

Are children who see movie characters use guns more likely to use them?

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Children who watched a PG-rated movie clip containing guns played with a disabled real gun longer and pulled the trigger more often than children who saw the same movie not containing guns, according to the

results of a randomized experiment published in a new article by *JAMA Pediatrics*.

Many U.S. households with guns do not secure the weapons and [children](#) in the United States are more likely to die by unintentional gun shootings than children in other developed countries. Lots of factors influence children's interest in guns.

The experiment by Brad J. Bushman, Ph.D., of Ohio State University, Columbus, and Kelly P. Dillon, Ph.D., of Wittenberg University, Springfield, Ohio, and formerly of Ohio State University, focused on movie characters with guns. The experiment included 104 children (52 pairs of siblings, cousins, step-siblings or friends) between the ages of 8 and 12. Each pair was randomly selected to watch a 20-minute edited version of the PG-rated films "The Rocketeer" or "National Treasure" that did or did not contain guns. Scenes in the [movies](#) showing guns were edited out for the no-gun version but the action and narrative of the film were not altered.

After watching the movie, the children were taken to a different room with a cabinet full of toys and they were told they could play with any of the toys and games in the room. One drawer of the cabinet contained a real 0.38-caliber handgun that had been modified so it could not fire, although the gun's hammer and trigger were still functional. The children had 20 minutes to play in the room together with the door closed.

Of the 52 pairs of children, 43 pairs (82.7 percent) found the gun in the cabinet drawer; 14 pairs (26.9 percent) gave the gun to a research assistant or told them about it; and 22 pairs (42.3 percent) had one or both children handle the gun. The type of movie clip (containing guns or not containing guns) did not influence whether children found the gun or handled it, according to the results.

However, the median number of trigger pulls among children who saw the movie containing guns was 2.8 trigger pulls compared with 0.01 trigger pulls among children who saw the movie not containing guns. Also, the median number of seconds spent holding the gun among children who saw a movie containing guns was 53.1 seconds compared with 11.1 seconds among children who saw the movie not containing guns, according to the results. Analyses suggest children who saw the movie containing guns also played more aggressively and sometimes fired the gun at people.

The study notes limitations, including only one modified handgun was available for play and a stationary hidden camera could record the entire room but not all the actions of all the participants.

"The present experiment aimed to understand the connection between exposure to gun violence in the media and interest in and playing with guns in the real world. We believe that these data are a compelling start to the conversation on the various factors that can increase children's interest in guns and violence," the article concludes.

More information: *JAMA Pediatrics* (2017). [DOI: 10.1001/jamapediatrics.2017.2229](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2017.2229)

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