

Study examines gun control policies and effect on youth gun carrying

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A more restrictive gun law environment was associated with a reduced likelihood of youth carrying guns, according to an article published online by *JAMA Pediatrics*.

An average of 15,000 teenagers 12 to 19 years old died annually in the United States from 1999 to 2013. The three leading causes of death among teenagers were unintentional injuries, homicide and suicide. Among these fatal youth injuries, most homicides were [gun](#)-related (83 percent) and about half of suicides involved a gun (45 percent). The limited impact of youth-focused gun laws may be explained by the wide prevalence of gun ownership. The study of the state gun law environment is limited, according to background information in the study.

Ziming Xuan, Sc.D., S.M., M.A., of the Boston University School of Public Health, and David Hemenway, Ph.D., of the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Boston, examined the gun law environment and youth gun carrying in the United States, as well as whether it was mediated by adult gun ownership.

The authors analyzed data from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, which includes representative data from students in grades nine to 12 from 2007, 2009 and 2011. Youth gun carrying was defined as having carried a gun on at least one day during the 30 days before the survey. To characterize the gun law environment, the authors used state gun law scores ranging from 0 to 100 points, with the greater value representing a

more restrictive gun control environment.

The authors found substantial variation in state-level gun law scores with average scores across 2007, 2009 and 2011 ranging from a low of 1.3 in Utah to a high of 79.7 in California. Adult gun ownership ranged from 20 percent in Massachusetts to 70.9 percent in Mississippi. In 38 states with data on youth gun carrying, the average aggregate prevalence was 6.7 percent, ranging from 1.4 percent in New Jersey to 11 percent in Wyoming.

The authors report a 10-point increase in the gun law score was associated with 9 percent lower odds of youth gun carrying. Higher adult [gun ownership](#) levels also were associated with a higher prevalence of youth gun carrying.

"Gun violence poses a substantial [public health](#) threat to adolescents in the United States. Existing evidence points to the need for policies to reduce gun carrying among youth. We find that the strength of gun policies including both adult-focused and youth-focused policies is inversely associated with youth gun carrying. These findings are relevant to gun policy debates about the critical importance of comprehensive state-level gun law environment to prevent youth gun carrying," the study concludes.

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