

Excerpt from PRIVATE GUNS PUBLIC HEALTH  
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In the United States, in the 1990's, two children per day under the age of fourteen died from firearms, and many more were seriously injured. Our rate of child firearm fatalities is far greater than that of any other developed nation. We have more guns and more suicides, more homicides, and more accidental gun deaths of children.

Across U.S. regions and states, where there are more guns, children are at significantly greater risk for dying. They are at greater risk for victimization because of (1) an accidental gunshot wound;(2) a gun suicide; (3) a suicide by all methods combined; (4) a gun homicide; and (5) a homicide by all methods combined. They are not at increased risk for non-gun suicide or non-gun homicide.

The greatest risk of gun violence is to adolescents and young adults. Young people in the United States are far more likely to be murdered than are youths in higher income countries. In U.S. regions and states with more guns, youths are at higher risk for accidental gun injuries, suicide and homicide.

Women are at much higher risk of violence from male intimates than from strangers. Guns may commonly be used as threats in violent domestic relationships. When guns are used to intimidate, the violence can become more severe. While women rarely perpetrate gun violence, a gun in the home increases the likelihood that a battered woman will kill her abuser. When women kill. The outcome is also terrible. The men are dead, and the women are sent to prison.

Guns may occasionally have some beneficial effect for some women at some times, but the net effect is clearly quite negative. No study has shown that a gun in the home reduces the likelihood of burglary, robbery, home invasion, abuse, or any other crime against women.

Blacks in the United States have lower rates of suicide than whites but much higher rates of homicide and gun homicide, in part because of differences in education, poverty, housing, employment, and treated based on racial characteristics.

Many policies can reduce the danger of guns to children, youths, women, and blacks. For example, to reduce the dangers to people, states might enact safe gun storage requirements, which are mandatory in most other developed nations. America probably needs a new social norm that makes it common for parents to ask other parents if guns are in their homes and whether they are stored securely.

Numerous policies can reduce gun possession and carrying among youths (U.S. Department of Justice, OJJDP 1996.) Some policies focus on the demand side. Programs such as "Hands -Without- Guns" provide media messages about the dangers of adolescent gun carrying (Hemenway et al. 1996). Other programs teach violence prevention and provide after-school activities that reduce the lure of gangs and keep youths off the streets. Youths who are at greatest risk for perpetrating gun violence should be referred to psychological and social services, including drug and alcohol treatment.

Other policies focus on the supply side. For example, national one-gun-per-month laws combined with waiting periods can reduce gunrunning across state lines. Increased

tracing of guns used in crimes, combined with strong enforcements against scofflaw dealers, can also decrease the supply of guns on the street. Elimination of secondary sales through non- dealers, such as at gun shows, can also limit teens' access to guns. Supply-side restrictions can have an immediate effect (Cook and Leitzel 1996)- tracing data show that a third of guns used in crimes by juveniles are quite, having been manufactured within three years of the crime, and half of all guns illegally acquired by young people involved straw buyers. A study of incarcerated adolescent males found that two of the main factors that prevented them, on at least one occasion, from acquiring or carrying firearms were the inability to find a source for a gun and the lack of money for its acquisition (Freed et al. 2001)

The public health approach to preventing gun violence suggests multiple policies. Punishing the “bad guys”-the kids who use the guns-is important, but punishing alone is neither good parenting nor an effective societal response to problem behavior. Women and women's organizations need to take a stronger stand on firearm issues to help create a society that is less dangerous for children, youths, and women. Fewer than one in ten women own a firearm. Compared to men, women are more likely to favor reasonable firearm policies that will promote the public health.

One woman who had lost a child to guns was on her way to testify at a state firearms hearing when pro gun demonstrators began to heckle her. She responded, “We love our children more than you love your guns”(Tapper 1999)

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