

Gun-related spinal cord injury in childhood brings hardship later

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(HealthDay)—Spinal cord injuries in childhood are devastating no

matter how they happen, but new research suggests that kids felled by gunshots are even worse off than those who suffer such an injury nonviolently.

About 13% of [spinal cord injuries](#) in U.S. children are gun-related.

"Gunshot-related spinal cord injuries have serious social and [economic consequences](#) in adulthood well beyond [physical disability](#) and reducing them has not been a research priority, nor an adequately investigated public health concern," said lead author Dr. Jessica Prunte, an assistant professor of pediatric physical medicine and rehabilitation at the University of Michigan Health's C.S. Mott Children's Hospital.

In this study, the researchers interviewed 45 adults with childhood spinal cord injuries, including 23 who were injured by guns. Nearly 90% of the study participants with nonviolent injuries had at least some [college education](#), compared with fewer than 60% of those injured by guns.

More than two-thirds of those [injured by guns](#) earned less than \$25,000 a year, compared with 26% of those with nonviolent injuries. That amount is below the U.S. poverty line for a four-person family, the study authors noted.

The researchers also found that nearly 81% of those with gunshot-related spinal cord injuries were from minority backgrounds, compared to 15.8% of those with nonviolent injuries, according to the study published recently in the *Journal of Spinal Cord Medicine*.

"Black and Hispanic children have a higher risk of gun-related injuries and can also experience poverty, limited access to health care and discrimination," Prunte said in a hospital news release.

"Those are the same factors that continue to affect people as they get

older and place them at risk for poor health outcomes. The lifetime costs of these types of injuries lends weight to the fact that primary prevention needs to be key here," she said. "If we can stop a 3-year-old from getting injured, that is much better than trying to rehab them after the [injury](#)."

The study did not prove these injuries cause later hardships; it only found an association between the two.

When treating patients with gun-related spinal cord injuries, "we need to be more aware of these long-term risks of not going to college or earning as much and provide them with extra resources like vocational rehab, counseling and school modifications," Pruento said.

Even though adults with gun-related [spinal cord injuries](#) have lower levels of education and lower incomes, their life satisfaction wasn't significantly affected, the study found.

"As clinicians, we would like to think that the rehabilitation work they went through contributed to maintaining quality of life, but the reasons are unclear," Pruento said. "These patients were able to cope with their injuries and find [life satisfaction](#), which is great news for our patients and their families."

More information: The U.S. National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke has more on [spinal cord injury](#).

Jessica Pruento et al, Adult outcomes for children who sustained firearm-related spinal cord injuries, *The Journal of Spinal Cord Medicine* (2021). [DOI: 10.1080/10790268.2021.1943250](https://doi.org/10.1080/10790268.2021.1943250)

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