

# HARVARD SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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## States with Higher Levels of Gun Ownership Have Higher Homicide Rates

Newswise – Firearms are used to kill two out of every three homicide victims in America.

In the first nationally representative study to examine the relationship between survey measures of household firearm ownership and state level rates of homicide, researchers at the Harvard Injury Control Research Center found that homicide rates among children, and among women and men of all ages, are higher in states where more households have guns. The study appears in the February 2007 issue of *Social Science and Medicine*.

Matthew Miller, Assistant Professor of Health Policy and Injury Prevention at Harvard School of Public Health, and his colleagues David Hemenway and Deborah Azrael, used survey data from the Center for Disease Control and Preventions 2001 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, the world's largest telephone survey with over 200,000 respondents nationwide. Respondents in all 50 states were asked whether any firearms were kept in or around their home. The survey found that approximately one in three American households reported firearm ownership.

Analyses that controlled for several measures of resource deprivation, urbanization, aggravated assault, robbery, unemployment, and alcohol consumption found that states with higher rates of household firearm ownership had significantly higher homicide victimization rates for children, and for women and men. In these analyses, states within the highest quartile of firearm prevalence had firearm homicide rates 114% higher than states within the lowest quartile of firearm prevalence. Overall homicide rates were 60% higher. The association between firearm prevalence and homicide was driven by gun-related homicide rates; non-gun-related homicide rates were not significantly associated with rates of firearm ownership.

These results suggest that it is easier for potential homicide perpetrators to obtain a gun in states where guns are more prevalent. Our findings suggest that in the United States, household firearms may be an important source of guns used to kill children, women and men, both on the street and in their homes, said Miller.

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Miller M., Hemenway D., Azrael D. State-level homicide victimization rates in the US in relation to survey measures of household firearm ownership, 2001-2003 *Soc Sci Med.* 2007 Feb;64(3):656-64. Epub 2006 Oct 27.

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