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KIDS & GUNS



111607

A Child Safety Scandal

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**U.S. Department of Justice
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I suspect that virtually everybody who reads this report will be surprised -- and shocked -- to learn the extent to which American children are victims each year of firearms accidents and violence. Indeed, segments of our youth population are the most likely to be murdered or wounded because of handgun shootings; such shootings are also a leading cause of accidental death and injury among children; and, during the past 25 years, the rising suicide rate among the young is closely connected to access and use of firearms.

The magnitude of the problem may come as a surprise because, as this report suggests, many government agencies and officials refuse to discuss the relationship of guns to child injuries and deaths. In fact, while the public receives information about other lesser threats to child safety, there is no comprehensive public education effort at any level of government to inform children, parents, and communities about the dangers of the President's Child Safety Partnership even to acknowledge that the problem exists.

The House Select Committee on Children, Youth and Families, which I chair, has focused its attention on violence perpetrated against children and adolescents, and on the tragedy of teen suicide. It is clear from available statistical data, and from the further evidence presented in "Kids and Guns," that thousands of children throughout America are the victims of indifference to responsible policies to regulate the availability and use of guns.

Both the American Youth Work Center and the National Coalition to Ban Handguns are to be commended for providing an important public service -- for documenting the extent of a serious problem affecting youth and providing a list of recommendations of possible solutions. Many of the recommendations are addressed to government agencies, public officials, and Congress and deserve serious attention. But, as the report also suggests, parents, their children, school officials and community leaders can also take steps to alleviate the problem. This report should be required reading, not only in Washington, but in homes and communities throughout the country.

Congressman George Miller, Chairman
Select Committee on Children, Youth, and Families

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KIDS AND GUNS

A CHILD SAFETY SCANDAL

A publication of
The National Coalition to Ban Handguns
and
The American Youth Work Center

by

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This publication was made possible in part by support from:

Veatch Program
Ruth P. Smith

Thomas Feil
Mrs. John J. Strandberg

Cover photo by James D. Wood

KIDS AND GUNS--A CHILD SAFETY SCANDAL

The statistics demand attention.

Each year, there are an estimated 3,000 youths who commit suicide with firearms.

1,000 murder victims each year are aged 19 and under. More than 150 are under 12.

There are at least 400 unintentional firearm fatalities annually among children. Forty-five are under five years of age. The tragedy is amplified when one considers that firearm deaths are among the most preventable of all childhood fatalities. Had guns not been immediately available and easily accessible, none of the following young lives would have been so brutally ended.

***Consider how the following moment of handgun violence affected a classroom of 20 high school students. In May, 1987, a 16-year-old high school sophomore stunned his friends when he pulled a .38-caliber handgun out of his pocket and shot himself in the head as his advanced English class was ending. One of his classmates told reporters that she ran to him, put her hands around the sides of his head and all she could think about was trying to stop the blood. He died the next day.

***A Spanaway, Wash., girl, 14, apparently distraught over a failed romance and bad grades, fatally shot her ex-boyfriend, a friend who tried to protect him, and then herself. The shooting occurred on the students' junior high school athletic field.

***In Detroit, just before the 1987 spring break, a student, 14, chased a Murray-Wright High School football player through the halls with a .357 Magnum. After running past the gymnasium and physics laboratory, the athlete was shot and killed by a bullet to the head. Other students watched, frightened and helpless.

***Twelve-year-old Jenny died four days after she was shot unintentionally by a friend. A 14-year-old boy was given a .32-caliber pistol on the school bus ride home. As Jenny's friend was walking over to show it to her, he tripped and grabbed for the gun. The bullet hit Jenny in the head.

A study done in Washington state shows that guns kept in homes were involved in the deaths of friends or acquaintances 12 times as often as in deaths of strangers.

In April, 1985, President Reagan appointed a panel to study non-disease issues in child safety. The 25-member panel spent two years and at least \$250,000, appropriated by Congress to aid missing children, conducting hearings, but made no serious mention of a critical issue in child safety--firearms. In fact, the introduction of the report, a letter to the President, makes only a comment in passing. "More than 1,000 teens are murdered each year. In some cities children shoot each other over card games, bicycles, clothing, or misinterpreted facial expressions." The study offered no further analysis.

The American Youth Work Center and the National Coalition to Ban Handguns have produced this study to correct what we consider to be the politically inspired deficiencies of the President's Child Safety Partnership Final Report. A report ignoring the rate of death and injury for children due to access to firearms is incomplete and innaccurate.

To overlook some 4,500 deaths, and between 13,500 and 22,500 injuries each year because gun control is not appealing to a President with a life membership in the National Rifle Association is inexcusable. The Reagan administration declares itself an advocate of child safety while ignoring the dangerous mix of children and guns. American families devastated by the loss of a child deserve better.

There are at least 1,000 firearm homicide victims aged 19 and under each year, according to thirteen years of FBI Uniform Crime Report statistics. In addition, the Centers for Disease Control reports there are at least 1,500 youths who commit suicide with firearms. The American Association of Suicidology estimates that number to be much higher--at least 3,000 firearm suicides each year. A National Safety Council publication, "Accident Facts, 1987 edition" attributed 287 unintentional deaths from firearms to children 14 and under. Another 515 youths between 15 and 24 were killed from unintentional firearms injuries.

Nobody wants to tackle this issue. Injury in America, a publication of the National Academy of Sciences, reported: Nonfatal assaultive injuries and homicides have been subjected to little prevention-oriented research. Typically, they have been regarded as a "crime problem" rather than as a health problem, and the blame and punishment of the perpetrators have been emphasized, rather than measures to reduce the frequency and severity of such injuries."

At the same time, law enforcement authorities recognizing the common use of firearms, especially handguns, as murder weapons are saying measures of punishment are insufficient in dealing with the problem. In the realm of child safety, the focus on discussions of stricter punishments for abusers of firearms is wholly inadequate. Prevention is the logical solution. Indeed, the 1986 Federal Bureau

of Investigation Uniform Crime Report (UCR) printed the following statement: "Supporting the philosophy that murder is primarily a societal problem over which law enforcement has little or no control is the fact that nearly 3 of every 5 murder victims in 1986 were related to or acquainted with their assailants." The majority of homicides are committed with firearms. The 1986 UCR stated that handguns accounted for 44 percent of all homicides, shotguns for 7 percent and rifles for 4 percent.

However, if homicide by firearms is a societal problem, there are few groups within "society" willing to attack it. In an editorial in the March 1985 American Journal of Diseases of Children, titled "Children and Handguns--A Public Health Concern," Dr. Diane Schetky writes:

Handgun violence is a topic about which the medical profession has remained largely apathetic. Given that there are now between 45 and 60 million handguns in circulation in the United States and that the government is reluctant to institute reforms on handgun ownership, it is easy to feel helpless in the face of the magnitude of the problem. In 1981 there were 11,258 murders and a similar number of suicides by handguns. Among these fatalities, 474 were young people aged 13 to 18 years and 156 were children under 12. It is clear that we are dealing with a problem of epidemic proportions. Any disease that produced such an alarming number of deaths would receive prompt attention from the medical profession and the government, as did the recent outbreaks of toxic shock syndrome, legionnaires' disease, and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome. Yet, when it comes to violence, we turn our backs and accept it as part of the American way of life.

Yet there are some who have consistently recognized the problem. A Surgeon General's Select Panel for the Promotion of Child Health in 1981 concluded, "The stakes for the nation's children are so high that nothing short of a total ban on the sale of handguns, with exemptions for persons such as police, military personnel, and pistol clubs, seems reasonable."

At the 1987 Conference on Injury in America, held in Atlanta, several of the speakers urged their colleagues in the public health profession to recognize the problem as a public health concern.

"Injuries to children from firearms is largely a problem of the proliferation of handguns and the acceptance of handgun violence in our culture. The young child is introduced to the handgun as a toy; violence with handguns is a mainstay of television drama...The young child does not understand the danger of the real object or the difference between it and a toy gun. While "playing" with the family gun, one child somehow kills another child. As for the adolescent who has grown up in our "gun culture," the handgun is all too often seen as the quick solution to conflict, and there has been increased incidence of handgun suicide and homicide among adolescents," said Dr. Phyllis F. Agran.

Another speaker, Dr. Mark L. Rosenberg, basically scolded the public health community for the lack of research that has been done on intentional injury prevention. "The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has spent about \$100 million studying motor vehicle impact biomechanics. How much money, if any, has been or will be spent studying the biomechanics of bullet injuries? There is an epidemic of homicide in Detroit. Perhaps researchers at Wayne State University, an institution where much has been done to examine impact biomechanics, could look at firearm injuries during the epidemic in their own backyard."

