

OREGON HEALTH TRENDS

Center for Health Statistics (503) 731-4354
 STATE OF OREGON • HEALTH DIVISION • DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES

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Weapons, Schools, and Kids

What is the Risk?

An American child dies of gunshot wounds every one and one-half hours -- the equivalent of an entire school classroom every two days.¹ Knives, clubs, and other weapons claim additional youth. An Oregon high school-aged youth is fatally shot about once every 10-11 days, either intentionally or unintentionally.² Oregon death certificate data show a 42 percent increase in the gunshot death rate for Oregon 14- to 18-year-olds between 1984-86 and 1994-96 and a 105 percent increase for fatal injuries from handguns.

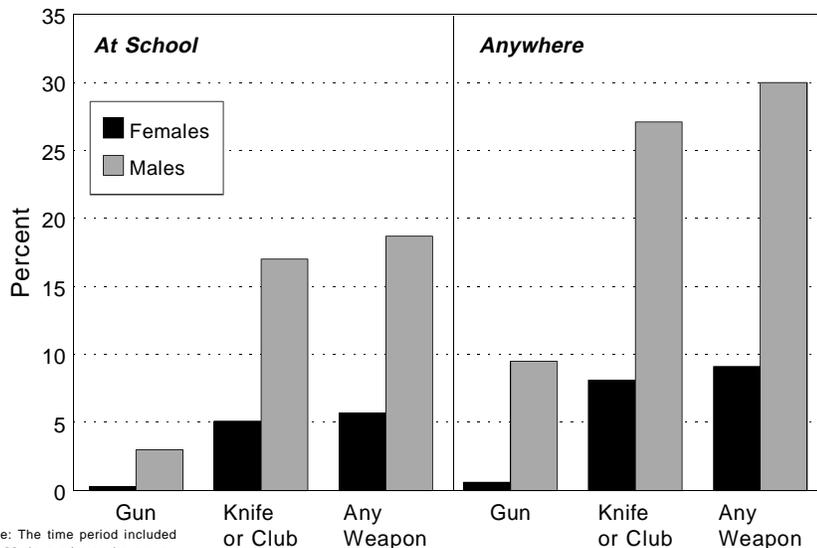
During the 1997 school year, at least 19,000 Oregon high school stu-

dents are estimated to have carried guns, knives, and/or clubs to school (at least once during the previous 30 days) for use as weapons.³ Thirty thousand carried weapons at school or elsewhere. These weapons, particularly firearms, are a danger not only to other students, but to all Oregonians.

Self-reported data from the 1997 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) show that risk factors from multiple domains (demographic, environmental, and behavioral) are associated with weapon-carrying both in and out of school, and that risk-taking behaviors cluster in adolescents in an array of problem behaviors: adolescents

The deaths of nearly one in four 14-18 year old Oregonians resulted from gunshot wounds.

Figure 1. Weapon-carrying by Gender and Weapon Type, Oregon High School Students, YRBS, 1997



*Percentage increase in gunshot death rates for Oregon 14- to 18-year-olds between 1984-86 and 1994-96:
 Suicides — 31%;
 Unintentional Injuries — 47%;
 Homicides — 88%.*

Firearms are second only to motor vehicles in claiming the lives of Oregonian youth.

METHODOLOGY

All school superintendents for each of Oregon's 230 public schools with grades 9, 10, 11, or 12 were invited to participate in the 1997 YRBS. Participation required permission at the district and school level, as well as from the students and their parents. After data editing, the convenience sample included 32,378 usable surveys, or 21% of the state's 157,769 high school students. Each student's survey was assigned a weight based on their school's size and socioeconomic ranking, to more accurately represent Oregon's population of high school students. In the strictest statistical sense, these data cannot be referred to as typical of Oregon teens, as the schools were not randomly chosen. For more information, see the full report.

who participate in one form of risk-taking behavior are more likely to also be involved in other forms of risky behavior. This newsletter summarizes information about the demographic and behavioral characteristics of weapon carriers and more specifically focuses on weapon-carrying in the schools; it is a summary of the report *Weapons and Oregon Teens: What is the Risk?*

STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS

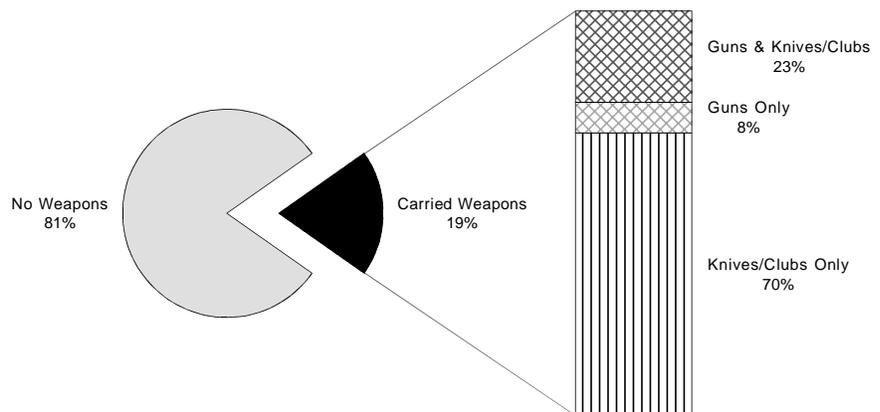
In a 1995 national survey of 11- to 17-year-olds, 24 percent cited gangs, violence, and guns as being the biggest threats to their health. Data from the 1997 Oregon YRBS provide a sense of why these fears arise – the prevalence of weapon-carrying in our schools is substantial. Thousands said they carried weapons to school. Every eighth Oregon high school student carried a gun, knife, club or other weapon to school at least once during the prior 30 days. Every fifth student carried a weapon to school or elsewhere. Statewide, an estimated 3,000 high school students took a gun to school during the previous 30 days while an estimated 9,000 carried guns to school or elsewhere.

Demographic Characteristics

Sex. Males of all ages more often engage in risky behaviors than females of a similar age, and this penchant is apparent in the prevalence of weapon-carrying at school. Nineteen percent of male high school students reported carrying guns, knives or clubs to school for use as weapons during one or more of the 30 days preceding the survey, compared to just 6 percent of females (Table 1). About one-third of students who carried guns for use as a weapon, took them to school, 3.0 percent of males and 0.6 percent of females.

Race/ethnicity. Two groups, American Indians and African-Americans, were more likely than non-Hispanic whites to carry weapons to school (21% and 18%, vs. 12%). African-Americans and American Indians were more than twice as likely as whites to carry guns anywhere, but were four to five times more likely to carry them to school, 6.7 percent and 5.0 percent, respectively, compared to 1.3 percent. Although Black and Indian males were about equally likely to carry guns to school, Black females were over four times more likely to do so than their

Figure 2. Proportion of Oregon High School Students Carrying Weapons Anywhere During the Previous 30 Days, YRBS, 1997



Note: Column percentages do not total 100% due to rounding.

