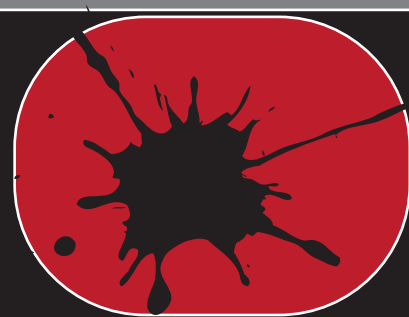


TEEN FIREARM SUICIDE: STOPPING A GROWING EPIDEMIC IN AMERICA

POLICY BRIEF BY ZOE HOLLERAN



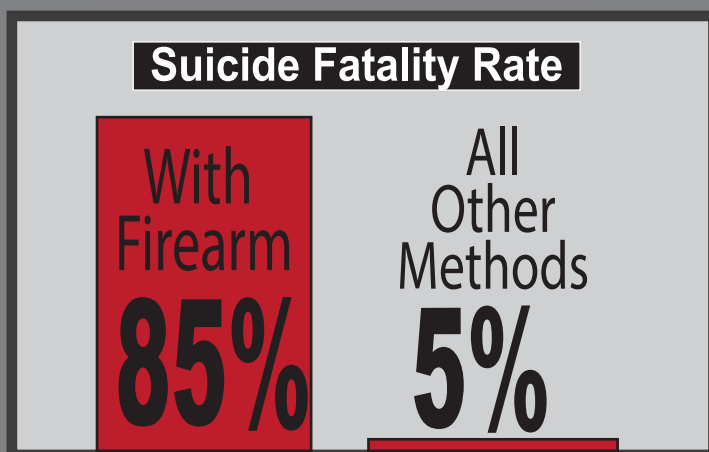
BACKGROUND

- Suicide has surpassed homicide to become the **2nd** leading cause of death among youth ages 14-19, only falling behind unintentional injury.²
- Since 2010, the teen firearm suicide rate has increased by **61%**.
- Today, more than **1/2** of teen suicides are committed using a gun.³

HOW DOES THIS IMPACT US?

- There are strong ethical impacts of teen suicide: a clinical study showed those impacted by suicide loss are "at higher risk of developing major depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and suicidal behaviors, as well as a prolonged form of grief known as *complicated grief*."¹²
- Economic impacts are also very strong. Studies show that the average cost of one teen suicide on the economy is \$2,012,476 -- the highest out of every other age group. This number combines both direct and indirect costs. While direct costs include things such as medical treatment for injuries, the indirect costs make up 97% of total economic costs from suicides. These include the net value of future salaries and wages, fringe benefits, and the value of household productivity lost or reduced by the suicide.¹⁰

WHY FOCUS ON GUNS?



- Although firearms are used in less than 6% of all suicides, they make up 1/2 of the deaths because they are so fatal. 85% of people who attempt suicide with a gun will die, giving it the highest fatality rate of all other methods. The lethality of firearms is what makes them so dangerous, especially for teens.³
- Studies show that although there may be warning signs prior to a suicide attempt, almost half of all survivors report less than 10 minutes of deliberation between the thought of suicide and the attempt. This is especially concerning for teens because they can often be very emotional and quick to make rash decisions. If teens have easy access to firearms, they are even more capable of making that fatal decision.⁸



Establishing a Federal C.A.P. Law



WHAT IS C.A.P.?

- Child Access Prevention strategies target the restriction of youth accessibility to firearms, especially in their homes. The main goal of CAP Laws is to hold gun owners accountable for safe storage of firearms, and impose liability when they fail to do so. GLC, 2018

WHY C.A.P.?

- **80%** of guns used by teens to commit suicide are kept in the home of a relative, parent, or friend. Too often, people leave their gun in plain sight, in a case that is unlocked, and even already loaded.³
- **4.6 million** minors in the US live in homes with at least one loaded, unlocked firearm.⁵
- Parents are unaware: in a 2010 survey, **73%** of children reported knowing where their parents stored guns, and 36% of these youth reported having handled these weapons themselves.¹

FUTURE BENEFITS

- When considering the effects of a CAP law, it is important to keep in mind that the benefits would not be received until farther into the future. Because the law would only punish people after a minor has already used their gun, in the short-term, lives may continue to be lost before improvements begin to be made. In the long-term, however, after witnessing these punishments, people would be more cautious about storing their weapons, which would result in the benefit of less suicides, making it a successful policy effort from a public policy standpoint.⁹

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- **Political Feasibility:** The stigma of “gun control” could likely be an issue. Although, with CAP laws, rather than rights being restricted, children’s safety is just being protected. The welfare of children is inarguable across partisan lines.⁷
- **Social Acceptability:** To society, it might seem as if the law is essentially “allowing” kids to continue committing suicide in order to punish people who allowed them access. Often, the public only considers short-run effects.⁶

DO THESE LAWS WORK?

- Studies have shown that state-level CAP laws are directly linked with decrease in number of youth suicides.⁴
- In 2004, a study showed that CAP laws were associated with a 8.3% decrease in teen suicide within the first year of implementation.¹¹

CREATING FEDERAL POLICY

- Present in 29 states today, CAP laws have a variety of forms. The type which the federal government should look to is as follows: After a minor has used a firearm in any way, this law would impose criminal liability upon the gun owner if it is determined that the minor gained access because the firearm was improperly stored.⁵

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