To consider the issue of firearms and child safety, this report will be divided into categories of homicide, suicide, and unintentional fatal injuries. This report can only serve as a first step in analyzing the problem. Since no national reporting and tracking system for firearm injuries exists, there are, at best, estimates by researchers that for every firearm fatality there are

three to five injuries. Even the fatality numbers, especially in terms of suicides, may be vastly underreported.

YOUTH VICTIMS OF FIREARM HOMICIDES

In 1986, 49 percent of all homicide victims under the age of 19 were killed by firearms. Even more sobering is the trend analysis of firearm homicides between 1968 and 1979. There was a 21 percent increase, with the largest increase among 5 to 9 year olds, according to The Injury Fact Book. The following chart illustrates the number of children killed in 1986 by firearms and the total number murdered in each age category.

Murder victims age 19 and under, 1986

| age of victim | firearm homicides | total homicides | firearms % of total homicides |
|------------------|-------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|
| Infant (under 1) | 9 | 262 | 3% |
| 1 to 4 | 43 | 182 | 11% |
| 5 to 9 | 48 | 124 | 39% |
| 10 to 14 | 101 | 199 | 51% |
| 15 to 19 | 1,009 | 1,517 | 67% |
| total | 1,210 | 2,484 | 49% |

Source: FBI Uniform Crime Report 1986

Only in the age categories of children under 5 were other weapons used more frequently than firearms. For infants, while 9 were shot, 125 were killed by personal weapons (hands, fists, feet) and 31 by asphyxiation. In that age group, 12 children were killed by cutting or stabbing instruments. However, in the next age bracket (1 to 4), only personal weapons were used more often than firearms. While 43 small children were shot, 196 were beaten with personal weapons. Cutting and stabbing instruments accounted for less than half (19) the number of deaths involving firearms. Firearms remain the leading murder weapon once victims get older.

A further comparison of FBI statistics shows that no other weapon competes with firearms as murder weapons.

WEAPONS USED IN MURDERS OF VICTIMS 19 AND UNDER

| WEAPON | # of victims | # of total homicides |
|--|--------------|----------------------|
| Firearms | 1,210 | 48.7% |
| Cutting/stabbing | 392 | 15.8% |
| Blunt objects | 122 | 4.9% |
| Personal weapons | 416 | 16.7% |
| Fire | 62 | 2.6% |
| Strangulation | 44 | 1.8% |
| Asphyxiation | 67 | 2.7% |
| All other weapons/ weapons not stated | 197 | 7.9% |

Stories such as the following ones cannot be reasoned away as rare instances. These numbers prove that isn't true.

***On May 12, 1987, a Broomall, Pennsylvania woman was charged with fatally shooting her retarded two-year-old son Eric. The parents had earlier appealed through posters for community support to help them raise their son. More than 300 people responded. The mother's lawyer said she was unable to cope and first considered committing suicide, but instead took the life of her son with a handgun.

***In September, 1986, 16-year-old Scott was delivering copies of The Indianapolis Star as he had been doing for more than two years. One of his customers, who had reportedly complained to police about area youths, killed Scott with a single shotgun blast. According to newspaper reports, the suspect had been drinking the night before and then sat up with his shotgun to protect his house from vandals.

Dr. Schetky brings into her discussion on children and handguns the additional problem of the trauma children face as indirect victims of handgun violence. "While young children are not likely to be victims of homicide, they become indirect victims when traumatized by their parent's murder or by witnessing handgun violence."

Children especially likely to suffer that trauma are those who do the killing. Consider this example: a Memphis boy, 3, shot and killed a 65-year-old church day care center director in what newspapers called an apparent accident. He found a handgun in a worker's purse in the toy closet. After the shooting, the child walked up to the other worker, said he was sorry and handed her the .22-caliber pistol. In fact, the FBI reports that arrests of persons charged with murder under age 18 increased 9 percent in 1986. Of the total murder arrestees in 1986, 9.6 percent, or 1,552, were under age 18. These numbers only represent those children who were actually arrested and charged with murder. Realizing that many of these instances are determined as unintentional shootings, similar to the example described above, the number of children who end someone else's life is much higher.

Indeed, one handgun-owning family was shattered on Mother's Day, 1987, when a 10-year-old Houston boy was angry at his parents for not letting him play outside. After his father called him into the house, they continued to argue. The boy found his father's .38-caliber handgun under a sofa cushion and fired all six rounds at his parents, killing his father with a bullet to the head and seriously wounding his mother. His siblings were in the house. Two bullets continuing into a neighboring apartment, barely missed two small children sitting at the kitchen table.

On a November Saturday in 1987, a mother of three was shot to death by her four-year-old. The boy and one of his brothers were playing in their Utah home when they found a loaded revolver on a high shelf. The oldest boy, 7, grabbed toilet tissue to try to stop the bleeding. The handgun was kept loaded for protection.

In "When Children Shoot Children," an article published in the June 12, 1987 edition of the Journal of the American Medical Association, the authors discuss this problem. "Serious long-term effects are not limited to those killed or injured. At least 52 of the 53 shooters in deaths inflicted by others were family members or friends of the children who were shot. They are almost certainly at increased risk for acute and chronic emotional and behavioral disturbance; to our knowledge, this hypothesis has not yet been evaluated."

Certainly, that effect on children can be great enough to haunt them for the rest of their lives. What follows here is a story sent to the National Coalition to Ban Handguns by a widow who wanted to share her husband's experience:

It was quite a piece of machinery, all right--heavy, smooth, lightly oiled, and deadly. It was a double action revolver--a .38-caliber Smith and Wesson Police Special. My grandfather had carried it for all his street years as a Philadelphia cop. He had never drawn it in line of duty. Now the gun was my father's. It was kept in its holster in the back of the locked top drawer of a chiffonier in my parents' bedroom. I'd never seen it until this day, when my father took it out to clean and oil it. He had never fired it. I was 10 years old, and mightily impressed by its heft and its action--the cylinder revolving to exactly the right chamber space when the hammer was cocked or even when the trigger was pulled. My father let me handle it and snap the trigger a few times. It made a satisfying and final clack as it fell. Then he took it away, warned me about touching it, and locked it up.

Two weeks later I was playing in the house with two friends while my parents were at work: some version of cops and robbers, or cowboys and Indians, or maybe just ten-year-old horseplay. And I decided to show off a little. I had already disobeyed my father by unlocking the drawer with my mother's extra keys and practicing fancy draws in front of a mirror. That satisfying clack meant another bad guy downed. On this day I got the gun and ran through the house waving it at my friends and making "gun" noises. They ran through the kitchen to a door leading to the basement, and at the head of the stairs Jackie Culp turned to say something to me. I raised the gun and pulled the trigger as I had so many times before. But instead of a satisfying clack, this time there was an ear-shattering roar like a bomb exploding.

Later I found out what happened in the next instant. The .38 caliber slug travelled two feet and struck Jackie under the left eye, shattering his face. It passed through his brain, killing him instantly, and tore a huge chunk out of the back of his skull as it exited. The force of the impact lifted him

into the air and hurled him to the bottom of the stairs, where he lay crumpled, face up, with a gaping bone-rimmed hole where his eye had been. Blood and brain tissue had sprayed on ceilings, walls, and floor.

I dropped the gun, ran down the stairs and looked at that distorted mask. Then I began screaming and running. I ran, sobbing violently, until I could run no more. Then I stopped a passing car and asked the driver to take me home.

My mother and my father were waiting there, with the police. I told my story as best I could. At one point my father leaned forward as if to strike me with his fist, but my mother stopped him. Later, my mother called my friend's mother. She wouldn't come to the phone. A couple of days later I went down to the basement and found a large pool of clotted blood under the stairs. My mother cleaned it up.

My life changed. At school, the other kids avoided me. They whispered about me when they were sure I could see them. Even the teachers asked unnecessary questions, seeking for details. I finally had to change schools. The story followed me from school to school, though, until I graduated from high school. I guess I was considered notorious, and something of a dangerous freak.

But I learned something.

From the instant of that awful noise, I knew at first hand something of the dreadful power of a handgun, a power for which no western pulp stories, no comic books, no cowboy movies, no radio programs had ever prepared me. In later years, in the service, I qualified as a marksman with a .45 pistol and as an expert marksman with a carbine. And I learned then that a large-caliber bullet at close range can be fatal even in a minor wound, simply because of the enormosity of its shock power.