Indian counterparts and 17 times more likely than their white counterparts.

The Student's Environment

School Environment. Contrary to what might be expected, weapon-carrying was more common among students in small high schools than larger ones. One in five students who attended school where the student body numbered less than 100 carried weapons compared to one in eight where the student body was 800 or greater (18% vs. 12%). Students in schools with a student body numbering less than 100 were more than half-again as likely to take guns to school than were those in schools where the student body totaled 1,200 or more (2.5% vs. 1.6%).

Poverty and behavior are linked. The Oregon Department of Education assigns a numeric rank to each school in the state based on the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced price lunch, the student mobility rate, student attendance rate, and the level of education of the most educated parent. Students attending schools in the three lowest socioeconomic groups were 30-40 percent more likely to carry

weapons to school than were those in the highest socioeconomic group (13-14% vs. 10%) and were almost twice as likely to carry guns to school than were those in the highest group (2.1% vs. 1.2%).

Home Environment. Although most students are brought up in healthy and nurturing environments, many are not. Only one survey question asks directly about the student's home environment, but it and three other questions provide an indication of the student's experiences while growing up. Students who had no adults they could go to discuss their problems, who had been physically and/or sexually abused,⁴ and who lived in homes where tobacco smoke was present were more likely to be weapon carriers than were others. A fuller discussion of the relationship between the home environment and student behavior is included in the recent report *Suicidal Behavior: A Survey of Oregon High School Students, 1997*, also published by the Center for Health Statistics.

Not surprisingly, the stronger the adult social support network, the less likely children were to carry weapons.

Seventy-one percent of all fatal gunshot injuries to youth occurred in a home.

Figure 3. Weapon-carrying by Number of Caring Adults, Oregon High School Students, YRBS, 1997

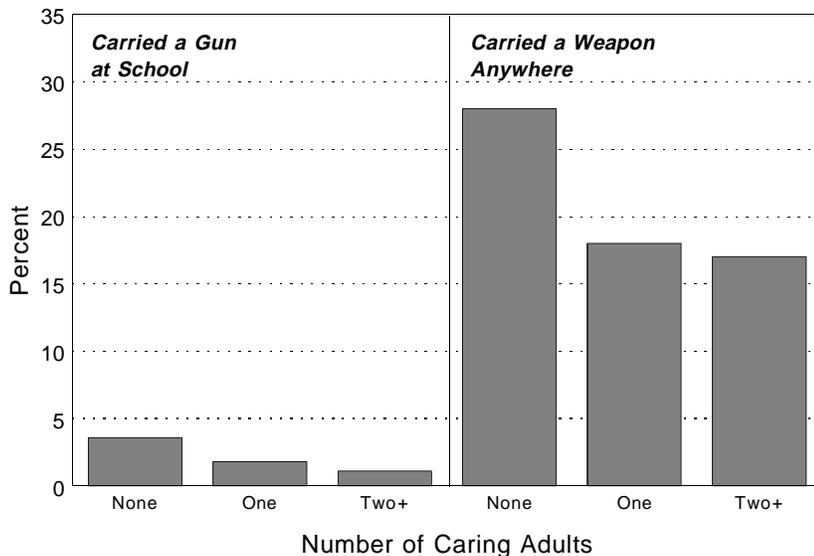


TABLE 1. Percentage of Students Who Carried Weapons During the Previous 30 Days, by Demographic and Behavioral Characteristics, Oregon YRBS, 1997 (Part 1)¹

Characteristic	% with Characteristic	Carried a Weapon to School			Carried a Gun to School		
		Total	M	F	Total	M	F
TOTAL	100	12	19	6	1.8	3.0	0.6
GRADE							
9	30	12	19	6	1.8	3.0	0.6
10	28	13	19	7	1.8	2.8	0.7
11	23	12	19	5	1.8	3.3	0.4
12	19	11	18	5	1.6	2.8	0.5
RACE/ETHNICITY							
White	84	12	18	5	1.3	2.4	0.3
African American	2	18	20	15	6.7	8.3	5.1
Hispanic	5	13	18	8	3.9	5.8	2.0
Asian	3	10	15	5	3.0	5.3	0.5
American Indian	2	21	30	11	5.0	8.5	1.2
Other	4	17	24	11	3.3	4.9	1.6
ENROLLMENT LEVEL							
<100	2	18	28	8	2.5	3.6	1.3
100 - 399	13	13	21	5	1.8	3.2	0.4
400 - 799	15	14	22	6	1.7	3.0	0.5
800 - 1199	18	12	18	5	2.1	3.7	0.7
1200+	53	12	17	6	1.6	2.6	0.6
SCHOOL SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS²							
1 (lowest)	12	14	21	6	2.2	3.7	0.6
2	24	14	22	6	2.2	3.7	0.7
3	28	13	20	6	1.9	3.2	0.6
4 (highest)	36	10	15	5	1.2	2.0	0.4
CARING ADULTS							
None	16	19	25	11	3.6	5.4	1.4
1	19	12	20	6	1.8	3.6	0.6
2+	35	10	16	4	1.1	2.0	0.3
EVER PHYSICALLY ABUSED							
No	73	8	14	3	0.9	1.6	0.3
Yes	27	20	30	12	3.1	5.7	1.0
SMOKERS IN THE HOUSEHOLD							
None	63	11	17	5	1.3	2.2	0.4
Yes-but not inside	18	13	20	6	2.0	3.7	0.5
Yes-inside	19	16	24	8	2.9	4.7	1.1
NUMBER OF CIGARETTES ON DAYS SMOKED							
0	77	9	14	4	0.8	1.4	0.2
<1- 5	16	18	28	10	2.8	5.1	1.1
6 - 20	6	25	35	14	5.4	9.2	1.5
20+	1	50	60	21	27.3	35.8	5.2
NUMBER OF DAYS DRANK ALCOHOL							
0	54	7	12	3	0.5	0.8	0.2
1 - 5	32	13	21	7	1.2	2.4	0.3
6 - 19	13	25	34	14	5.0	7.6	2.0
20+	2	41	50	22	20.4	26.8	7.8
NUMBER OF DAYS BINGED ON ALCOHOL³							
0	69	9	14	4	0.7	1.2	0.2
1 - 5	24	17	25	9	2.5	4.2	0.8
6 - 19	6	27	37	13	6.9	10.2	2.4
20+	1	53	58	30	33.1	36.9	16.1
NUMBER OF TIMES USED COCAINE							
0	98	11	18	5	1.3	2.3	0.4
1 - 9	2	38	50	27	14.0	21.4	7.4
10+	<1	50	69	21	26.2	41.1	2.8

Two-thirds of Oregon students who reported bingeing on alcohol during 20 or more of the previous 30 days also carried weapons to school or elsewhere.

