Preventing Firearm Violence

- Over the past decade homicide rates among adolescents have increased dramatically, and, at a pace exceeding that of nonfatal assaultive behavior. The increase is almost entirely attributed to homicides involving firearms.

- Suicide rates among adolescents have more than tripled since the early 1950s and, again, the increase is attributed to suicides involving firearms.

- The primary context for youth firearm injuries is interpersonal violence, which accounts for about 60% of both fatal and nonfatal firearm injuries between children and adolescents.

- In 1992, 5,262 of five- to nineteen-year-olds in the United States died of gunshot wounds. Of these:
  o 62% of the violent acts were homicides,
  o 27% of the violent acts were suicides,
  o 9% of the violent acts were unintentional injuries, and
  o 2% of the violent acts were the result of undetermined causes.

- Firearm injuries rank as the fifth leading cause of death for 5- to 9-year-old children and the second leading cause of death for children aged 10 to 14 and 15 to 19 in 1992.

- The use of firearms by school-aged youths is much greater among those who live in the inner city.

- In a survey representative of U.S. students in the sixth through twelfth grade, 13% of respondents said someone else had seriously threatened to shoot them.


- Male school-aged children are at 7.3 times greater risk of fatal, and 6.0 times greater risk of nonfatal, firearm injuries than females. This gender gap in the risk of firearm-related fatalities increases with age.

- The presence of a gun in a violent interaction dramatically increases the likelihood that one or more of the participants will be killed.

- Many school-aged children in American society can easily obtain a firearm if they wish, even though the laws forbid the sale of firearms to minors.

- In a 1993 survey, nearly 8% of school-aged youth nationwide reported that they had carried a gun during the 30 days preceding the survey. Males were significantly more likely than females to have carried a gun. Blacks were significantly more likely than whites to have carried a gun.
The main reason given by adolescents for obtaining or carrying guns is a self-protection. Research suggests that this explanation is an oversimplification. Additional motivational factors for carrying a gun include involvement in delinquent activities, such as drug dealing, and a propensity for aggressive behavior.

More and more children are witnessing gun violence and such direct exposure can cause severe psychological trauma and adversely affect the educational climate in schools.

The beginning of the increase in lethal youth violence is associated with the widespread introduction of crack cocaine. Most researchers attribute the continued increase in lethal firearm injuries to a greater access to firearms and a greater willingness to use firearms on the part of children and their assailants.

No school is an island. What happens to children inside and on the way to and from school reflects what is happening in surrounding communities.

To understand the problem of guns and gun violence in schools, the violence problem in its larger social context must first be understood.

The information for this fact sheet was excerpted from the following book chapter. *Violence in American Schools* was developed by CSPV through a grant from the W.T. Grant Foundation:


For more information on how to obtain a copy of this book, please contact Cambridge University Press, 110 Midland Avenue, Port Chester, NY 10573. Telephone: (800) 872-7423, E-mail: orders@cup.org, or URL: www.cup.org.