Today I look upon handguns as I look upon rattlesnakes -- handsome, beautifully made, and fascinating: but at the same time repulsive and full of deadly menace. When I think of the number of handguns kept for "protection" in American homes -- 30,000,000 at the last conservative estimate -- I think of 30,000,000 rattlesnakes coiled and ready to strike. For I know that the odds are overwhelmingly great that any one of those guns that is fired will kill or wound a child, a spouse, a family member, or a friend.

The story I've told you began 50 years ago -- half a century -- and yet the memory of that moment, and the pain, and the remorse, and the horror, are still very keen to me. All the victims of handgun violence aren't on the same side of the gun muzzle.

In fact, the long term effect on children and their families has become such a concern in some areas that the public is motivated to act. In Detroit, Michigan, the handgun violence problem continues to be particularly desperate. In this city with the highest murder rate in the country for 1985 and 1986, the homicide rate remained extraordinarily high in 1987. The 1986 toll of 646 murdered people was a 10-year-high. Of those victims, 43 were children under age 16

who were shot to death. According to The Detroit News in 1987, 69 children under the age of 18 were killed by handguns. A Detroit Free Press tally showed 35 of them were under age 17. Another 302 were wounded. A June 22, 1987 article in The Washington Post on Detroit's murder problem, stated, "When The Detroit News reported on Jan. 2 that 'no homicides were reported in Detroit during the first 20 hours of 1987,' it was hard to guess whether the intended effect was irony or relief." Two weeks into January, however, the Detroit Free Press ran an editorial cartoon stating that so far that year nine children under the age of seventeen had been shot by handguns. Things are not getting better in 1988. By January 16, already four youths were shot to death. In comparison, the first youth to die by gunfire in 1987 was killed in March.

Melody, 16, went to a chaperoned party. Some uninvited guests were asked to leave; police and newspaper reports said the party-crashers returned with shotguns and fired indiscriminately. Melody joined 42 other Detroit children under 16 who were killed in 1986 with firearms.

But citizens in Detroit have rallied, formed a handgun control group, helped to get mandatory sentencing legislation passed and formed a support group --Save Our Sons and Daughters or SOSAD -- for parents of children killed by firearms. Melody's mother is among them.

Under the requirements for nomination for the President's Child Safety Partnership certificate and awards program, SOSAD is exactly the kind of group that should have been singled out for praise had the partnership not subordinated child safety to support the National

Rifle Association and other advocates of Americans' unfettered right to kill each other and themselves. The nomination form states that for eligibility for nonprofit service organizations the group's "primary function does not necessarily need to be child safety related, but it must demonstrate a commitment and successful response to the issue."

The first question asks why the group was formed. SOSAD was established to be a support group for families that have been destroyed by handgun violence.

SOSAD was not among the several organizations receiving mention in the President's Child Safety Partnership. We don't suggest that the National Parent Teachers Association abandon its babysitting safety program. However, we do recommend that each of those organizations which received mention for being involved with child safety incorporate a handgun safety component in their program. As with the public health field, the involvement of child safety advocates is critical to getting sane legislation passed dealing with restricting firearms, particularly handguns, to children.

An example of how easy it is for children to obtain guns was presented in the January 11, 1988 issue of Newsweek. "Nowhere is the proliferation of firearms among youths more startling than in city high schools. In Baltimore last spring, newly appointed Circuit Judge Ellen Heller was so shocked at the number of minors charged with gun crimes that she ordered a survey of weapon use among students. The results were even worse than she expected. Of 390 city high schoolers polled, 64 percent said they knew someone who had carried a handgun within the preceding six months; 60 percent knew someone who had been shot, threatened or robbed at gunpoint in their school; almost half of the male respondents admitted to having carried a handgun at least once."

Problems in big cities, like Detroit and Baltimore, are based in part on racial tensions, drugs, high unemployment, feelings of hopelessness in the city, and gang killings. Charles Harper, a black psychologist who works with juveniles criminals in Detroit, said Detroit Mayor Coleman Young's comment on refusing to disarm his city which is surrounded by "hostile suburbs" adds to the impression that "he perceives the black community as a community that needs to be armed and wants to be armed. Like Reagan on Star Wars, no amount of reason will shake that belief."

However, according to major opinion polls, the black population is unswayingly in favor of stricter handgun controls. In a demographic breakdown of a 1986 Gallup Poll on handgun control, 76% of the blacks questioned said laws on handgun sales should be made more strict. Fifty-eight percent of the whites questioned felt the same way. Nine percent of both blacks and whites surveyed said laws on handgun sales should be made less strict, while 31 percent of the whites and 15 percent of the black said the laws should stay the same. The same poll showed that 59 percent of the blacks, as opposed to 45 percent of the whites surveyed favored a community ban on handguns.

There may be a connection between a larger black anti-gun sentiment and the significantly higher black victimization rate. According to a Centers for Disease Control publication on homicide, the ten leading causes of death for blacks and whites by age group shows that homicide is consistently a more frequent cause of death. The following chart shows that beginning with children and continuing through older ages, homicide ranks higher for blacks.

HOMICIDES RANKED AS LEADING CAUSES OF DEATH

| Age group | Rank for whites | Rank for blacks |
|-----------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Infant | Tenth | Eighth |
| 1 to 14 | Fifth | Second |
| 15 to 24 | Third | First |
| All ages | Not in top 10 | Fourth |

The homicide rates per 100,000 population for blacks, especially young black men, are dramatically higher than for whites. The CDC publication also shows these comparisons:

HOMICIDE RATES BY RACE, AGE, SEX OF VICTIMS, 1979 AND 1983 COMPARED

| Age | White males | | Black males | |
|----------|-------------|------|-------------|------|
| | 1970 | 1983 | 1970 | 1983 |
| Under 1 | 2.9 | 3.3 | 14.3 | 13.5 |
| 1 to 4 | 1.3 | 1.5 | 5.7 | 6.4 |
| 5 to 9 | 0.4 | 0.7 | 1.6 | 1.8 |
| 10 to 14 | 0.6 | 0.9 | 4.6 | 2.8 |
| 15 to 19 | 3.5 | 5.2 | 35.9 | 26.7 |

| Age | White females | | Black females | |
|----------|---------------|------|---------------|------|
| | 1970 | 1983 | 1970 | 1983 |
| Under 1 | 2.9 | 3.8 | 10.7 | 14.2 |
| 1 to 4 | 1.2 | 1.2 | 6.3 | 5.9 |
| 5 to 9 | 0.4 | 0.7 | 1.7 | 1.4 |
| 10 to 14 | 0.6 | 0.7 | 2.3 | 1.5 |
| 15 to 19 | 2.0 | 2.9 | 10.6 | 10.6 |

Rates per 100,000 population

In homicides against black victims, a higher percentage of the murders were committed with handguns. More than 50 percent of the black victims were killed with handguns, compared to just more than 40 percent of the white victims. A small percentage more white victims than black were killed with another type of gun.

In the discussion accompanying the charts, the CDC writes, "Regardless of race, the highest risk of homicide is faced by young males, who are typically killed by friends or acquaintances using firearms (usually handguns) during the course of an argument."

However, this pattern is most pronounced among black homicide victims. Further research is needed to understand the socioeconomic and cultural context in which friend/acquaintance violence occurs. In the meantime, education efforts should be made to inform those at high risk that common arguments with friends and acquaintances may escalate to violent interactions with lethal consequences. This lethality might be reduced if, on the occasion of violent quarrels, lethal weapons such as handguns were not immediately available..."

Another speaker at the Injury in America conference, Dr. Vernon Houk of the CDC, said, "People are more willing to accept risks that they take voluntarily. In some areas of injury control, however, people are unwilling to accept the changes needed to reduce the risk. For example, although being murdered is not something people volunteer for, there is not much support for gun control activities in the United States, where 60 - 80 percent of the agents of murder are handguns. Nevertheless, we hope that within the next 10 to 20 years, the owning of handguns will become as socially unacceptable as is driving an automobile while intoxicated."

Despite the compelling case, the murder of children by firearms was rejected as a significant child safety issue by the President's Child Safety Partnership. Indeed, there is not a single word in the report that couldn't receive a full endorsement from the National Rifle Association, of which the President is a card-carrying life member.