Percentage of Oregon weapon-carrying youth who reported binge drinking: 47.

TABLE 1. Percentage of Students Who Carried Weapons During the Previous 30 Days, by Demographic and Behavioral Characteristics, Oregon YRBS, 1997 (Part 2)¹

Characteristic	% with Characteristic	Carried a Weapon to School			Carried a Gun to School		
		Total	M	F	Total	M	F
NUMBER OF TIMES SNIFFED INHALANTS							
0	95	11	17	5	1.4	2.5	0.4
1 - 9	4	29	41	18	4.9	8.6	1.7
10+	1	59	67	46	25.7	32.4	14.9
NUMBER OF DRUGS USED⁴							
0	69	9	14	3	0.7	1.2	0.2
1	16	15	23	8	2.8	4.8	0.7
2	10	20	28	12	3.2	5.5	0.8
3	3	32	44	21	6.5	10.6	2.9
4+	1	59	72	42	27.4	36.0	15.8
NUMBER OF SEXUAL PARTNERS (LAST THREE MONTHS)							
Never had sex	65	8	13	4	0.5	0.9	0.2
Yes, but over 3 months ago	12	18	25	8	2.2	3.5	0.7
1	19	15	26	7	2.4	4.7	0.7
2	3	25	35	15	7.6	13.0	2.4
3+	2	41	49	25	23.0	29.0	10.2
HARASSED AT SCHOOL							
No	69	9	15	3	1.1	1.9	0.3
Yes	31	18	27	10	3.0	5.1	1.0
NUMBER OF TIMES THREATENED OR INJURED WITH A WEAPON AT SCHOOL							
0	93	10	16	5	0.9	1.6	0.3
1 - 5	6	33	40	22	8.7	11.7	3.9
6+	1	64	69	48	35.9	40.8	21.9
NUMBER OF PHYSICAL FIGHTS AT SCHOOL							
0	87	9	14	4	0.7	1.4	0.2
1	9	25	30	16	3.5	4.1	2.3
2 - 3	3	35	38	29	8.7	9.8	5.4
4 - 7	1	59	63	45	25.5	28.6	15.0
8+	1	70	72	60	40.8	44.2	27.0
NUMBER OF FIGHTS REQUIRING TREATMENT BY AN MD OR RN							
0	97	11	17	5	1.2	2.1	0.4
1	2	38	43	28	11.9	15.2	5.5
2+	1	55	57	48	30.7	32.1	25.0
ATTEMPTED SUICIDE							
Yes	8	26	45	17	6.3	15.3	2.3
No	92	10	17	4	1.2	2.1	0.3
NUMBER OF RISK FACTORS⁵							
0	14	4	6	1	0.1	0.1	0.0
1	28	6	10	2	0.3	0.3	0.2
2	18	11	17	4	1.0	1.7	0.3
3 - 5	33	17	26	8	2.4	4.2	0.6
6 - 7	7	30	40	20	7.0	11.4	2.6
8+	1	65	75	51	31.0	43.7	13.8

Among students who used four or more illicit substances during the previous month, one in four took guns to school.

1. Based on 32,378 weighted cases from 102 schools.
 2. The Oregon Department of Education assigns a numeric rank to each school in the state based on the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced price lunch, student mobility rate, student attendance rate, and the level of education of the most educated parent.
 3. Binging is defined as consuming five or more drinks within a two-hour period.
 4. The number of types of drugs used by students was measured with six questions. Affirmative responses to the use of injection drugs, cocaine, steroids (not under doctor's supervision), marijuana, inhalant use (glue/paint sniffing, huffing), and "any other type of illegal drug" were counted.
 5. Risk factors included physical abuse, sexual abuse, suicide attempts, fewer than two adults to talk to about problems, smoking by the student or household members, alcohol use, illicit drug use, and sexual activity within the last three months.

*Percentage of students who:
Have no caring adult
they can talk to — 16%;
Have been physically
abused — 27%;
Live with a smoker — 37%.*

*Number of children 17 or
younger witnessing domestic
violence against women in
Oregon households:
During the last year — 123,400;
At least once a month during the
last year — 81,400.*

While 10 percent of high school students who had two or more adults with whom they could discuss their problems (or their friends' problems) took weapons to school during the previous month, 19 percent who had no adults to go to, carried weapons. The figures for gun-carrying in the schools were 1.1 percent and 3.6 percent, respectively. Other studies have shown strong links between violence and low academic orientation with lack of parental affection and support.

National studies have shown that most physical abuse (72%) is perpetrated by the natural parents of a child while other parents and parent substitutes account for most of the remainder (21%). The one in four students who had been physically abused were over twice as likely to take weapons to school as were their counterparts who had not been abused (20% vs. 8%) and three times as likely to take guns to school (3.1% vs. 0.9%).

Growing up in a home where secondhand tobacco smoke is present puts children at risk of developing respiratory disorders; cigarette smoking also serves as a marker of a poorer socioeconomic environment as it is associated with lower levels of education and income. Students in these environments were more apt to take weapons to school than those in smoke-free households (16% vs. 11%). Gun-carrying at school was more than twice as common among students living amidst secondhand tobacco smoke than those living in smoke-free homes (2.9% vs. 1.3%).

In a study published earlier this year, researchers concluded that maternal smoking during pregnancy was a predictor of persistent criminal behavior in males. Even after controlling for other health, demographic, and behavioral characteristics of the parents during and after pregnancy, there

was a dose-response relationship between maternal smoking and violent and nonviolent criminal behavior of the child – the more the mother smoked, the more likely her son was to engage in criminal behavior.⁵ This increased likelihood of criminal behavior persisted until at least age 34. Maternal prenatal smoking has also been associated with other externalizing behaviors, including impulsivity, truancy, conduct disorder and attentional difficulties.

Student Mental Health

No question on the Youth Risk Behavior Survey directly asks students about their psychological health, but questions about suicidal behavior are asked and can serve as a surrogate indicator of students' emotional well-being.

Suicidal Behavior. Depressed juveniles can present a threat to both themselves and others. Students who attempted suicide within the previous 12 months prior to the survey were over twice as likely to carry weapons to school (26% vs. 10%) and more than five times as likely to take a gun to school (6.3% vs. 1.2%).

Among weapon carriers, 15.6 percent reported having attempted suicide compared to 6.8 percent of non-carriers.

Student Behavior

Weapon-carrying is strongly associated with a constellation of high-risk personal behaviors. Among the best warning signs (as revealed by the YRBS) are licit and illicit substance use, and sexual activity. Other studies have identified such deviant behaviors as selling drugs, committing nonviolent felonies, and engaging in delinquency.

