

The NHSDA Report

Youths Who Carry Handguns

In Brief

- According to the 1999 NHSDA, an estimated 833,000 youths between the ages of 12 and 17 had carried a handgun in the past year
- Among youths, males were 6 times more likely than females to have carried a handgun
- Youths who had carried a handgun had lower academic performance and were more likely to use illicit drugs and alcohol than youths who had not carried a handgun

Recent high-profile cases of gun violence have drawn attention to the problem of youths who carry handguns. More than 80 percent of homicide victims aged 15 to 19 years old between 1988 and 1997 were killed using firearms, and homicide is the second leading cause of death among teenagers and young adults (i.e., persons aged 15 to 24 years old).¹

The 1999 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse (NHSDA) includes information on the prevalence of handgun carrying in the past year among youths aged 12 to 17, and the survey enables an examination of links between carrying handguns and the use of illicit drugs and alcohol among youths. Use of illicit drugs included use of marijuana/hashish, cocaine (including crack, inhalants, hallucinogens (including PCP and LSD), heroin, or any prescription-type psychotherapeutic used nonmedically.

Prevalence of Youths Carrying Handguns

According to the 1999 NHSDA, nearly 4 percent of 12 to 17 year olds, or an estimated 833,000 youths, carried a handgun at least once in the past year (Figure 1). The rate was 6 times higher for

Figure 1. Percentages of Youths Aged 12 to 17 Who Carried a Handgun in the Past Year, by Gender and County Type: 1999*

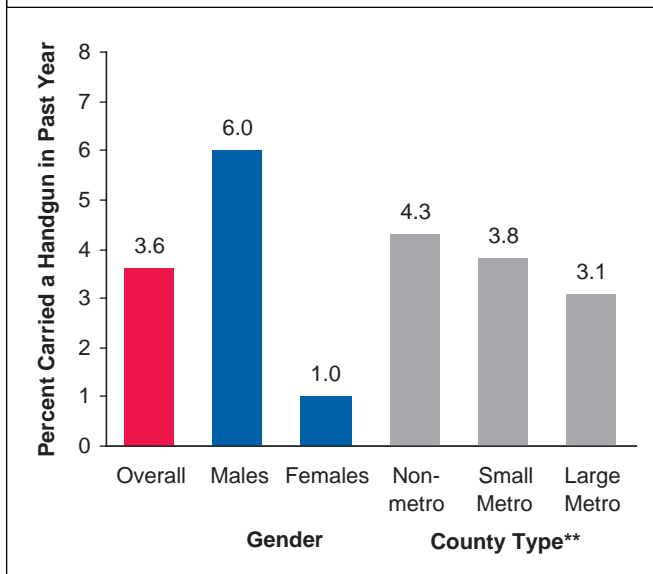
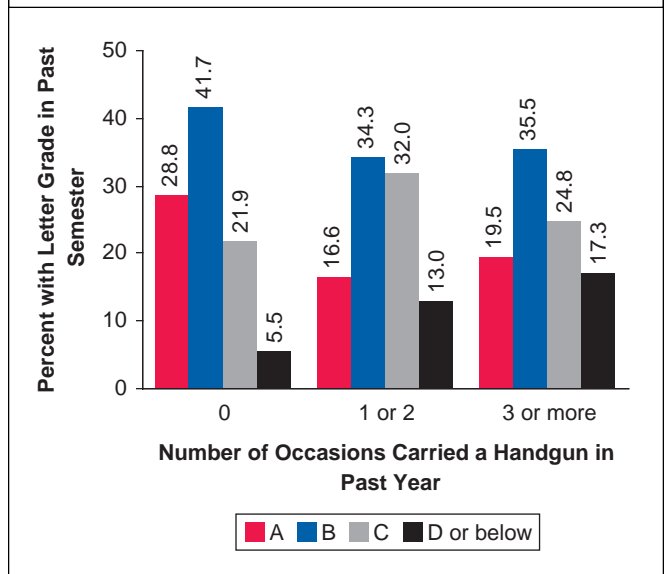


Figure 2. Percentages of Youths Aged 12 to 17 with Different Letter Grades in School, by Number of Times Carried a Handgun in the Past Year: 1999



males than for females. Youths who lived in nonmetropolitan areas were most likely to have carried a handgun in the past year (4.3 percent), followed by youths who lived in small metropolitan areas (3.8 percent) and large metropolitan areas (3 percent).

Carrying Handguns and School Performance

Youths who had carried a handgun on one or two occasions in the past year were more than twice as likely to have received average grades of “D” or below in the past semester (13 percent) compared with youths who had not carried a handgun (6 percent) (Figure 2). Those who carried a handgun on three or more occasions in the past year were more likely to receive grades of “D” or below in the past semester (17 percent) compared

with those who had not carried a handgun (6 percent). Youths who had carried a handgun in the past year were also less likely to have received grades of “A” or “B” in the past semester than youths who had not carried a handgun.

Drug and Alcohol Use Among Youths Who Carry Handguns

Youths who had carried a handgun on one or two occasions in the past year were more likely to have used illicit drugs in the past year compared with youths who had not carried a handgun (Figure 3). Approximately 50 percent of youths who had carried a handgun on three or more occasions in the past year had also used illicit drugs in the past year.

Carrying a handgun was also linked to the use of alcohol. Approximately 30 percent of

youths who had carried a handgun on one or more occasions in the past year had “binged” on alcohol (had five or more drinks on the same occasion at least once in the 30 days prior to the survey) compared with 9 percent of youths who had not carried a handgun. Approximately 11 percent of youths who had carried a handgun at least once in the past year had engaged in heavy alcohol use (had 5 or more drinks on the same occasion on at least 5 different days in the past 30 days), compared with 2 percent of youths who had not carried a handgun.