There does seem to be one paragraph which would parallel the recommendations made in this report exactly. However, we doubt sincerely the partnership had the firearms manufacturing industry in mind when this passage was written:

"The Partnership recognizes that only a very few businesses would consciously or intentionally conduct enterprises that threaten the safety of youth. However, there is a range of commercial activities that may have such an impact. Just as it is the responsibility of parents to help protect their children, and of government agencies to enforce the laws and regulations associated with the safety of children, so it is the obligation of the private sector to assure that it does not contribute to the risks and threats faced by children. The decision to get out of, or stay out of, enterprises that pose a potential hazard to youth is one which should be reinforced by business peers as well as by concerned members of the public."

YOUTH SUICIDE WITH FIREARMS

***An 11-year-old Ontario, California girl, caught smoking cigarettes, took her own life rather than face her father's punishment. According to newspaper reports, she wrote in her suicide note, "I wanted to grow up and be somebody...but I messed up...Oh yeah, I forgot to tell you I used the gun--yours. I'm sorry you don't have a daughter anymore." She became one of more than 3,000 young people who take their own lives with guns.

Suicide is the area of study where there has been the most correlation drawn between death and the availability of firearms. In an article published in the New England Journal of Medicine in April 1983, Dr. Jeffrey H. Boyd wrote that, "The suicide rate has been rising over the past 25 years, mainly among the relatively young. Studies of the different types of suicide have shown that suicide by means of firearms accounts for most of the rise...There was a rapid rise in the rate of suicides by firearms between 1953 and 1978; no

other means of suicide showed a continuous increase over this period."

In 1980, firearms and explosives were the leading causes of suicide by males and females between the ages of 15 and 19. (The National Center for Health Statistics combines firearms and explosives, adding that explosives are rarely used in a suicide). Of the males, 64.9 percent, or 962 males, killed themselves in this manner. Among the females, 55.7 percent, or 175, used firearms. During the past 10 years cited in the study, the rate of females using firearms increased, showing a sharp jump in 1974. In 1970, firearms suicides accounted for 34.2 percent of all female suicides. At that time, the most common way for females to commit suicide was by means of poisoning by solid or liquid substances. In 1970, 41.5 percent, or 113 young females killed themselves by that method. By 1980, poisoning accounted for 54, or 17.2 percent of, suicides by young females.

The Injury Fact Book confirms these figures in its trend analysis between 1968 and 1979. "During the same period, firearm suicides increased by 30 percent overall and approximately doubled in age groups younger than 25."

A September, 1985 issue of the Mayo Clinic Health Letter states that females attempt suicide about three times more often than males, but males succeed about three times more often than females. One of the reasons is that females generally use less lethal means. Those figures are changing as a higher percentage of teenage girls are choosing firearms as the suicide weapon.

A February, 1985 study in the American Journal of Psychiatry reflected the earlier figures that more females than males attempt suicide. The male/female ratio ranges from 1:2 to 1:4 in suicides attempts, but the male/female ratio for successful suicides ranges from 2:1 to 4:1.

The Mayo Clinic letter states that gun control laws would at least reduce the suicide rate. "In the United States, use of firearms is both the preferred and the most certain method of suicide. As noted earlier, suicidal individuals usually have mixed feelings about their impending death. The lack of ready access to a weapon will certainly prevent some suicides. Many medical and law enforcement experts believe that limiting access to this most lethal means of self-destruction is the single most practical way to reduce the tragic loss of life from suicide."

Another study published in the American Journal of Psychiatry titled "The Influence of Gun Control Laws on Suicidal Behavior" concludes "Our results indicate some indirect support for the notion that controlling methods for suicide may reduce the suicide rate. We found that states with stricter gun control laws in 1968 had lower suicide rates in 1969-1971 and a smaller increase in the suicide rate over a 10-year period. These results were found for males (who often use firearms in suicide) but not females (who use firearms much less frequently). Therefore, we propose that strict gun control laws may have a preventive effect on suicidal behavior."

In contrast to the homicide statistics, suicide trends show that those at highest risk are white males. According to an unpublished article by Dr. Robert Markush, "As in total suicides, white rates were roughly double non-white rates."

However, award-winning journalist Barry Michael Cooper, who has studied the issue of youth violence in depth, said that this argument is one of semantics. Cooper said the self-destructive behavior in black youths is apparent by their willingness to take life threatening risks. "When you go out on the streets wearing \$100 sneakers, this is suicide. When you sell drugs in Detroit, it's suicide."

The Markush study discusses the idea of reducing the suicide rate by controlling the method of suicide.

The concept that agent availability can influence suicide rates has also been suggested for agents other than firearms. Farmer and Rohde examined the relationship between suicide rates in England and Wales and the availability of coal gas. They found that, over a one-hundred-year period, "the rise in coal gas suicides occurred coincidentally with the widespread introduction of coal gas to domestic use, ...the increase did not appear to displace other methods of suicide." Two studies have suggested that the fall in suicide mortality in England, Wales and Scotland since the mid 1960's was related to the change in the domestic gas supply from toxic coal gas to non-toxic oil-based gases and subsequently to natural gas.

Another study mentioned in the Markush article concluded "the physical availability of the more culturally accepted method of suicide is a major determinant of suicide rates and that suicides may be prevented by decreasing the availability of the most common methods of suicide to suicidal individuals."

Markush urged public health professional to act. "Since suicides are committed by the victims themselves, it is possible that many households might reduce their personal risks voluntarily once the suicide risks associated with gun availability are recognized. Public health education programs promoting suicide prevention through removal of firearms may encounter less political antagonism than effective gun control legislation, which seems to infringe on an ingrained American urge toward violent death."

Massachusetts-based clinical psychologist Pamela Cantor, past president of the American Association of Suicidology, echoes the concern. She estimated 5,200 youths in the United States kill themselves each year. About 65 percent of those, or 3,380 suicides, are committed with firearms. Although that number is higher than the one given by the safety council, it's probably still underreported because many suicides are not cited as such to spare families' embarrassment.

"Firearms are the leading method of suicide, and also the one method that has increased significantly along with the increase in the suicide rate. Guns now account for more suicides than all other methods combined: 65% of all teen suicides are committed with firearms. About 25 million households have handguns and half of these keep their guns loaded. Adolescents are impulsive. Having a loaded gun around the house is an invitation to disaster."

Cantor continues that, "adolescents who can't get a lethal weapon don't necessarily choose another. If they do, it's usually a less lethal method and you have a chance to intervene. Often if they can't get a weapon, the impulse passes."

The American Journal of Psychiatry article titled "Self-Inflicted Gunshot Wounds; Lethality of Method Versus Intent" focused on the idea that people who choose more lethal means want more strongly to die. "Traditional formulations of suicide risk have held that the most lethal suicide attempts are planned, while impulsive suicide attempts are considered to be less lethal, often only "gestures." Recent evidence has suggested that the relationship should be re-evaluated and that the demographics of individuals who make violent suicide attempts may also be changing.

"Many patients in our sample admitted that while they had originally expected to die, they were glad to be alive and would not repeat the self-destructive behavior despite the continued presence of significant medical, psychological and social problems. To date, none of these patients have died or attempted suicide in the two years since they wounded themselves."

Dr. David Shaffer, who spoke on strategies for prevention of youth suicide at the Injury in America conference, added that suicide among teenagers is not thoroughly contemplated, but is spontaneous. "Many teenagers commit suicide very shortly (often within hours) after finding out that they are in trouble, when they are afraid and uncertain about the consequences. Other less common precipitants include rejection and humiliations (for example, a dispute with a girlfriend, being teased, failing at school, and failure to get work). There appear to be relatively few cases of suicide where no immediate precipitating stress can be identified but where there is evidence of longstanding planning...Both boys and girls are most likely to commit suicide with a firearm."

Suicide ranks as the tenth leading cause of death among children in the one to 14 year old age group. In the next age category, the 15 to 24 year olds, suicide escalates to the third leading cause of death. That threat to youth cannot be disregarded. Neither can it simply be shrugged off or ignored by saying that if teenagers are upset enough to kill themselves, they will find any way possible. Although American research correlating the firearm accessibility and suicide rates cannot be adequately conducted until firearms are restricted, there is strong evidence supporting the conclusion that, ultimately, restrictions on access to guns would

significantly lower the suicide risk to this nation's children. No other change in governmental or social policy will do more with greater rapidity to improve child safety. Too bad the President's panel on child safety so ill served our nation's children.

UNINTENTIONAL FATAL INJURIES WITH FIREARMS

On April 7, 1987, Leonard was killed by a San Bernadino County Sheriff's deputy, while he and three youths, 18, 17 and 16, were playing with laser tag guns on the schoolgrounds. A passer-by called police and said there were men with guns on the property. A deputy responding to the call followed a man with a gun into a dark hidden area, where he spotted the man crouched down, pointing the gun at him. Laser guns emit a flash when fired. The deputy responded to the fire and shot Leonard. Incidents such as these have led San Bernadino Sheriff Floyd Tidwell to adamantly urge banning all toy weapons that can be misidentified as real guns.