Cigarette Smoking. Almost one-quarter (23%) of high school students smoked cigarettes and the more ciga-

rettes a student smoked, the more likely he or she was to also take weapons to school. Heavy smoking (20 cigarettes or more daily) is one of the most observable of warning signs that a high school student may carry weapons; one-half of students (49.7%) who smoked a pack or more a day also carried weapons to school compared to 8.6% of non-smokers, nearly a six-fold difference. As large as this contrast is, the odds of a heavy smoker taking a gun to school were far greater; 27.3% of pack-a-day (or more) smokers took guns to school compared to 0.8% of non-smokers—a 34-fold difference.

Alcohol Use. Alcohol use of any kind of is associated with weapon-carrying, but binge drinking (drinking five or more drinks within a two-hour period) in particular is strongly linked with weapon-carrying, and an especially concerning one given the potential effect of alcohol on the drinker's judgment. Frequent binge drinkers (binge drinking on 20 or more of the previous 30 days) were over six times more likely to carry a weapon to school (53.0% vs. 8.5% of

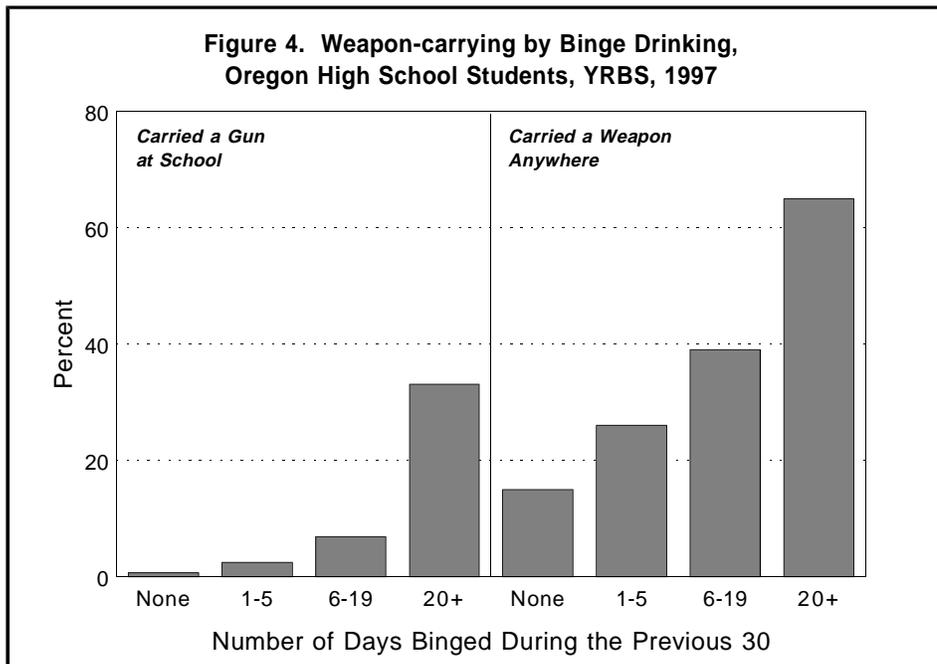
non-bingers), and 47 times more likely to have taken a firearm to school (33.1% vs. 0.7%).

A study published by the National Center for Health Statistics showed that about half of youth homicide victims had elevated blood alcohol levels at autopsy.

Illicit Drug Use. Almost one-third of students (31%) reported having used illicit drugs (including the use of inhalants such as glue or paint) during the 30 days preceding survey. Most strongly associated with weapon-carrying was the frequent use of inhalants (although any use whatsoever was linked with a marked increase in the likelihood of weapon-carrying). The minority of students who "huffed" on 10 or more of the preceding 30 days were over five times more likely to carry weapons to school than were non-abusers (59% vs. 11%) and were over 18 times more likely to take guns to school than were abstainers (25.7% vs. 1.4%).

Just as the frequent use of a given drug is associated with weapon-carrying, so too is the use of multiple drugs. The risk of weapon-carrying at

Percentage (and estimated number) of Oregon students who drank alcohol during the previous month:
 46% (73,000);
who binged:
 31% (49,000);
who binged & carried a weapon:
 8.7% (14,000).



Among Oregon students in six or more physical fights during the prior 12 months, frequent⁶ gun-carriers were 33 times more likely to be seriously injured than were non-carriers.

school increased greatly among multi-drug users, and although the proportion was highest among males, the difference between multi-drug users and abstainers was greatest for females. High school students who illicitly used four or more types of drugs were seven times more likely to carry a weapon to school (58.9% vs. 8.6%) and 39 times more likely to take a gun to school than were non-drug users (27.4% vs. 0.7%).

Sexual Behavior. Students who had multiple sexual partners during the three months preceding the survey were also more likely to have carried weapons during the previous month; 41.3 percent of those with three or more sexual partners took weapons to school compared to 8.4 percent of those who had never had sex. These multi-partner youth were 46 times more likely to take guns to school than were the majority of the students, who had not had sexual relations (23.0% vs. 0.5%).

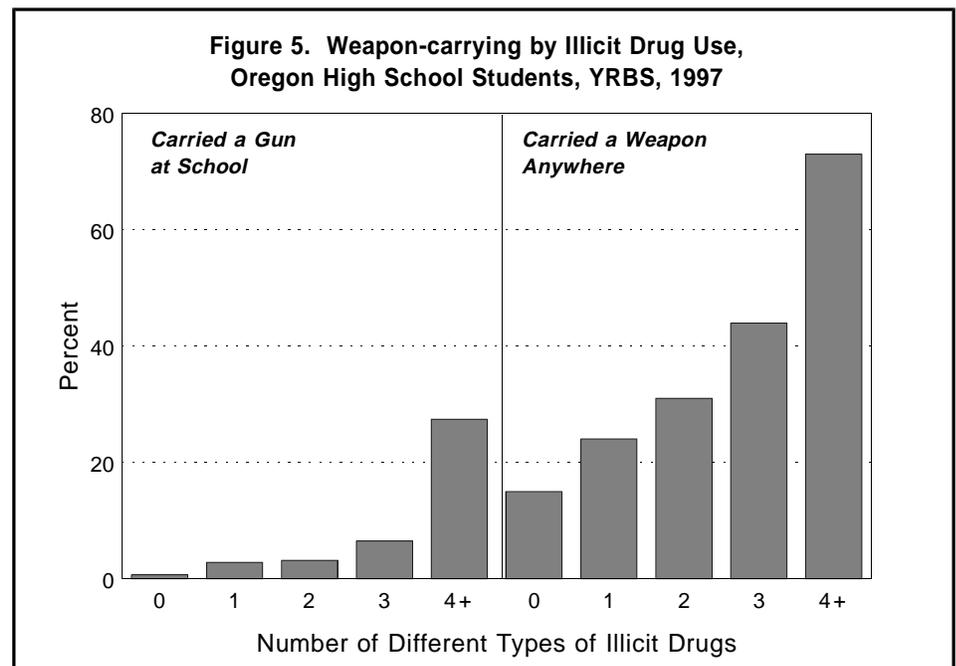
School Violence

Some researchers have reported that students carry weapons for personal safety, but others believe that

neither victimization nor fear for safety in schools is associated with weapon-carrying. Some adolescents are thought to carry guns because they may be disproportionately more likely to lead risky lives or associate with violent people. Carrying a weapon does not make a student safer from harassment or violence -- in fact, just the opposite appears to be the case.

