Youth Suicide and Firearm Child Access Laws

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An analysis of 30 years of suicide data for all 50 states revealed that (1) state legislation requiring a minimum age to possess firearms does not have a significant effect on the firearm-related youth suicide rate, (2) states with laws limiting children's access to firearms have lower firearm-related youth suicide rates than states without these laws, and (3) a 1994 federal law prohibiting persons under age 18 from possessing handguns reduced the national youth suicide rate.

The Federal Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 was found to be associated with a 1.2 per 100,000 person decrease in the firearm-related youth suicide rate, which the authors considered a "very significant decline" given that the firearm-related youth suicide rate for the study period was 1.49 per 100,000. They also suggested that this law may not be the only factor contributing to the reduction in the firearm-related youth suicide rate since "a wide variety of other gun control measures were enacted at the federal level at approximately the same time as the minimum age requirements for handguns."

The analysis also found that while the federal law was associated with a drop in the national firearm-related youth unintentional death rate, state-level child access prevention and minimum age legislation was not found to have a significant effect on state unintentional death rates. Child access prevention laws are those that "impose criminal liabilities on adults who allow children to have unsupervised access to firearms."


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