

Majority of young victims of unintentional shootings shot by another youth

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Over three-quarters of youths under age 15 who die in firearm accidents are shot by another person, usually another youth, according to new research from the Harvard School of Public Health (HSPH). It is the first multi-state, in-depth study of who fires the shot in unintentional firearm fatalities. The study appears online and will be published in the July, 2010 print issue of the journal *Accident Analysis and Prevention*.

David Hemenway, director of the Harvard Injury Control Research Center at HSPH, and colleagues Catherine Barber and Matthew Miller, used data from 17 states participating in the National [Violent Death Reporting System \(NVDRS\)](#) of the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) from 2003 to 2006 to determine who fired the shot in unintentional firearm fatalities. Among the 363 unintentional firearm deaths, about half were inflicted by others. The percentage that was other-inflicted declined with the victim's age. For shooting victims under age 15, 78% were other-inflicted, while among those age 55 and over, 81% had shot themselves.

In the large majority of shootings that were other-inflicted, the shooter was young; four out of five of the shooters were under age 25, and one in three were under age 15. Fifty-nine percent of the fatal incidents took place in a home; among these, over a third took place in a home other than the victim's. The shooters were well known to the victims: 47% of shooters were related to the victim, most often the victim's brother. Another 43% of shooters in these incidents were friends of the victim. Most of the remaining shooters were acquaintances: fewer than 2% were

strangers.

"The young age of most of the shooters and victims shows what can happen when young people get their hands on a gun," said Hemenway. "Youth with guns are a danger to themselves, but even more so to their friends and family."

"In over one-third of American homes with children, there are guns. Many of these guns are left unlocked or loaded or both," said Daniel Gross, founder of the youth gun-violence prevention organization, PAX. "The results of this study underscore the need for simple and effective programs, such as PAX's 'Asking Saves Kids' (ASK) campaign, which aim to reduce youth access to firearms and help cut the number of unintentional shootings, particularly among youths."

More information: "Unintentional firearm deaths: A comparison of other-inflicted and self-inflicted shootings," Accident Analysis and Prevention, vol. 42, issue 4, online February 9, 2010.

Provided by Harvard School of Public Health

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