Ironically, the manufacturer Worlds of Wonder donated several million dollars to the Justice Department's National Center on Missing and Exploited Children to aid endangered children while simultaneously Justice was spending \$250,000 in Missing Children's Assistance Act funds to finance its child safety study.

The difficulty of distinguishing real guns from toys may be a contributing factor in making firearm injuries the fourth leading cause of accidental death in children aged five to 14. According to the National Safety Council, within those age boundaries, 2,263 children in 1984 were killed in motor vehicle accidents. Another 532 drowned; 466 were killed in fires or from burns associated with fires. Two hundred and fifty-three children died because of unintentional firearms injuries. For newborns to four-year-olds, 34

children died from firearms injuries. Of all the firearms fatalities, 160 were killed at home.

In 1986, 40 children under age 5 were killed unintentionally by firearms. Between ages five and 14, 200 children were killed. Another 550 young people died between the ages of 15 and 24, according to National Safety Council statistics.

In 1986, there were 800 unintentional firearms deaths in public places, including hunting accidents. Ten of the victims were under five years old. Sixty of the victims were between five and 14. Between the ages of 15 and 24, there were 250 of these accidents. "Accident Facts, 1986" states in its section on hunting accidents, "Overall, about 36 per cent of the injuries were self inflicted. However, of the 82 cases involving handguns, 70 were self-inflicted." That 87 percent of self-inflicted handgun injuries is more than double the rate of total self-inflicted firearm injuries.

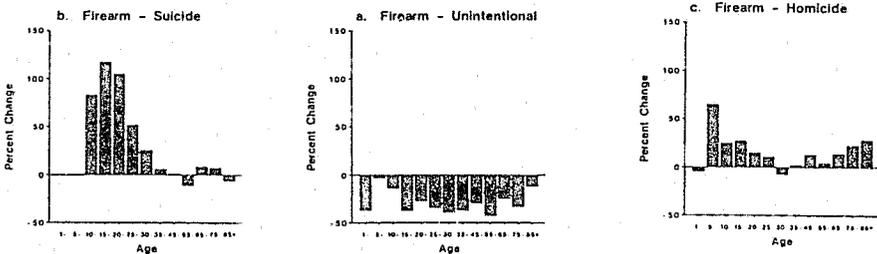
During that same year, there were 900 unintentional firearms deaths in the home. The National Safety Council defines these as including "firearms accidents in or on home premises. Many occur while cleaning or playing with guns." Thirty of the victims were under age five. Another 140 were between ages five and 14. And 300 victims were between ages 15 and 24.

In sum, Injury in America concludes, "Especially high death rates among teenagers and young adults are associated with motor-vehicle crashes, firearms, and drowning."

Echoes The Injury Fact Book, "Firearms account for one-fifth of all injury deaths and are second only to motor vehicles as a cause of fatal injury. In 1980, shootings caused almost 34,000 deaths. Shootings are the sixth leading cause of fatal unintentional injury for all ages combined, and the third leading cause at ages 10 -

19...The death rate from unintentional shootings is highest for males ages 13-17."

Again in the trend analysis between 1968 and 1979, the authors said there was an overall decline in the unintentional firearm death rate of 29 percent. "The smallest decrease occurred for ages five to 14." The following charts show The Injury Fact Book trend analysis.



The authors discuss some possibilities for reducing the death toll. "Firearm injuries and deaths, intentional as well as unintentional, can be prevented through application of a broad spectrum of approaches. Potentially effective measures include reducing weapons and ammunition through limitations on production or importation. Efforts to keep guns from young children and to prevent handgun possession by criminals are likely to have only limited success if widespread ownership by the general public is permitted. The common tendency to focus on gun purchases by potential criminals ignores the difficulty of regulating the sale and distribution of a widely available commodity, as well as the fact that most homicides are committed by relatives and acquaintances."

Unintentional firearms fatalities for all ages have been decreasing slightly. Dr. Ned Colonge, who spoke at the Injury in America conference on objectives for injury control, said, "The 1990 objective is a 5.6 percent reduction in nonintentional fatalities from firearms (to 1700 victims per year). This target was reached,

with 1,688 such deaths reported in 1984; a new goal has been set at 1,600 gun deaths (0.68 deaths per 100,000 people). This target, seemingly small, reflects the United States' adamant stand against gun control. A legislative change in this area would also likely have an effect on homicides and suicides.

"Without such a philosophical change, remaining potential interventions include development and use of nonfatal projectiles such as wax bullets, improved trigger-safety mechanisms, and improved public education on the safe handling of firearms. There are no data to suggest that any improvements have occurred in this area; improvement may require interventions aimed at changing social consciousness."

Perhaps most frighteningly, a significant number of the deaths of children occur at the hands of other children, as described in the Journal of the American Medical Association article "When Children Shoot Children."

Firearms owners' perceived need for protection was associated with at least nine cases. In case 1, a 5-year-old boy shot himself in the head with a .38-caliber revolver. The child had found the loaded revolver under an older family member's pillow. The gun was usually stored out of view 6 ft. above the floor but was placed under the pillow at night. The older family member had left the bedroom for a few minutes to watch television. In case 2, an 11-year-old boy was shot in the head by his 12-year-old brother with a 10-gauge shotgun owned by the boys' father. The boys were playing with the gun and did not know it was loaded. Ordinarily, the gun was kept unloaded. The previous night a prowler had been seen; the father loaded the gun at that time. In case 3, a 6-year-old boy shot himself in the head with a .38 caliber revolver. He had found the gun in the purse of a houseguest.

In at least three cases the shooter thought the gun was a toy. In case 4, a 2-year-old girl was shot in the head with a .22-caliber rifle. The shooter, her 4-year-old brother, thought the gun was a toy. He had found it under their parents' bed, pointed it at her, and pulled the trigger.

The authors analyzed the deaths of 88 California children under 15 years old who were unintentionally shot and killed either by other children or by themselves between 1977 and 1983. Of those deaths, 75 percent occurred when the children were playing with the gun or demonstrating its use. In seven percent of the deaths, "the gun just went off;" in six percent, the children were playing Russian roulette. Another 3 percent occurred during hunting or target shooting.

The following story shows that young children simply cannot fully understand the scope of the damage guns can cause. In Irving, Texas, a boy, 8, found a shotgun and a rifle. He asked his six-year-old friend to play war with him. When the younger child told him he didn't want to play with guns, the older boy threatened to kill himself. He did.

The authors of "When Children Shoot Children" concluded that "Contributing factors that are susceptible to intervention exist. Easy access to firearms is chief among these. In at least 48 percent of residential shootings, children gained access to firearms that were stored loaded--but never locked away--in the house where the shooting occurred...The ready availability of handguns in the home appears to contribute to their involvement in both unintentional shootings and homicide. Therefore, efforts to reduce firearms availability might best be focused on handguns."

However, there are certain types of handguns which deserve immediate focus. Recently, several communities in the U.S. have banned the sale of look-alike toy handguns. We are much more concerned with real handguns that will look like toys. According to testimony before the Crime Subcommittee of the U.S. House of Representatives Judiciary Committee, a manufacturer of a 99 percent plastic handgun said he could have a prototype ready by mid-1988.

Testimony presented by Dr. Garen Wintemute alerted the legislators to a problem beyond the politics of banning a weapon. Dr. Wintemute said a handgun, made of plastic, perhaps molded in a variety of colors, will undoubtedly further blur the distinction between real and toy guns.

In the February, 1988 issue of Pediatrics magazine, Dr. Wintemute and two of his colleagues wrote, "Clearly, children will have great difficulty distinguishing these guns from the toys they closely resemble. Conscientious adults may find themselves in a not dissimilar quandary. The very characteristics that would differentiate this new handgun from firearms now on the market are characteristics that we have long associated with toys. This, coupled with statements by their developer and others who minimize the hazards associated with plastic guns, creates the risk that these guns will be treated with less caution than that accorded to those now available."

The American Medical Association clearly sees this as an important issue as well. The organization's Board of Delegates voted in December 1987 to support legislation that would ban plastic or non-detectable handguns.

We urge action on this issue before there are statistics on how many children have been killed with non-detectable, plastic handguns.

