Firearms Laws and Statewide Suicide Rates

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Researchers have found that states with stronger firearms laws have lower suicide rates overall and lower suicide rates by firearm. In states with high levels of gun ownership, the relationship between firearms laws and overall suicide rates is even more pronounced.

The Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence scored the strength of firearms laws, based on their likelihood to limit access to firearms, in each of the 50 states. Researchers gathered 2016 data on statewide suicide rates (overall, by firearm, and by non-firearm). After controlling for confounding factors like gun ownership levels, education, race/ethnicity, age, and population density, they looked at whether the strength of firearms laws impacted statewide suicide rates. They also examined whether a state’s level of gun ownership impacted the relationship between firearms laws and suicide rates.

The researchers found that as the strength of laws increased, overall suicide rates and firearm suicide rates decreased. The relationship between legislation strength and suicide rates, overall and by firearm, was even more pronounced in states with medium and high levels of gun ownership. These findings suggest that firearms laws may be a useful tool for decreasing overall and firearm-related suicides in the U.S., particularly in states with higher rates of gun ownership.