Among Oregon students involved in a physical fight, weapon-carrying was associated with an increased likelihood of injuries requiring medical treatment by a doctor or nurse; 8.4 percent of weapon carriers were seriously injured compared to 1.4 percent of non-carriers.

Harassment. Nearly one-third of students (31%) reported being harassed at school during the previous 12 months. The data from the survey do not show whether weapon-carrying by a student occurred before or after being harassed, but in any case, compared to their non-harassed peers, harassed students were two times more likely to carry weapons to school (18.2% vs. 9.0%) and three times more likely to take guns to



school (3.0% vs. 1.1%). Among harassed students, those who were harassed for their race or for their perceived sexual orientation were most likely to carry guns to school, 10.4 percent and 6.6 percent, respectively.

Threats and Injuries. Seven percent of students reported being physically threatened or injured with a weapon while at school during the previous 12 months. Those who had been on half a dozen or more occasions were over six times more likely to take a weapon of any kind to school (64% vs. 10%) and 40 times more likely to carry a gun to school (35.9% vs. 0.9%). Students are not the only ones who are threatened; nationally, an estimated 900 teachers are threatened daily and 40 are physically attacked.

Physical Fights. Thirteen percent of students reported being in a physical fight at school during the previous 12 months, and they too were more apt to carry a weapon, particularly at school. Those involved in eight or more fights were eight times more likely to take a weapon of any kind to school (69.9% vs. 8.8%)

and were 58 times more likely to take a gun to school (40.8% vs. 0.7%). While females were generally much less likely to carry weapons than males, those involved in a large number of fights were nearly as likely to carry weapons anywhere as were fight-prone males. Physical fighting is often a precursor to other violent interactions and may become potentially fatal in the presence of a weapon.

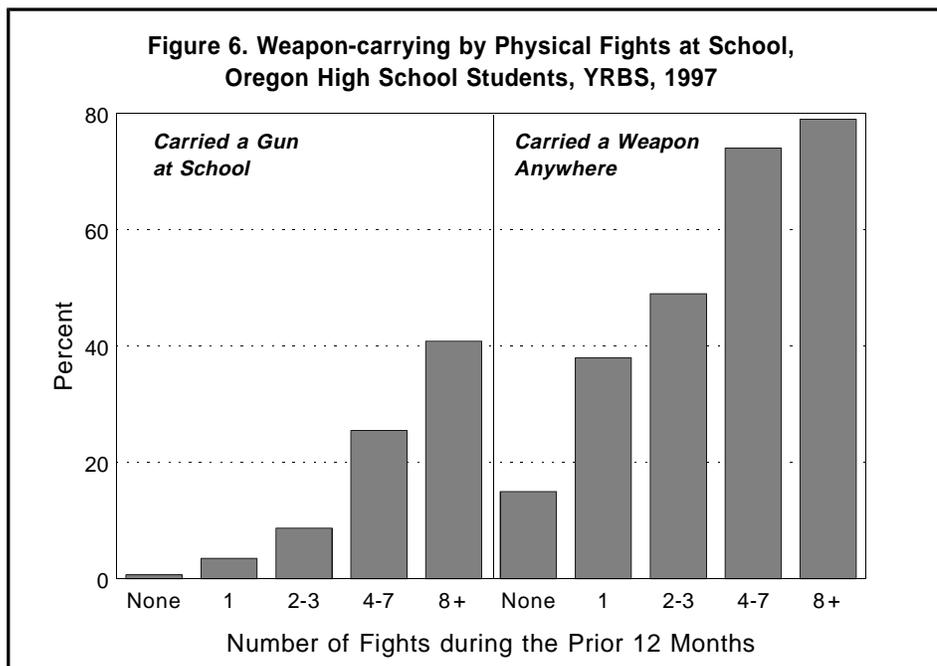
WHY STUDENTS CARRY WEAPONS

Students have been asked many times in surveys why they carry weapons, but researchers have also looked beyond their answers.

What the Students Say

A Harris survey of students reported that when asked “What is the single most important reason some students carry a weapon?” 41 percent of students answered “for protection against possible attacks by other people”; 34 percent said to “show off and impress their friends”; 10 percent responded “because it makes them feel important”; 10 percent indicated “because they are

Arrests for weapons possession by Oregon juveniles increased 44 percent during 1988-97.



Nearly two-thirds (64%) of the firearm fatalities among Oregon 14- to 18-year-olds were caused by handguns.

angry and want to hurt someone”; and 4 percent answered “because their friends carry weapons.” A survey by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company concluded that students carry weapons for four main reasons: for protection while going to school; for impressing their friends; for self-esteem; and for protection in school.

