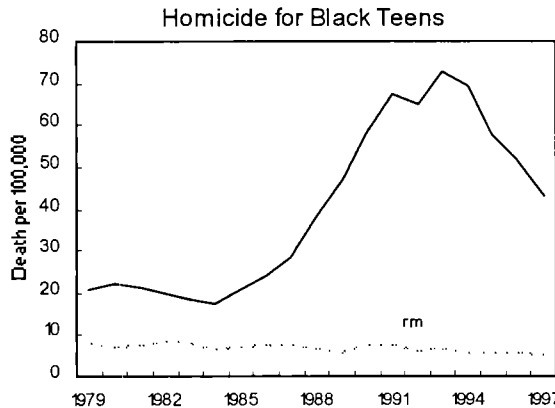
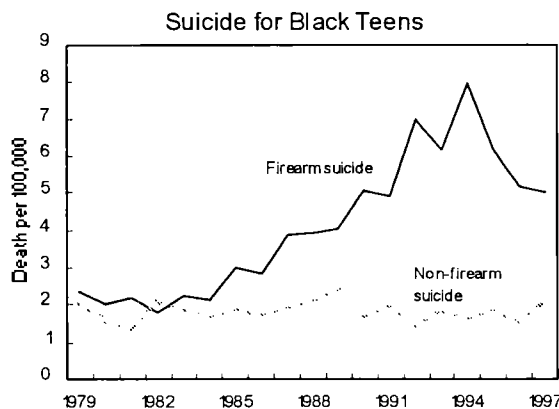


Harm to teens often stems from their own behavior and the behavior of those around them. The most visible and distressing example concerns suicide and homicide. In 1997, suicide and homicide were the second and third leading causes of death among teens after accidents (check). And although both suicide and homicide are fairly rare events for teens (around 1 per 10,000 teens per year), because so many of these deaths may be preventable, it is important to look at recent trends in teen violence and their proximate causes to help find strategies that will reduce the number of such tragedies.



As with many of the issues we discuss in this report, there are numerous facets to this issue that cannot be treated in a page or two. Here we focus on one extremely important, policy-relevant factor—the role of guns. Guns are far and away the most common means of fatal teen violence, used in 85% of teen homicides and 63% of teen suicides. Moreover, changes in gun availability and gun possession are closely tied to recent teen homicide and suicide trends, in particular, the sharp rise gun-related deaths among teens that began in the mid-1980s. Although the patterns presented below apply to the teen population at large, the following discussion of mortality trends focuses primarily on black teens because this group has been most affected by the increase in gun-related deaths.



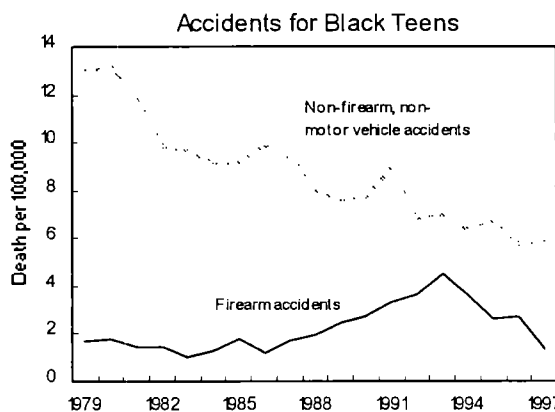
Blumstein and Cork (1996) link the

In 1997, there were 2,601 homicides and 1,802 suicides among teens aged 15 to 19. Male teens composed 85 percent of homicide victims and 83 percent of suicide victims. Black teens were slightly less likely to commit suicide than white teens (7.1 per 100,000 vs. 10.0 per 100,000) while black teens are substantially more likely to be homicide victims than white teens (48.4 per 100,000 vs. 7.0 per 100,000). Source: Center for Disease Control.

Recent reports have shown that although such fatal tragedies are especially rare in America's schools, recent highly visible tragedies have created a false public perception about the likelihood of homicide occurring in schools. See, "School House Hype: Two Years Later", Justice Policy Institute/Children's Law Center, April, 2000.

dissemination of guns into the hands of American teenagers and young adults in the late 1980s with the advent and growth of the crack trade. Crack cocaine first arrived in large cities like Miami, Los Angeles, and New York in about 1983. After remaining fairly constant from 1975 through 1984, drug arrest rates among non-white juveniles more than doubled from 1985 to 1989. Guns were carried by teens directly involved in drug markets, but possession became far broader as other teens acquired a gun in reaction to this trend—for perceived self-protection or as a status symbol. This period saw a dramatic proliferation of guns: domestic production of pistols, the type of gun most commonly traced to teens by law enforcement, more than tripled to 2.3 million units in 1993. Consistent with this presumed increase in teen gun possession in the late 1980s, juvenile arrest rates for weapons law violations more than doubled from the mid-1980s to the early 1990s.

