

Young hunters most likely to be injured using tree stands, researchers say

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Young hunters between the ages of 15 and 34 are the most likely to suffer serious injuries in tree stand-related incidents, say researchers at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) Center for Injury Sciences (CIS). The same researchers' findings, though, suggest that such injuries are preventable.

The study, presented online this week in the *Journal of TRAUMA Injury, Infection and Critical Care*, reports that men were twice as likely as women to be injured, and younger [hunters](#) more likely than older ones. Hunters aged between 15-24 had injury rates of 55.7 per 100,000, and those aged 25-34 averaged 61 injuries per 100,000. Hunters over 65 had injury rates of only 22.4 per 100,000.

"The elevated injury rate among younger hunters is significant, because debilitating injuries in younger people are far more devastating than for older individuals because of the potential long-term effects that create both physical and financial hardships for patients and their families," said Gerald McGwin, Jr., MS, Ph.D., associate director for research at the CIS and senior investigator for the study.

Using data drawn from the 2000-07 National Electronic Injury Surveillance System established by the Consumer Product Safety Commission and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, the UAB researchers report that the number of Americans hunting has remained stable over the past decade, with 12.5 million people engaging in hunting in 2006. There were an estimated 46,860 injuries related to tree stand

use between 2000 and 2007.

The study found that the most common injuries were fractures, mostly likely to occur in the hip or lower extremities, followed by injuries to the trunk, shoulder and upper extremities. Head and spinal cord injuries were less common, but still significant. McGwin said such injuries are consistent with other studies that demonstrate a similar injury pattern, explained by hunters trying to land on their feet, leading to injury of the lower extremities.

McGwin said younger hunters may have higher injury rates due to a willingness to take risks, less exposure to safety information and more time spent hunting than older hunters. He said the study reveals certain target areas for preventing tree stand-related injuries, including safety education campaigns that recommend the use of safety harnesses and regular maintenance of stands.

"In addition to a broad safety education campaign regarding the use of tree stands, the vulnerable young hunter population should be specifically targeted to decrease the number of preventable injuries," he said. "Manufacturers of tree stands can aid in prevention by providing more support for the hunters, particularly for the minimalistic stands such as climbing or ladder stands. Although tree stand-related injuries are a major cause of injury among the hunting population, they are preventable."

McGwin, along with study colleagues Loring W. Rue, III, M.D., Joshua Terry, BS, and Russell Griffin, MPH, said the study was not able to determine from the data what types of tree stands were in use when injury occurred, nor the exact mechanism of injury, be it a hunter falling from a stand, a stand improperly erected or a structural failure of a stand. Further research in these areas would be valuable in reducing the number of injuries related to hunting from tree stands, the authors said.

Provided by University of Alabama at Birmingham

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