Most children surveyed couldn't tell real guns from toy guns

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A new study found that a majority of parents and caregivers, including firearm owners, said they were confident their children could tell a real gun apart from a toy gun. The children themselves also said they thought they could recognize the difference. But when shown side-by-side photos of actual and fake (toy) firearms, only 41 percent of children between ages 7 and 17 years old identified both correctly.

The study abstract, "A Comparison of Parental Firearm Storage Patterns and Children's Access to Firearms," will be presented on Monday, Nov. 5, during the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) 2018 National Conference & Exhibition in Orlando, Fla.

"One of the most dramatic findings was how easily caregivers and children can confuse real guns with today's realistic-looking toy guns," said Kiesha Fraser Doh, MD Assistant Professor of Pediatrics and Emergency Medicine Physician at Emory University School of Medicine. "Especially considering gun owners surveyed were nearly twice as likely as non-gun owners to let their children play with toy guns, safe storage of firearms in homes where children play is critical."

For the study, Fraser Doh and her colleagues surveyed 297 caregiver-child pairs visiting one of three pediatric emergency departments — 2 suburban and 1 urban — in the southeastern United States, over a three-month period in 2017. Gun owners represented 25 percent of respondents, and they were significantly more likely to be white, have an annual income of greater than $50,000, and some college education, compared with non-gun owners. Gun owners were also more likely to allow their child to play with toy guns, (51 percent, compared with 26 percent of non-gun owners).

In addition to asking about toy guns, the researchers asked all the caregivers how easily they thought their child could access a real gun. Few caregivers (5 percent, overall) felt their child could obtain a gun within 24 hours. However, results show that 14 percent of the children whose caregivers owned guns and 4 percent of children whose caregivers didn't own a gun, said they could access a gun within a day.

Among the study's firearm owners, most recruited from the suburban hospitals, fewer than half (34 percent) stored their gun locked, unloaded, and separate from ammunition as recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). In addition,
among children who reported having a gun in the home 53 percent knew where it was stored and 45 percent knew where ammunition was stored.

Provided by American Academy of Pediatrics

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