Examine decrease of handguns 1993-1998 and decrease in crime!

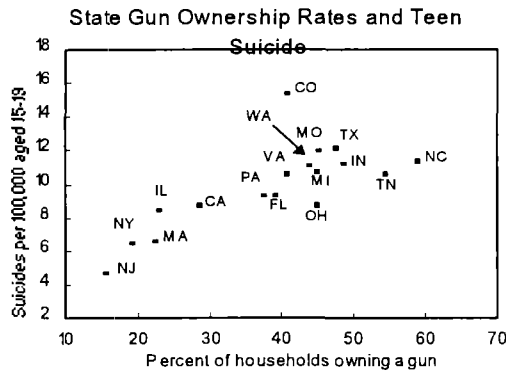


Blumstein and Cork point to a mid-1980s increase in teenage gun possession as a factor in several trends, the most disturbing of which is the rapid rise in deaths among black teens due to gun homicide (see chart xx). There are two competing explanations for the sharp rise in homicides. First, the rise in gun possession may have directly increased the lethality of confrontations among teens. Second, there may have simply been an increase in teens' inclination toward violence. If the latter explanation were the predominant influence, though, we might expect to observe an increase in both gun and non-gun homicide. In fact, non-gun homicide victimization among black teens remained roughly constant through the 1980s. Trends in black teen suicide and black teen accidental death show a similar pattern: increased gun fatalities in the early 1990s with no contemporaneous corresponding increase in non-firearm mortality rates. The rate of fatal gun accidents was more than four times as high in 1993 as in 1983 (see chart xx) and the rate of teen gun suicides increased rapidly in the mid-1980s while the non-gun suicide rate remained roughly constant for black teens. Again, evidence is consistent with a causal effect of guns on mortality rates is supported.

Blumstein, A. and Cork, D., "Linking Gun Availability to Youth Gun Violence", *Law and Contemporary Problems*, Winter 1996.

Blumstein and Cork cite a 1993 study by [getting cite from OEOB library] conducted in center-city schools in which 22 percent of students possessed guns, with 68 percent citing protection as the main reason.

"Kids and Guns", U.S. Department of Justice, March 2000.



Because guns are an especially lethal means of suicide, suicide attempts (which are often impulsive) are more likely to be successful when guns are present. A cross-state analysis of gun suicide and gun accident rates among all teens provides additional support to the idea that gun access increases suicides. In states where more households have guns, teen suicide rates are much higher (see chart xx, which presents statistics for the 17 large states for which there are ownership data). Importantly, this relationship holds because gun-related teenage suicide is higher in states with high gun ownership; non-gun teen suicides are unaffected by gun ownership. An alternative approach uses an index of gun availability developed by Philip Cook. In the four states with the highest levels of gun availability, the teen suicide rate is twice the rate in the four states with the lowest gun availability. (Fatal gun accidents occurred more than *ten times* as often among teens in the top four gun index states.)

*Examine impact on all races*

By the mid-1990s gun-related death rates were declining from historic peaks for both black teens and teens generally. It is important to understand why. One explanation consistent with the analysis we have presented here is that gun possession in more recent cohorts of teenagers is lower than in their immediate predecessors. Policies that are effective in reducing the gun access and gun possession by teens should reinforce the recent downward trend in teen mortality.

*Examine decrease in gun violence after only*

*What about analysis of state laws such as CAP?*

This analysis was prepared using: Smith, T. and Martos, L., "Attitudes Towards and Experiences With Guns: A State-level Perspective," National Opinion Research Center, December.

Gun availability in each state is estimated at the average of the percentage of homicides and suicides that are firearm related. This index, created by Philip Cook, is used to designate states with the highest average gun levels (Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi, and Kentucky) and lowest average gun levels (Hawaii, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and New Jersey) for 1988-1997. Analysis using this index follows Miller, M., Azrael, D, and Hemenway, D "Firearm Availability and Unintentional Firearm Deaths, Suicide, and Homicide Among 5-14 Year-Olds" (forthcoming).