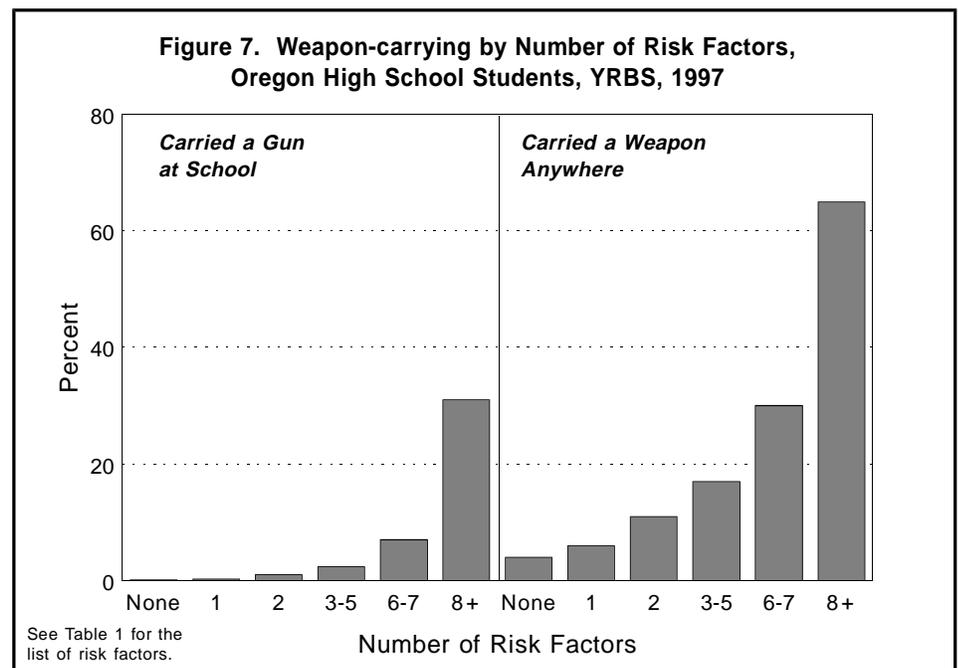
What Researchers Say

Other studies have gone beyond the answers given by the adolescents themselves. One showed that weapons are not brought to school because of a heightened need for protection, but instead may be in response to normative influences in school. Another showed that weapon-carrying at school was more strongly associated with use of violence and use of substances at school than with previous victimization and fear of attending school. A study of fifth-, seventh-, and ninth-grade students in the Cleveland public school system, found that: students perceived guns as fun; students believed that safety is achieved primarily through personal power, not by relying on

adults to change the environment; students displayed confidence in aggression and lack of confidence in their own interpersonal skills such as negotiations, assertiveness, and conflict resolution; many students believed that shame which results from an insult can be undone only through aggression. In a study of inner city junior high school students, gun-carrying appeared to be a component of highly aggressive delinquency rather than a purely defensive behavior.

SOME UNDERLYING FACTORS

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey identified many elements associated with youth weapon-carrying, only a few of which may be causative, but all of which too often form a constellation of risk factors. Students who are exposed to deleterious factors in the home or who engage in multiple risk behaviors are more likely to carry weapons. Some of these behaviors can serve as markers of potential weapon-carrying. Other factors have been widely cited as contributing to weapon-carrying by youth and its



resultant violence; these include family dynamics, the widespread availability of firearms, and the portrayal of violence as entertainment.

Family Dynamics

The survey data do not tell us why Oregon youth carry weapons, but do offer clues. The home environment precedes any risky behavior that a child may eventually engage in, and many studies have shown that a child's earliest environmental experiences affect their later behavior. Only a few questions in the YRBS survey relate to the students' home environment, but taken together, suggest that the family's socioeconomic status, communication within the family, and treatment of the child are linked to subsequent weapon-carrying and a constellation of other risky behaviors by the child. The presence of domestic violence and other dysfunctional family conduct can put youth at risk of engaging in violent behavior. A recently released state survey found that 13 percent of Oregon women interviewed were the victims of domestic physical assault, coercion, or injury during the past year; in 60

percent of these homes, children 17 or younger witnessed the violence and two-thirds saw or heard the abuse at least once per month.⁷

Gun Availability

The United States. In a survey of North American and European countries, the United States had the highest household gun ownership rate. According to a 1994 survey, an estimated 44 million Americans owned 192 million firearms, 65 million of which were handguns. In a study of Seattle high school students, 34 percent said they had easy access to handguns and 33 percent of handgun owners said they had fired at someone.

Oregon. Half of all Oregon households (51%) contain firearms, and in one in six of the households (16%) where both children and guns were present, the guns were loaded and unlocked (see page 16).

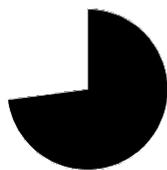
Video

The National Institute of Mental Health has concluded that "there is increasing consensus among the research community that violence on

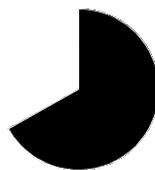
During 1990-96, four times as many Oregon infants and toddlers were shot to death than were police officers who died in the line of duty.

Figure 8. Selected Behavioral Indicators of Possible Weapon-carrying, Oregon High School Students, YRBS, 1997

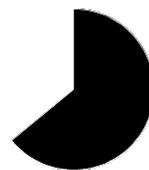
Percentage That Carried Weapons Anywhere



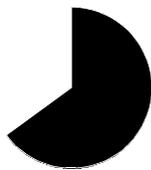
Used 4+ Illicit Drugs - 73%



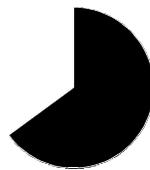
Abused Inhalants 10+ Times - 67%



Used Cocaine 10+ Times - 66%



Smoked 20+ Cigarettes a Day - 65%



Binged on Alcohol 20+ Days - 65%



Three or More Sex Partners - 55%

Note: See Table 1 for durations of risk factors.

Gunshot Deaths

Both gun deaths in general, and homicides in particular, have become increasingly common in Oregon during the past decade. Although the increases in the state are not as large as those seen nationally, they are dramatic, nonetheless. Between 1984-86 and 1994-96, the death rate for Oregon youth ages 10-19 dying from gunshot wounds increased 26 percent. Nationally, the figure was 65 percent. Had Oregon's gunshot death rate remained unchanged since 1984-86, 29 fewer Oregon youth would have been shot to death during 1994-96. Although higher than a decade earlier, the death rate has edged downward recently.

Both Oregon youth (ages 10-19) living east of the Cascade Range and those living in coastal counties were 39 percent more likely to die from gunshot wounds than those residing in non-coastal western Oregon counties. Multiple factors probably play a part in these higher rates, including the higher prevalence of household gun ownership (see page 16), less readily available medical care for gunshot trauma, and local culture.

During 1987-96, the gunshot death rates among Oregon 10- to 19-year-olds, ranged from 4.4 per 100,000 10- to 19-year-olds in Washington County to 23.3 in Jefferson County, a five-fold difference; the Oregon rate was 9.7.

Year	Age		
	10-14	15-19	10-19
1984-86	3.9	12.6	8.4
1994-96	3.2	18.2	10.6
% change	-18	44	26

Note: Rates are per 100,000 population.

