

# Many kids in rural U.S. are all too familiar with handguns

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(HealthDay)—About one-third of boys and 10% of girls in rural U.S.

communities have carried a handgun, a new study finds. Many started carrying as early as sixth grade.

This study "provides evidence that youth handgun carrying in these settings is not uncommon," said lead author Dr. Ali Rowhani-Rahbar. He is an associate professor of epidemiology at the University of Washington School of Public Health.

Rowhani-Rahbar and his team found that this practice was consistently associated with gun-positive attitudes and having friends who carry handguns.

"Youth handgun carrying and firearm violence are often presented as an exclusively inner-city problem," Rowhani-Rahbar said in a university news release.

"However, that focus should not come at the cost of ignoring non-urban settings. Indeed, youth in some rural areas experience similar or even higher rates of handgun carrying and certain forms of interpersonal violence—for example, being attacked or threatened with a weapon—than their counterparts in urban areas," he pointed out.

The study analyzed survey questionnaires from about 2,000 kids in [rural communities](#) in seven states from 2005 to 2012. The communities studied were not engaged in the university's Communities That Care prevention program, which has been found to reduce risky behaviors among adolescents.

"We looked at handgun questions only in the control communities, those that did not receive the risk prevention program," said Rowhani-Rahbar. "This is because we did not want to measure the effect of the Communities That Care intervention in this study. We wanted to characterize the age at initiation, prevalence and patterns of handgun

carrying in the absence of the intervention."

The researchers found that in the sixth grade, nearly 12% of boys and almost 3% of girls had carried a handgun within the past year. And from sixth grade to age 19, about 34% of males and nearly 10% of females carried at least once.

Youth exposure to guns is dangerous. Firearm injury is only second to vehicle crashes as a leading cause of death among American youth. Additionally, firearm carrying is associated with bullying, physical fighting and assault, the researchers said in background notes.

The team next plans to study risk of violence or injury among rural [youth](#) who carry handguns.

The study was recently published in the *Journal of Adolescent Health*.

**More information:** The University of Michigan has more on [youth firearm injury](#).

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