

Researchers study hidden homicide trend

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Gun-related homicide among young men rose sharply in the United States in recent years even though the nation's overall homicide rate remained flat, according to a study by researchers at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. Between 1999 and 2005, homicide involving firearms increased 31 percent among black men ages 25 to 44 and 12 percent among white men of the same age. The study is published in Online First edition of the *Journal of Urban Health*.

"The recent flatness of the U.S. homicide rate obscures the large increases in firearm death among males ages 25-44, especially black males," said Susan Baker, MPH, co-author of the study and a professor with the Bloomberg School's Center for Injury Research and Policy.

For the study, Baker and her colleagues Daniel Webster and Gouqing Hu, the study's lead author, analyzed data from WISQARS™ (Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System), which includes information on injury-related deaths and mortality rates per 100,000 population from 1981-2005. Mortality data by urbanization level was obtained through the Wonder System at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

According to the study, the overall homicide rate remained between 6.0 and 6.1 deaths per 100,000 from 1999 to 2005, except for an increase in 2001 attributed to the terrorist attacks of September 11. The researchers found significant increases in the rate of firearm homicide for white males ages 25 to 34 and for black males ages 25 to 44.

The increase in firearm homicide for males age 25 to 44 was not distributed evenly throughout the country. The most significant increases occurred in Alabama, California, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas and Washington. The other states did not see significant change. Additionally, most of the increases occurred in and around large metropolitan areas.

"The increases in firearm homicide we measured were almost twice as high among blacks as among whites and they were mostly concentrated in central metropolitan and fringe metropolitan areas," said Webster, ScD, MPH, co-director of the Bloomberg School's Center for Gun Policy and Research. "Further research is needed to ascertain the causes for recent increases in firearm homicides involving men living in urban area. Factors that may be influencing the homicide trends we observed include the number of people returning from prison as well as conditions unique to the particular age cohorts. For many black males in their 30's who grew up in inner cities this could include early exposure to lead and unusually high rates of gun homicides surrounding them during their adolescence."

Source: Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health

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