County	All Ages		Ages 10-19	
	Number	Rate	Number	Rate
Oregon	3,987	13.6	397	9.7
Baker	43	27.2	5	21.7
Benton	56	7.7	7	6.0
Clackamas	302	10.5	21	4.8
Clatsop	50	14.8	6	12.4
Columbia	39	10.2	3	*
Coos	105	17.2	12	13.6
Crook	26	17.7	2	*
Curry	62	30.5	4	*
Deschutes	127	15.7	10	8.8
Douglas	153	16.0	20	14.0
Gilliam	1	*	0	*
Grant	21	26.0	0	*
Harney	11	15.4	2	*
Hood River	17	9.7	3	*
Jackson	240	15.7	13	6.1
Jefferson	21	14.8	5	23.3
Josephine	147	22.3	11	12.4
Klamath	120	20.2	13	14.8
Lake	17	23.1	4	*
Lane	355	12.3	40	9.7
Lincoln	59	14.8	6	12.0
Linn	134	14.3	12	8.7
Malheur	34	12.6	2	*
Marion	297	12.5	29	8.7
Morrow	11	13.5	1	*
Multnomah	907	15.1	104	14.7
Polk	61	11.8	7	9.4
Sherman	4	20.8	1	*
Tillamook	36	16.2	2	*
Umatilla	89	14.5	8	8.6
Union	41	17.1	6	15.9
Wallowa	20	28.0	3	*
Wasco	42	19.2	5	14.9
Washington	258	7.8	20	4.4
Wheeler	6	40.8	1	*
Yamhill	75	11.1	9	8.7
Coastal Counties	312	17.6	30	12.5
Other Western	3,024	12.7	296	9.0
East of Cascades	651	17.1	71	12.5

Note: Rates are per 100,000 population; rates are not shown for counties with <5 deaths.

television does lead to aggressive behavior by children and teenagers who watch the programs." Many researchers have concluded that exposure to violence as "entertainment" increases the risk of violent behavior of children. Physicians and other scientists have reported that exposure to media violence correlates with aggression, callousness, and an appetite for violence among both adults and children (who have a harder time distinguishing reality from fiction)—particularly, with the viewing of "reality" television shows (e.g., *Cops*). The widespread exposure to violence of America's youth and easy availability of guns is thought to have a predictable outcome: children who see their "heros" in the entertainment industry resolve problems with automatic weapons are more likely to see violence as a solution to their own problems. One 22-year study showed that the more television an eight-year-old watched, the greater the likelihood at age 30 that he or she would: be aggressive when drinking; commit serious crimes; and punish their own children harshly (even after controlling for other factors).

Viewing violence on the screen has been reported to have the following negative effects: it increases the viewer's fear of becoming a victim of violence, with a resultant increase in self-protective behaviors and increased mistrust of others; it desensitizes the viewer to violence, resulting in a callous attitude toward violence directed at others and a decreased likelihood of taking action to help a victim of violence; it increases the viewer's appetite for becoming involved with violence; it often demonstrates how desirable commodities can be obtained through the use of aggression and violence. Other studies have suggested that children who are heavy viewers of television are: more aggressive, more

pessimistic, less imaginative, less sympathetic, less capable students, and weigh more, than their lighter-viewing counterparts.

One researcher concluded "children learn what they see -- and unfortunately, in our country through news reports, movies, television, and everyday life ... children see violence; and they do not learn that violence is bad. Too often, they learn that violence is an acceptable way to resolve conflict; furthermore, many children, because of their home and neighborhood environments, have little opportunity to learn about alternative ways to settle disputes."⁸

PREVENTION

The National School Safety Center summarized the many firearm injury prevention strategies available. These include: reducing the availability of firearms, legislative relief, maintaining a positive school climate, community education, public awareness, teaching non-violence, conflict resolution training, peer assistance, firearms safety courses, weapon-free school zones, and counseling centers.

Availability of Guns

Guns are more likely to kill than other weapons. Even if the number of violent events remained unchanged, a drop in the proportion of these events in which guns were used would decrease the lethality of violence, resulting in fewer deaths and serious injuries. Thus, efforts to reduce the numbers of deaths and injuries from firearms should focus on the firearms themselves, as well as on the root causes of violence.

Public education should be directed toward teaching safe gun storage/use and increasing public awareness about the risks of having a gun in the home. People have loaded firearms because they believe guns

In just one decade (1984-86 to 1994-96), the risk of being murdered for Oregon 14- to 18-year-olds nearly doubled, from 3.4 per 100,000 population to 6.2. Most of the victims were shot to death with handguns.

Oregon high school-aged students more often died from gunshot wounds than from natural causes.

The youngest child murdered with a gun during 1994-96 was two months old.

promote home safety. Gun owners must be made aware of the risks of injury posed by loaded guns to unsupervised children and adolescents. Adolescents living in homes where there is easy access to guns have been shown to be more likely to be involved in violent behavior. They are more likely to act violently towards others and are at increased risk for suicidal thoughts and attempts.

There is evidence that gun safety laws have a beneficial effect.⁹ States that have passed laws making gun owners criminally liable if someone is injured because a child gains unsupervised access to a gun have subsequently experienced a 23 percent decrease in unintentional shooting deaths among children 15 or younger.

Gun-Free Schools

Legislation. In 1994, the federal Gun Free Schools Act was signed into law. The act requires, among other actions, that schools expel for at least one year students who were caught carrying a gun, and gives schools discretion to modify the expulsion policy on a case-by-case basis should extenuating circumstances exist.

A recent report from the U.S. Department of Education provides evidence that the legislation is working; a total of 6,093 students were intercepted with dangerous weapons and expelled during the 1996-97 school year. In the majority of cases, the weapon involved was a gun.

Last summer, Gov. Kitzhaber signed into law SB 344. It requires that

Potential Warning Signs of Violence in the Adolescent

- ◆ Consistently does not listen to authority figures.
- ◆ Pays no attention to the feelings or rights of others.
- ◆ Cruel or violent towards pets or other animals.
- ◆ Mistreats people.
- ◆ Often expresses the feeling that life has treated him or her unfairly.
- ◆ Does poorly in school and often skips class.
- ◆ Misses school frequently for no identifiable reason.
- ◆ Gets suspended from, or drops out of, school.
- ◆ Drinks alcohol and/or uses drugs or inhalants.
- ◆ Severe rage for seemingly minor reasons.
- ◆ Possession and/or use of firearms and other weapons.
- ◆ Other self-injurious behaviors or threats of suicide.
- ◆ Relies upon physical violence or threats of violence to solve problems.
- ◆ Detailed threats of lethal violence.
- ◆ Joins a gang, gets involved in fighting, stealing, or destroying property.

From the brochure "Raising Children to Resist Violence: What You Can Do," a collaborative project of the American Psychological Association and American Academy of Pediatrics and "Early Warning, Timely Response: a Guide to Safe Schools" published by the Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice of the American Institutes for Research. For further discussion of these points, see <http://www.apa.org/pubinfo/apa-aap.html> and <http://www.air-dc.org/cecp/guide/earlywarning.htm>.

school employees report to the appropriate authority any person they believe has unlawfully possessed a firearm or destructive device on school grounds within the previous 120 days. Law enforcement agencies are required to conduct an investigation. The law also allows courts to detain any youth believed to have carried a firearm or destructive device on public property if probable cause exists. A mental health assessment or screening of a youth may be ordered (during which time the youth may be detained for one week).