In June 1986, The New England Journal of Medicine ran an article titled "Protection or Peril? An Analysis of Firearm-Related Deaths in the Home." In this study, Drs. Arthur Kellermann and Donald Reay reviewed all gunshot deaths that occurred in King County, Washington, from 1978 to 1983. A total of 743 firearm-related deaths occurred; 398, or 54 percent of which, happened in the home where the firearm was kept.

Of the 398 firearm deaths that occurred in the home, a total of nine were classified as self-protection homicide. Two of those were justifiable homicides; seven were self-defense homicides. Twelve others were unintentional deaths and 41 were criminal homicide. The vast majority, 333, were suicides.

"Guns kept in King County homes were involved in the deaths of friends or acquaintances 12 times as often as in those of strangers. Even after the exclusion of firearm-related suicides, guns kept at home were involved in the death of a member of the household 8 times more often than in the death of a stranger. For every time a gun in the home was involved in a "self-protection" homicide, we noted 1.3 accidental gunshot deaths, 4.6 criminal homicides, and 37 firearm-related suicides."

National statistics compiled from FBI figures show that there were 193 justifiable handgun homicides by a civilian in 1986, compared to slightly more than 9,000 total handgun homicides, 12,000 suicides and at least 1,000 unintentional fatal handgun injuries.

The Kellermann and Reay study concluded, "The home can be a dangerous place. We noted 43 suicides, criminal homicides, or accidental gunshot deaths involving a gun kept in the home for every case of homicide for self-protection. In the light of these findings, it may reasonably be asked whether keeping firearms in the home increases a family's protection or places it in greater danger. Given the unique status of firearms in American society and the national toll of gunshot deaths, it is imperative that we answer this question."

Clearly, this question is not to be considered solely by the public health professionals in this country. Protecting children, by limiting their access to firearms, must be a community concern. It is crucial that we all answer this question and take appropriate action.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the obvious lack of recommendations from the Child Safety Partnership on preventing child deaths and injuries due to guns, the American Youth Work Center and the National Coalition to Ban Handguns make the following recommendations.

1) We urge that appropriate attention be given to the Surgeon General's report from 1981, which called for a total ban on handgun sales, noting particularly the high stakes for the nation's children. The report added, "The panel is aware of the fierce political controversy in this country about any form of gun control, and recognizes the strength of the organized firearms lobby...We realize such a ban is not likely to prove politically feasible in the short term. One useful, less controversial step would be to mandate the development of child and youth protection standards relating to gun safety. The effects of such a safety campaign on child and adolescent death rates should be carefully assessed. Failure to reduce the incidence of youthful handgun deaths by more than half should be regarded as further impetus for an overall ban."

The American Academy of Pediatrics should follow aggressively the recommendations put forth in its policy statement on handgun control. "The American Academy of Pediatrics recognizes the hazards that handguns pose. The elimination of these guns from the environment of children and adolescents would effectively reduce the injuries and fatalities they cause. The Committee on Accident and Poison Prevention strongly urges active support of handgun control legislation."

2) We strongly urge removal of guns, specifically handguns, from homes with children. Guns kept in the home should, at the very least, be unloaded and locked up, with ammunition kept locked up

separately. Following these guidelines, handgun owners may want to reconsider for alternative self-defense methods, if that is the reason they are keeping handguns in the home.

3) We urge Congress to give the Consumer Product Safety Commission or the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms the authority to regulate safety aspects of firearms. Currently there are no minimum safety requirements on domestic firearm manufacturers, nor does the Consumer Product Safety Commission or any other government agency have the right to regulate manufacturers.

4) We urge state health departments to study the issue and recommend policies regarding education and safety. A final report of the Governor's Youth Suicide Prevention Council and a review of the Youth Suicide Prevention Programs in New York State recommended the following in prevention strategies. "The State should undertake an educational demonstration program focusing on the clear need for improved firearm security in households with vulnerable or at-risk teenagers. The Council reiterates its alarm at the documented connection between the increase in adolescent suicidal death and the increased availability of firearms in households over the past 25 years." Other state health departments should follow suit and do what they can to see their recommendations are implemented.

5) We urge school boards to incorporate into the curricula facts on firearms which will encourage children to not own guns as adults and to urge their parents to remove firearms, specifically handguns, from homes. Furthermore, because according to The Injury Fact Book, "unintentional firearm deaths exhibit a pronounced seasonal pattern, with one-fourth occurring in November and December, the primary hunting season in most areas," we urge school superintendents in districts that routinely offer the opening day of hunting season as

an excused absence to reconsider that policy. Casual handling of firearms should not be promoted.

6) We urge Surgeon General Dr. Everett Koop and the Public Health Service to make access to firearms a major public health concern.

7) We urge the Justice, Public Health Service and Education departments to alert all teachers and youth workers to the dangers of access to handguns.

8) We urge Congress to examine the legality of using Missing Children's Assistance Act funds to finance a study on "child safety" which only selectively examines the facts and has little bearing on aiding the truly missing child.

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A Report to the President President's Child Safety Partnership Final Report, 1987

MESSAGES FROM THE DIRECTORS

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national coalition to ban handguns

The statistics presented in this report are frightening, but the issue is not hopeless. There is a voice in Washington, working to reverse the trend of handgun violence. The National Coalition to Ban Handguns is a collection of 33 national religious, professional and civic organizations working together to educate the public about handgun abuse and achieve legislative solutions to the problem.

Each year, 22,000 people die from an uniquely American disease.

Annually, about 9,000 people are murdered with handguns. That accounts for about half of all murders in this country. Additionally, there are at least 12,000 suicides. More than 1,000 people die from unintentional handgun injuries. These are not accidents; they can be easily prevented. Whether the case is a handgun murder in a moment of passionate anger or a curious child who find a "toy" in the closet, the result and message are the same; if a handgun had not been available, the person would more than likely still be alive.

It is the National Coalition to Ban Handguns' organizational aim to ban the manufacture and sale of handguns to private individuals. There are reasonable exceptions: military, police, security officers, pistol clubs and antique dealers. The coalition's emphasis is to keep handguns out of private possession -- where they do the most harm.

Handguns are the only form of self-protection from which we need protection.

Join the National Coalition to Ban Handguns today. Your contribution will be used to save lives and to make this country a safer place.

Michael K. Beard

participating organizations

American Association
of Suicidology
American Ethical Union
Americans for Democratic
Action
American Jewish Congress
American Psychiatric
Association
American Public Health
Association
Black Women's Community
Development Foundation
B'nai B'rith Women
Board of Church & Society,
United Methodists: Church
Center for Social Action,
United Church of Christ
Church of the Brethren,
Washington Office
Friends Committee on National
Legislation
International Ladies' Garment
Workers Union
Jesuit Conference—Office of
Social Ministries
National Alliance for Safer Cities
National Association of Social
Workers
National Council of Jewish
Women, Inc.
National Council of Negro
Women
National Jewish Welfare Board
National Urban League, Inc.
Political Action Committee,
Woman's National Democratic
Club
The Bible Holiness
Movement, International
The Program Agency,
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Union of American Hebrew
Congregations
Unitarian Universalist
Association
United States Conference of
Mayors
United States Student
Association
United Synagogue of America
Women's Division, Board of Global
Ministries, United Methodist
Church
Women's League for Conservative
Judaism
Young Women's Christian
Association of the U.S.A.
National Board
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The accolade "child advocate" or "youth advocate" like any phrase is debased from repetitive use and abuse. Just who isn't a child advocate? All leaders across the American political spectrum readily point to their own positions on the issues of the day as being best for the nation's children.

How is the concerned citizen to tell when government and its leaders offers more than rhetoric on behalf of children? An advocate for the young is willing to subordinate a desire, for example, to lower taxes to the greater good of better schools for our children. And so it is with children and guns. While some arguments can be made in favor of some type of gun ownership, none can be made that the flood of a 150 million virtually unregulated guns is good for children. The carnage of 4,500 youthful deaths by guns each year can not conscientiously be overlooked by the true child advocate.

When the Reagan Administration proclaimed child safety as one of its top children's priorities it thereby assumed an obligation to look at child safety issues comprehensively, objectively, and fairly. An even greater burden for an ethical development of child centered public policy rested with the National Child Safety Partnership's board members. They have failed miserably.

These would be child advocates took \$250,000 in money appropriated with bi-partisan support by Congress to aid truly missing children and squandered it on a dubious study which could have been written for free by the National Rifle Association or the Gun Owners of America. It is particularly disappointing to observe former Sen. Paula Hawkins and Toledo mayor Donna Owens (the former chair of the Attorney General's Advisory Board on Missing Children) approve of this partisan misappropriation of Missing Children's Assistance Act funds.

