

YOUTH AND FIREARMS

In the United States today, children and young adults are at greater risk of becoming victims of violence than any other age group.¹ In 1998, firearm-related injuries were the second leading cause of death for persons aged 15 to 19. They were the leading cause of death for African-American and Hispanic youth.²

Youth Victim Statistics

- Most young homicide victims are killed with guns. In 1998, 82 percent of homicide victims 15 to 19 years old were killed with firearms. The firearm homicide rate for this age group increased 44 percent between 1987 and 1998.³
- In 2000, one in eight people murdered was younger than 18 years old.³
- Homicides of juveniles ages 15 to 17 were more likely to involve a firearm than were homicides of adults.⁴
- Firearms were involved in 3,761 deaths of children aged 19 and under in 1998. That is 10 children everyday. Of these, 2,184 were murdered, 1,241 committed suicide, and 262 were victims of accidental shootings.⁵

Youth Perpetrator Statistics

- Between 1980 and 1997, the large majority (93 percent) of known juvenile homicide offenders were male.⁶
- Males are far more likely than females to kill with a firearm. Between 1980 and 1997, 73 percent of male juvenile homicide offenders used a firearm, while 14 percent used a knife. In contrast, 41 percent of female juvenile offenders used a firearm and 32 percent used a knife.⁶
- In a study regarding gun acquisition and use by juvenile offenders, 84 percent of the gun carriers reported acquiring their first gun before the age of 15. They also reported feeling safer, more powerful, and excited when carrying a gun.⁷
- One study of urban juvenile arrestees found that more than two-thirds of the juveniles said their primary reason for owning and carrying a weapon was self-protection. A smaller number also reported using their weapon for drug trafficking or other illegal activity.⁸

Carrying or Possession of Firearms

- Having a parent who owned a gun for sport increased the odds more than fivefold that a boy owned a gun for sport. However, parental gun ownership had no impact on the likelihood that a boy owned a gun for protection. Conversely, having peers who owned guns for protection increased the odds more than sixfold that a boy owned a gun for protection.⁸

According to the 1999 Youth Risk Behavior Survey:

- Nearly 20 percent of the students surveyed reported carrying a weapon during the past 30 days.⁹
- Male students (28.6 percent) were more likely than female students (6 percent) to report carrying a weapon.⁹
- African-American and Hispanic female students (11.7 percent and 8.4 percent, respectively) were more likely than white female students (3.6 percent) to have carried a weapon.⁹

Alcohol and Other Drug-Related Firearm Violence

Drugs and firearms are connected in three ways:

1. Drugs can induce criminal or violent activity.
2. Crimes are committed by drug users to support their addictions.
3. Crimes committed by drug users are an integral part of doing business.¹⁰

Youth who had ever used marijuana were more likely to have carried a handgun (21 percent vs. 7 percent) at some point than youth who never used marijuana.⁶ In addition, a longitudinal study of 1,500 young males in Pittsburgh showed a higher frequency of carrying a concealed weapon in the year they started dealing drugs.¹¹

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