Carrying Handguns Among Drug and Alcohol Users

Youths who had used illicit drugs in the past year were approximately 3 times more likely to have carried a handgun in the

Figure 3. Percentages of Youths Aged 12 to 17 Reporting Past Year Illicit Drug Use, by Number of Times Carried a Handgun in the Past Year: 1999*

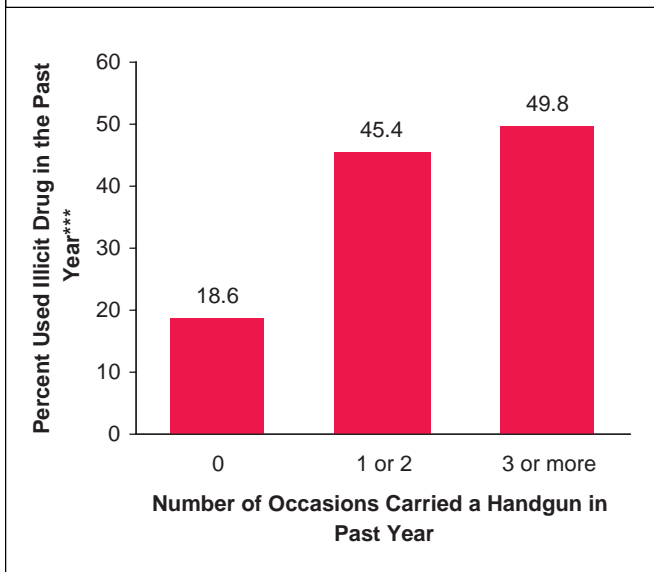
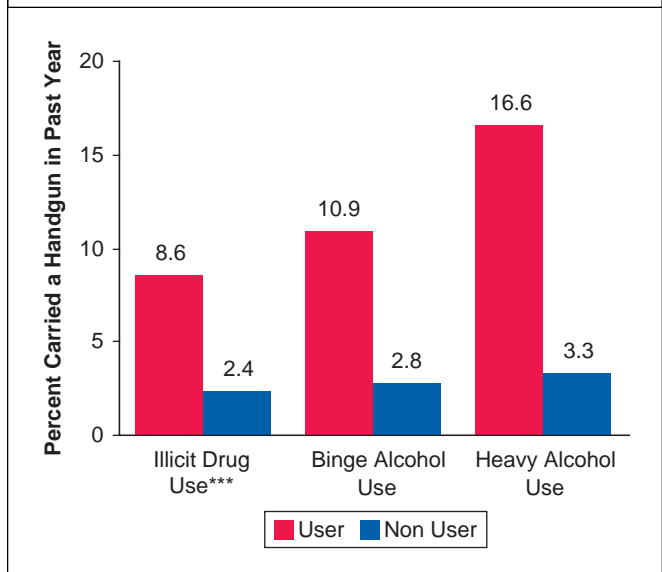


Figure 4. Percentages of Youths Aged 12 to 17 Who Had Carried a Handgun in the Past Year, by Past Year Illicit Drug Use, Past Month Binge Alcohol Use, and Past Month Heavy Alcohol Use: 1999*



past year than those who had not used illicit drugs (Figure 4). Youths who had engaged in past month binge alcohol use were almost 4 times as likely to have carried a handgun in the past year compared with youths who had not engaged in binge drinking. Youths who had engaged in past month heavy alcohol use were more than 5 times as likely to have carried a handgun in the past year compared with those who had not engaged in heavy drinking.

Summary

The 1999 NHSDA indicated that carrying a handgun among youths was more common among males than females and among youths who lived in nonmetropolitan areas compared with those living in large metropolitan areas. These data also indicated that youths who had carried a handgun in the past year had lower academic per-

formance, were more likely to have used illicit drugs, and were more likely to have engaged in binge and heavy alcohol use than youths who had not carried a handgun in the past year. Youths who used illicit drugs or were binge or heavy alcohol users were more likely to have carried a handgun than youths who were not users.

End Note

¹Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. (2000, January 27). *Youth violence in the United States* [On-line]. Available: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/factsheets/yvfacts.htm> [2001, May 31].

Figure Notes

* Data presented may differ from previously published data from the 1999 NHSDA because of corrections made to imputation procedures.

** *Nonmetro* = not part of a metropolitan statistical area (MSA);
Small Metro = MSAs with population of 50K to < 1 million;
Large Metro = MSAs with population of 1 million or more.

*** Illicit Drug Use indicates use at least once of marijuana/hashish, cocaine (including crack), heroin, hallucinogens (including LSD and PCP), inhalants, or any prescription-type psychotherapeutic used nonmedically.

Source (all figures): SAMHSA 1999 NHSDA.

The National Household Survey on Drug Abuse (NHSDA) is an annual survey sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The 1999 data are based on information obtained from nearly 70,000 persons aged 12 or older. The survey collects data by administering questionnaires to a representative sample of the population through face-to-face interviews at their place of residence.

The NHSDA Report is prepared by the Office of Applied Studies (OAS), SAMHSA, and by Research Triangle Institute (RTI), Research Triangle Park, North Carolina.

Information and data for this issue are based on the following publication and statistics:

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2000) *Summary of findings from the 1999 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse* (DHHS Publication No. SMA 00-3466). Rockville, MD: Author.

Also available on-line:
<http://www.DrugAbuseStatistics.samhsa.gov>

Additional tables available on request.