For those who would be known as child advocates, the lives of children must come before guns. Curbing the easy access to guns by Americans of all ages will do more to promote child safety than all of the sanctimonious right wing approved recommendations contained in the National Child Safety Report just released by the White House.


William W. Treanor

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 28, 1987 A27

Colman McCarthy

Guns Kill Children, Don't They?

TAMPA—Behind showcases of Magnum .357s, pearl-handled pistols and long-barreled rifles, plus the bullets to load this arsenal, Lauren Pidgeon of Pidgeon's Gun Supply portrayed himself as both a gun dealer and gun enthusiast. No one doubts it. His enthusiasm recently extended to children.

For \$125, Pidgeon took out a full-page advertisement in the football program of the Hillsborough High School Terriers. A handgun was pictured at the top of the ad, over which was the name of Pidgeon's store. Discount coupons were displayed, including "Lay-A-Way Available." A handgun that retailed for \$79.95 was on sale for \$44.50. A .22 automatic, usually for \$89.95, was available for \$54.50. A .38 revolver, retailing for \$235.95, was now \$160. Ankle holsters were marked down to \$18.95. An "ammo sale special" offered 25 percent off. At the bottom, Pidgeon said, "Good Luck Terriers!"

When some parents gaged on the placing of a gun ad in a high school program—it is illegal to sell firearms to anyone under 21—Pidgeon found himself in a cross fire of controversy. The St. Petersburg Times reported the dispute.

In his store the other afternoon, Pidgeon said that the controversy is "unwarranted. Definitely. Students go hunting. Students shoot in the Olympics. Why not advertise to them to let them know the availability of the products they want?"

Those who are alarmed about firearm deaths among children—1,000 youths are killed each year, 3,000 commit suicide with guns, and 400 die from gun accidents—have an easy target in someone like Pidgeon. But he's the least of the problem. In this instance, he was responding as a generous businessman to an ad solicitation by the Hillsborough High football coach, who was raising money for the team. The Times quoted the coach: "What's wrong with guns? There's nothing at all wrong with having a gun ad in a high school football program."

At first, that sounds as monstrous as Pidgeon's statement about advertising to kids. Except their actions are legal. The law in Florida, recently loosened to make the state as much a shooting gallery as other states with lenient gun controls, now allows almost anyone to carry a concealed weapon. The Tampa Tribune, which had consistently editorialized against passage of the new legislation, calls Florida's new gun law "terrifying" and "a demonic absurdity."

The absurdists are found in the legislatures. Politicians who sit through hearings and hear from families of murder victims know the carnage statistics. They have been presented with evidence that it is 12 times more likely for a household gun to be used in the death of a family member or a friend than in that of an intruder. They have read the 1986 Gallup poll that shows a population favoring stricter handgun controls. They know that firearm death rates are lower where the laws are stricter and higher where the laws are looser. They have heard the surgeon general's 1981 Select Panel for the Promotion of Child Health call for "a total ban on the sale of handguns."

Still, many legislatures—Florida's being the latest and grossest example—pass laws of such leniency that a new gun is manufactured every 13 seconds. They embolden a football coach to ask, "What's wrong with guns?" and allow a gun dealer to present himself as a jolly good fellow molding future Olympians.

The same week that the Terriers of Tampa were being told of discounted revolvers and ankle holsters, Rep. George Miller (D-Calif.), chairman of the House Select Committee on Children, Youth and Families, was releasing "Kids & Guns: A Child Safety Scandal." The report, published by the National Coalition to Ban Handguns and the American Youth Work Center, cited the latest figures of violence, ranging from nearly one child a week under age five killed unintentionally by firearms to the 4,400 youths who are gunned or who gun themselves to death.

William Treanor of the American Youth Work Center, a Washington group, believes that "while some arguments can be made in favor of some type of gun ownership, none can be made that the flood of 150 million virtually unregulated guns is good for children."

In Florida, the flooding has yet to crest. More deaths, more injuries, more family tragedies and more reports are apparently needed before the legislature says enough. Either that or new toy stores are needed—Guns R Us.

COLMAN MCCARTHY

Arms and the Child

TAMPA, Fla. In the domestic arms race—a gun is manufactured in the United States every 13 seconds—Florida is the latest scene of escalation. Its permissive gun law, enacted Oct. 1, places few restrictions on gun buying or gun owning. The Tampa Tribune, which raised its eloquent editorial voice repeatedly against the law, estimated last May that a massive number of gun permits—130,000—would be authorized in the first year. The paper appears to have had it right. Days after the law went into effect, it reported "a rush for permits."

During the legislative debate, Jack Gordon, a state senator from Miami Beach, spoke for what would be the losing but rational side: "We all know that guns kill people, and the fact of having more guns, or more opportunity to have guns, is just going to mean more violence. There are going to be more people killed; there are going to be more little children who will shoot a gun at themselves or someone else."

The reference to children brings the debate home, literally. It's usually in bedrooms and living rooms where child's play becomes gunplay. Two recent studies provide invaluable research on what can happen to children unlucky enough to be born into gun-owning families.

"When Children Shoot Children," which appeared in a recent *Journal of the American Medical Association* and was written by five medical researchers, told of the 88 unintentional children's firearm deaths in California between 1977 and 1983. Both the shooters and the shot were 14 years of age or younger. The researchers estimate that 5,016 years of potential life were lost in the deaths.

In 82 of the 88 shootings, the firing occurred in a home. Most cases involved children finding a loaded gun—in a drawer or closet, under a pillow or a bed. Sixty-one children were shot in the head or neck. Nearly half died instantly or within one hour of the shooting. Thirty-five deaths were self-inflicted. Fifty-two involved either a playmate or sibling.

The researchers cite several typical deaths:

■ "A 7-year-old boy was shot in the chest with a .22-caliber pistol by his 8-year-old brother. The brother had retrieved the loaded gun from a drawer in their parents' bedroom. Thinking it a toy, he aimed it at his younger brother and pulled the trigger."

■ "An 8-year-old girl was shot in the head

by a 7-year-old playmate with a .38-caliber handgun. The loaded gun had been left under the couch by the victim's parents, who slept in the living room. The safety catch was broken."

■ "An 11-year-old boy was shot in the head by his 12-year-old brother with a 10-gauge shotgun owned by the boys' father. . . . Ordinarily the gun was kept unloaded. The previous night a prowler had been seen; the father loaded the gun at that time."

If there's no place like home for accidental gun deaths, there is no weapon like a firearm for successful suicide. In "Kids & Guns: A Child Safety Scandal," the National Coalition to Ban Handguns and the American Youth Work Center report that of the 4,400 American youths who kill themselves annually, 65 percent use firearms.

A psychologist from the American Association of Suicidology is quoted: "About 25 million households have handguns and half of these keep their guns loaded. Adolescents are impulsive. Having a gun around the house is an invitation to disaster. Adolescents who can't get a lethal weapon don't necessarily choose another. If they do, it's usually a less lethal method and you have a chance to intervene. Often if you can't get a weapon, the impulse passes."

Only the families of gun-killed children can express the depths of these firearm tragedies. Yet how many Mr. Machos, Handgun Honchos and Brave Sportsmen will have the courage or sense to junk their weapon in the name of child safety? To keep a gun for household safety is to ignore what every emergency room medical team knows—guns offer little self-protection. Guns kept at home are eight to 12 times more likely to be involved in the deaths of friends or acquaintances as in those of intruders.

In the violent culture that is America, everyone is a potential gun victim. The highest-risk group is children, but what adult can say with any assurance "not me" when reflecting on the 9,000 handgun deaths expected in the next 12 months?

To live in a shooting gallery and know the risk is at least better than the predicament of children, who don't know it. When they do learn, the adaptation to guns is chilling. An 11-year-old California girl, fearful of her father's punishment because she was caught smoking, wrote this suicide note: "I wanted to grow up and be somebody . . . but I messed up . . . Oh yeah, I forgot to tell you I used the gun—yours. I'm sorry you don't have a daughter anymore."

NCBH Child Safety "Study" A Sham

The desperation of the anti-gunners is best exemplified in a recent "study" on children and guns released by the National Coalition to Ban Handguns.

The NCBH "study" alleges that there are 4,500 firearm-related deaths and up to 22,500 non-fatal firearm-related injuries to "children" each year. They claim 3,000 firearms suicides by "children," although midway through their report they say 3,500 children take their own lives with handguns and long guns. And they do all of this and call for a ban on handguns.