Detection and confiscation of weapons. Schools have employed various strategies to confiscate weapons and deter students from bringing weapons on to school grounds, including random locker searches, metal detectors, and policies requiring clear plastic or mesh book bags so that weapons cannot be easily hidden. During the 1997-98 school year, 135 Oregon students were expelled for carrying firearms and/or explosive devices to school. An additional 392 students were expelled for carrying other weapons such as knives and clubs to school.

Schools should be encouraged to incorporate weapons possession situations into their school crisis plans, including the development of crisis response teams. Educators should be provided training and guidelines on how to handle individuals on campus who may be armed. Common sense would suggest that safe schools go hand in hand with safe communities and that schools that build alliances within their communities are more likely to achieve a weapon- and violence-free environment.

The Family

Programs that teach parenting skills to help parents of young children provide a nurturing home

environment and that model nonviolent methods of resolving conflict and mediating disputes are believed to be among the most promising strategies to reduce violence among youth. Parents of anti-social children often need additional assistance in developing one or more of the following skills: monitoring the whereabouts of the child, disciplining the child, negotiating in solving problems within the family, and modeling effective social skills.

Prevention Programs

Programs to reduce weapon-carrying should target frequent weapon carriers, as well as their peers and families. Because the risk of being assaulted is reportedly a motivation for weapon-carrying, programs should attempt to reduce the perceived or actual risk of victimization that underlies the need some students feel to carry weapons for self-protection.

Last year Governor Kitzhaber issued Executive Order No. EO 98-09 to develop high-risk juvenile crime prevention partnerships. State, county, and community agencies will target youth with more than one of the following risk factors:

- school failure
- substance abuse
- negative peer association
- anti-social behavior
- poor family function or support; and
- who are clearly demonstrating at-risk behaviors.

Violence and weapon-carrying are not simply school problems. Only by integrating efforts by diverse disciplines to address different facets of the problem can we shift the focus from reacting to violence to addressing its root causes. These causes are social, environmental, biological, genetic and behavioral in origin; they

include poverty, weak family structure, schools of varying quality, exposure to violence (in the media, home, and society), victimization, mental health problems, anger and poor impulse control, racism and oppression, alcohol and drug use, abuse and neglect, ready availability of firearms (e.g., poor gun storage practices by adults), and many other factors. Resolving these issues requires cooperation among not only public and private agencies, but the average citizen as well.

ENDNOTES

1. Due to space limitations, only selected citations are listed here. All others are available in the full report.
2. Of the 102 gunshot deaths of 14- to 18-year-olds during 1994-96, 57 were suicides, while homicides (29), unintentional injuries (14), and gunshots of undetermined manner (2) accounted for the remainder.
3. Because the YRBS questions asked about weapon-carrying during just the 30 days prior to the survey, this figure may be an underestimate.
4. Both physical and sexual abuse are associated with weapon-carrying, but because physical abuse is more strongly associated, only it will be discussed here.
5. Brennan PA, Grekin ER, Mednick SA. Maternal smoking during pregnancy and adult male criminal outcomes. *Arch Gen Psychiatry.* 1999; 56:215-219.
6. "Frequent" means six or more times during the previous month.
7. Glick B. 1998 Oregon Violence Needs Assessment: A Report to the Oregon Governor's Council on Domestic Violence. Oregon Health Division and Multnomah County Health Department. Portland, OR. 1999.
8. Osofsky JD. Children and Youth Violence: An Overview of the Issues. In: *Children in a Violent Society.* (Osofsky JD, ed.) The Guilford Press. New York, NY. 1997.
9. Cummings P, Grossman DC, Rivara FP, et al. State gun safe storage laws and child mortality due to firearms. *JAMA.* 1997;278:1084-86.

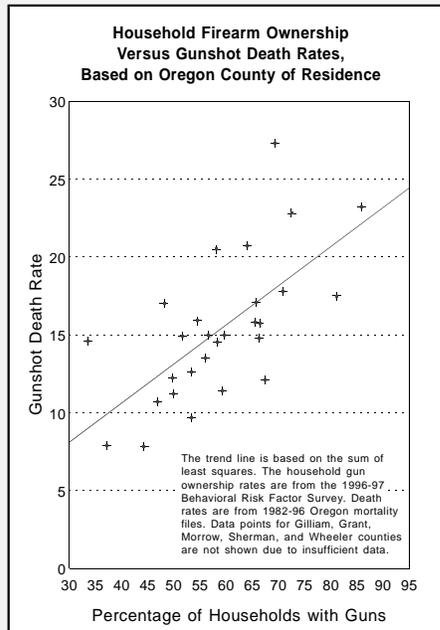
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Gun Safety and Oregonians

The potential for a tragedy exists when youths have access to weapons. Every year, several hundred Oregonians of all ages die from gunshot wounds. During 1997, the deaths of 26 Oregon children ages 0-17 resulted from gunshot wounds. Investigations of these deaths by Child Fatality Review Teams found that 19 occurred where there was access to, or lack of safe storage of, firearms. In other words, they may well have been preventable.

Firearms are present in 51 percent of all Oregon homes, including homes where children are present. In 23 percent of all homes with guns, and 16 percent of homes where both children and guns were present, the guns were kept loaded and not locked-up (based on data collected from the Oregon 1996-97 Behavioral Risk Factor Survey, a random digit-dialed telephone survey). These self-reported survey data further showed that firearms were more likely to be kept in an unsafe manner by high school dropouts, people with poor mental health, and those who engaged in other risky behaviors such as infrequent seatbelt use and binge drinking.

Elevated community gun ownership rates appear to be associated with an increased risk of a gunshot death of members within the community. The figure (below) displaying the prevalence of household gun ownership in a county versus the gunshot death rate for the same county shows a marked upward trend. In general, gun ownership rates were highest east of the Cascade Range and lowest in the Willamette Valley.



County	% of homes with guns	% of gun homes with guns stored unsafely
Oregon	51	23
Baker	86	29
Benton	44	17
Clackamas	47	24
Clatsop	56	23
Columbia	68	22
Coos	66	31
Curry	69	22
Deschutes	54	19
Douglas	66	22
Hood River	53	22
Jackson	57	17
Josephine	58	35
Klamath	64	29
Lane	53	21
Lincoln	52	18
Linn	58	31
Malheur	60	21
Marion	50	22
Multnomah	34	24
Polk	59	15
Tillamook	48	15
Umatilla	66	19
Wasco	66	21
Washington	37	19
Yamhill	49	15
Combined Counties		
Crook & Jefferson	71	30
Grant & Wheeler	78	20
Union & Wallowa	81	37
Harney & Lake	73	26
Sherman, Gilliam & Morrow	91	17

Note: Unsafe gun storage means the guns are loaded and unlocked.



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