Motivational Interviewing: An Evidence-Based Approach for Use in Medical Practice. Dtsch Arztebl Int. 2021 Feb 19;118(7):109-115. doi: 10.3238/arztebl.m2021.0014. PMID: 33835006; PMCID: PMC8200683.

⁴⁶ An example would be the Together we Build it. <https://togetherwebuildit.org/>

