

Can better gun safety practices improve teen suicide rates?

September 27 2021



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A new study conducted by Georgia State University researchers examining the risks of adolescent suicide by guns found that the teens did not display typical suicidal behaviors. These findings increase the

need for strong gun safety measures in homes where teenagers live.

Led by Dr. Melissa Osborne, clinical assistant professor of nursing in the Byrdine F. Lewis College of Nursing and Health Professions, the researchers used data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS) to conduct the study.

The study found that adolescent firearm suicides fell into three categories based on data from the NVDRS. The first group was the largest and consisted of teenagers with an overall low-risk of having common risk factors for [suicide](#). The second group contained those struggling with [mental health problems](#), including depression and suicidal behavior. The final group, the smallest, was comprised of adolescents who were having difficulties at school. The researchers found substance abuse relatively low in all three groups.

Forty percent of the teenagers committing suicide used guns, but the team found that no research studied the risk patterns of adolescent suicide by gun. Dr. Osborne and her colleagues looked for corresponding factors, including a history of depression and suicidal thoughts and trouble in school, which might lead to gun suicide, in order to identify these patterns. Their results showed that half of adolescents who died by firearm suicide were in the group with a low likelihood of having common risk factors for suicide, and Black and male adolescents were at greater odds of being in this group.

"Firearm-owning parents are more uniquely positioned to increase the safety of their children in the home and reduce the risk of suicide by implementing safe storage practices," said Dr. Osborne, who is trained as an epidemiologist.

Study results showed that teens who die by suicide using guns may show

fewer warning signs like [mental health issues](#) than teens who die by suicide using other methods. Gun availability could contribute to this, as gun-owning parents loosen safety practices as children grow up. Combined with the poor impulse control and decision-making in the still-developing [adolescent](#) mind, gun storage safety should still be a priority at home.

"Clearly, more research on suicide prevention in teenagers and how gun availability plays a role in potential child death is warranted. The current findings should encourage clinicians who work with parents in any capacity to offer effective communication about best practices in gun safety and storage. This is imperative to prevent child injury and suicide," said Dr. Shannon Self-Brown, professor and department chair of Health Policy and Behavioral Sciences in the School of Public Health.

Provided by Georgia State University

Citation: Can better gun safety practices improve teen suicide rates? (2021, September 27) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-09-gun-safety-teen-suicide.html>

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