

Parent and Child Report of Adolescent Access to Household Firearms: Results From a Nationally Representative Survey

Joyce Foundation Lunch & Learn Webinar

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Overview

- State of knowledge about adolescent access to firearms in the home
- Study findings on:
 - Adolescent's report of their access to household firearms
 - Parents' report of their child's access to household firearms
 - Parent-child discordance
- Future directions on studying firearm access among children and youth

Background

- Storing guns unlocked (and unlocked and loaded) is a risk factor for youth suicide and unintentional injury
- Storing guns in the home unloaded and locked, with ammunition locked separately, has been recommended by professional associations (e.g., AAP)
 - Ideally remove guns from the home for children and youth at risk
- What may get lost in that formulation is that locking firearms is not equivalent to making them inaccessible
 - In comparison to the literature on storage, there is limited knowledge on adolescent access

Literature on Household Firearm Access

- Simonetti et al: 41% of 13-18 year olds in homes with guns in 2004 “could access [a household] gun and shoot it right now if they wanted to.”
- Baxley & Miller (2006): 36% of 5-14 year olds in a rural Alabama Family Practice Clinic said they had previously handled a household firearm
 - First study to look at discordance: 22% of parents who reported that their child had never handled a household gun were contradicted by their child’s report
- These studies raise important questions:
 - What does adolescent access to household firearms currently look like, nationally?
 - How is adolescent access to firearms modified by storage practices?
 - How much access to firearms do adolescents’ parents think they have, nationally?
 - How much discordance about firearm access is there between parents and their children?

Present study

- The present study uses a nationally representative sample of parents and their 13-17 year old children who live in homes with guns
 - Includes both gun-owning parents and non-gun owning parents who live in a home with a gun
- We used a dyadic study design: interviewed parents and children in the same household
- Using responses from parent-adolescent dyad pairs, the present study examines:
 - Adolescents' access to loaded household firearms
 - Firearm storage characteristics associated with adolescent access
 - Parents' report of their child's firearm access
 - Discordance in dyadic parent-child reports

Methods: Survey Design

- Data from a web-based survey (the 2019 National Firearms Survey [NFS])
 - Conducted from July 30 to August 11, 2019
 - All respondents lived in homes with guns
- Parents of 13-17 year olds were over-sampled
- These parents were invited to select a child participate in a separate survey
 - Parents of these adolescents completed an additional survey module that focused on their participating child
 - Adolescents who participated answered a survey module separate from their parents
- Dyad sample are weighted to be nationally representative

Methods: Primary Measures

- Adolescents were asked how long it would take to get to a loaded household gun (or get to a household gun and load it, if it was not already loaded)
 - under 5 minutes; under 1 hour; under 2 hours; could not get to it in under 2 hours
- Parents were asked “As far as you know, can your [surveyed] child access any of the guns in your home independently, that is without you or another adult in your house accessing it for him/her?”
- Total number of household guns and household gun storage practices were elicited from gun-owning parents only

Results: Sample Characteristics

	Total N=318		
Average age of adolescent (range)	15		
Average age of guardian	45		
Gender of adolescent (male=1)	56%		
Gender of guardian (male=1)	47%		
			Gun owners n=209
		Number of household guns	
		1 gun	21%
		2 to 4 guns	34%
		5 or more guns	45%
		Unlocked firearm storage	49%
		Loaded firearm storage	49%
		Loaded and unlocked firearm storage	26%

Adolescent Report of Access

	How long does it take to get to a loaded gun			
	< 5 min	95% CI	>5 min, <1 hr	95% CI
Full Sample	34%	(27% 41%)	17%	(12% 23%)
Parent's ownership status				
Children of non-owners	36%	(23% 50%)	18%	(9% 28%)
Children of owners	33%	(25% 41%)	17%	(11% 23%)
Unlocked storage				
No	24%	(12% 35%)	12%	(4% 20%)
Yes	45%	(32% 58%)	22%	(11% 33%)
In homes with any unlocked guns, are any loaded & unlocked				
No	28%	(8% 48%)	32%	(13% 51%)
Yes	59%	(43% 76%)	14%	(2% 26%)

Parents' Report of Adolescent Access

	"As far as you know, can your child access any of the guns in your home independently"			
	No	95% CI	Yes	95% CI
<i>Full Sample</i>	70%	(64% 77%)	30%	(23% 36%)
Parent's ownership status				
Children of non-owners	80%	(70% 91%)	20%	(9% 30%)
Children of owners	66%	(58% 75%)	34%	(25% 42%)

Discordance

Parent report of adolescent access to a household gun

No (n=227) 95% CI

Yes (n=89) 95% CI

Adolescent report of how long to get a gun and load it

<5 min

22% (14% 30%)

63% (50% 76%)

>5 min, <1 hr

15% (9% 21%)

22% (12% 33%)

>1 hr, <2 hr

5% (2% 7%)

4% (0% 10%)

Can't access in <2 hrs

58% (50% 67%)

11% (3% 19%)

Limitations

- Our sample size limits the statistical precision of our estimates
- We only collect data on one adolescent and one parent
 - Our estimates are a lower bound of households with adolescent access and discordance
- We did not collect data on parents':
 - beliefs or expectations around their child's access
 - actions they may have taken to encourage or discourage access

Summary

- One third of adolescents could access a gun in under 5 minutes, one half in under an hour
- Locking is associated with reduced access, but even where all guns are locked, 24% of children report being able to access a loaded firearm in under 5 minutes
- 30% of parents acknowledge that their child has independent access to a household firearm
- Among parents who think their child cannot access household firearms, one fifth of their adolescents report being able to get to a loaded firearm in <5 minutes and one third within an hour

Conclusion and Future Directions

- More attention to understanding access, in addition to storage
- Understanding the context and circumstances in which child and youth access occurs
 - Importance of social epidemiological and qualitative studies
- How can we develop public health strategies that engage with firearm access specifically?