

New research examines association between gun access and adolescent health

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A new study found that personal gun access was associated with depression, suicidal ideation and perceiving school as unsafe, while attending a school where gun access was common was associated with

lower odds of perceiving school as unsafe. Findings from the study will be presented during the Pediatric Academic Societies (PAS) 2019 Meeting, taking place on April 24—May 1 in Baltimore.

Recent high-profile shootings have raised awareness of the health effects of both [access](#) and exposure to firearms and firearm violence among youth and adolescents. Access to guns and perceived unsafe school environments have been associated with gun-related injury, depression and suicidality among adolescents. Whether widespread acceptance of guns among peers alters these associations, however, is unknown.

When interaction terms were included in the models, the association between individual gun access and [suicidal ideation](#) was weaker when attending a school where gun access was more common. Additionally, as access to guns within a [school](#) was more common, the odds of poor general health decreased for students with personal gun access but increased for students with no personal gun access.

"For better or for worse, guns are an important part of American culture," said Samantha Chung, one of the authors of the study. "Some studies have shown that having a gun in the home is associated with poor mental health among adolescents. We wanted to study how overall gun access in adolescents' communities might also impact their mental health. We found that it probably does, but the effects are complex and may go in both directions."

The study concluded that gun access is a complex [social phenomenon](#). In an otherwise low-access environment, personal gun access may signify a high-risk physical and mental state. In schools where access to guns is common, however, personal gun access may signify social belonging that might reduce potential negative [health](#) effects of guns. Although overall evidence that widespread gun access is harmful remains clear, our findings suggest that nuance based on local cultural norms may be

significant.

More information: Chung will present findings from "Gun Access and Adolescent Health: Safety in Numbers?" on Monday, April 29 at 2:15 p.m. EDT.

Provided by American Pediatric Society

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