The NCBH "study" apparently was conducted in response to the President's Child Safety Partnership report, which was totally dismissed by NCBH and the American Youth Work Center because it did not mention children and guns.

The report to the President dealt with issues affecting millions of children annually, including physical and sexual abuse, drugs and missing children. Members of the partnership included Health and Human Services Secretary Otis R. Bowen,

Washington Attorney General Kenneth O. Eikenberry, U.S. Sen. Mitch McConnell (Ky.) and former U.S. Sen. Paula Hawkins (Fla.) and Attorney General Edwin Meese III.

Said William Treanor, director of the American Youth Work Center, in dismissing the report, "These would-be child advocates took \$250,000 in money appropriated with bipartisan support by Congress to aid truly missing children and squandered it on a dubious study which could have been written for free by the National Rifle Association."

The AYWC and NCBH claim that "curbing the easy access to guns by Americans of all ages will do more to promote child safety than all of the sanctimonious right wing approved recommendations contained in the National Child Safety report."

But NRA Institute for Legislative Action Research Coordinator Dr. Paul Blackman rejected the NCBH-AYWC analysis of firearm-related deaths and injuries as "simply, self-serving and just plain wrong;

the majority of the numbers are an invention."

He pointed out that firearm-related deaths among children—defined as 0-14, not 0-19 as NCBH used in its study—are few. "Most of the accidents and homicides, and virtually all of the suicides among persons 0-19 involve persons over 14," said Blackman.

Blackman also pointed out that two-thirds of the gun-related deaths involve alleged suicides, a number double the figure generally accepted and reported by the National Center for Health Statistics. In fact, the group making the 3,000 suicides estimate, the American Association of Suicidology, is part of NCBH's "coalition." Their estimate is based on their claim that many of the suicides are accidentally or deliberately misclassified to protect families.

"This is simply not possible," said Blackman. "It is quite likely that some suicides are misclassified, but there are not 1,500 deaths available for reclassification by the American Association of Suicidology un-

less they are claiming that some gun-related suicides are mislabeled as, say, car accidents or falls.

"Likewise, NCBH's figure on accidental injuries is enormously overstated as a result of its ludicrous suicide figure. They are assuming three to five non-fatal injuries with a gun for each fatality. That figure may be defensible if one is talking about homicides or self-inflicted accidents, but not deliberately self-inflicted wounds."

Relying on FBI crime statistics and accidental death figures from the National Safety Council, Blackman estimates the number of children killed each year to be about 600. Based on NCBH's three to five non-fatal injuries for each death, injuries amount to approximately 1,800 to 3,000.

NCBH makes no mention of the existing restrictions on the availability of firearms to persons under age 18 and of handguns to those under 21, nor does it recommend firearms safety training as a possible remedy to the alleged problem of children and guns. Just ban guns, says NCBH.

Study: More guns mean more teen deaths

BY MICHAEL MEEK
Gannett News Service

WASHINGTON — Chester Jackson Jr., an all-city running back at Detroit's Murray-Wright High School, this April ran for his life and lost.

A 14-year-old shot Jackson dead with a .357-caliber Magnum pistol after chasing him through school halls and into a parking lot. Two other students were wounded.

Jackson, 17, was one of the estimated 4,500 youths who die annually because of easy accessibility to guns, according to a recent report. Like Jackson, some are murdered. Others commit suicide. Still others are killed in accidental shootings.

An estimated 13,500 to 22,500 youths are injured by firearms annually, the report, *Kids & Guns — A Child Safety Scandal*, said.

"If one is to be truly concerned about child safety, accessibility to firearms cannot be ignored," said William Treanor, director of the American Youth Work Center, which compiled the report with the National Coalition to Ban Handguns.

"The tragedy is amplified when one considers that firearm deaths are among the most preventable of all childhood fatalities," the report said.

No one knows how many guns are in the

Kids and guns

More youth are dying from shootings because more guns are available, the report. *Kids & Guns — A Child Safety Scandal* says. Some firearm statistics:

■ Youth arrests on weapons charges increased 29% from 1976 to 1986. During the same period, that group's population declined 5%.

■ In Baltimore, almost half of male high school students surveyed have carried a handgun, a grand jury report said.

■ Each year an estimated 3,000 youths use firearms to commit suicide,

hands of youths. But there are indications that people 19 and younger may be toting them around as never before.

The devastation was swift and bloody outside a dance hall in Washington last April when Derck Gillis, 17, went on a shooting rampage that left 11 wounded. He was convicted of assault with a dangerous weapon last week.

"Young males are the most violent people in any society," said Donald Lunde, a professor at Stanford University. "Most major crimes of murder and assault and rape are committed by young males."

A report from the national Centers for Disease Control said young males face the highest risk of being slain and typically are killed by friends or acquaintances during an argument. Arguments apparently sparked the dance hall and Detroit shootings.

While Saturday Night Specials may be obtained on the black market, youths frequently don't go farther than their homes to get one.

The 14-year-old who killed Jackson in Detroit got his gun from his father's tool box. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms estimates that at least half the households nationwide are armed.

Murder is not the only cost of the easily available guns: Suicide by guns is growing more prevalent, the report said.

A report by New York's Youth Suicide Council found a "clear and very disturbing relationship" between the rise in teen suicide and the availability of guns at home.

"It has become all too common for households in the United States to maintain unsecured firearms even when a teen-ager in the house is known to be a suicide risk," the council report said.

"The clear conclusion looking at all the various studies that have been done is that a family should not keep a gun in the house," Treanor said.

1986 FIREARMS MURDERS*
VICTIMS 19 AND UNDER

| | <u>HANDGUNS</u> | <u>OTHER GUNS**</u> | <u>TOTAL</u> |
|------------------|-----------------|---------------------|--------------|
| ALABAMA | 12 | 8 | 20 |
| ALASKA | 5 | 2 | 7 |
| ARIZONA | 15 | 4 | 19 |
| CALIFORNIA | 194 | 49 | 243 |
| COLORADO | 10 | 6 | 16 |
| CONNECTICUT | 6 | 2 | 8 |
| DELAWARE | - | 1 | 1 |
| WASHINGTON, D.C. | 6 | 1 | 7 |
| FLORIDA | 48 | 30 | 78 |
| GEORGIA | 20 | 9 | 29 |
| HAWAII | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| IDAHO | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| ILLINOIS | 58 | 20 | 78 |
| INDIANA | 14 | 7 | 21 |
| IOWA | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| KANSAS | 4 | 3 | 7 |
| KENTUCKY | 9 | 9 | 18 |
| LOUISIANA | 33 | 8 | 41 |
| MAINE | - | - | - |
| MARYLAND | 25 | 4 | 29 |
| MASSACHUSETTS | 4 | 2 | 6 |
| MICHIGAN | 73 | 46 | 119 |
| MINNESOTA | 4 | 1 | 5 |
| MISSISSIPPI | 5 | - | 5 |
| MISSOURI | 20 | 14 | 34 |
| MONTANA | - | - | - |
| NEBRASKA | - | 1 | 1 |
| NEVADA | 1 | 3 | 4 |
| NEW HAMPSHIRE | 4 | - | 4 |
| NEW JERSEY | 15 | 4 | 19 |
| NEW MEXICO | 10 | 5 | 15 |
| NEW YORK | 79 | 10 | 89 |
| NORTH CAROLINA | 17 | 8 | 25 |
| NORTH DAKOTA | - | - | - |
| OHIO | 19 | 17 | 36 |
| OKLAHOMA | 8 | 3 | 11 |
| OREGON | 4 | 4 | 8 |
| PENNSYLVANIA | 19 | 5 | 24 |
| RHODE ISLAND | - | 2 | 2 |
| SOUTH CAROLINA | 14 | 10 | 24 |
| SOUTH DAKOTA | - | - | - |
| TENNESSEE | 21 | 13 | 34 |
| TEXAS | 83 | 37 | 120 |
| UTAH | - | 3 | 3 |
| VERMONT | 2 | - | 2 |
| VIRGINIA | 17 | 8 | 25 |
| WASHINGTON | 8 | 4 | 12 |
| WEST VIRGINIA | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| WISCONSIN | 9 | 4 | 13 |
| WYOMING | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| TOTAL | 904 | 375 | 1,279 |

Source: FBI Uniform Crime Report
Supplemental Data

*Murder as defined by the FBI Uniform Crime Report is the willful (nonnegligent) killing of one human being by another. Not included are deaths caused by negligence, suicide, or accident or justifiable homicides.

**Other guns includes shotguns, rifles, and firearms not specified.



**Children in Wisconsin mall.
Photo by Elliott Beard.**

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