



DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY
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Youth Firearm Violence
Key Facts

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Although firearm deaths began decreasing in 1994, both the number and rate of deaths from firearm violence for those 19 and under remain at historic highs. While the number of firearm deaths for those 19 and under has decreased from a high of 5,931 in 1993 to 5,285 in 1995 there still were an average of 5,282 deaths a year from 1990 to 1995. This represents a 50 percent increase over the average of 3,517 firearm fatalities that occurred from 1980 to 1989. Overall, an average of 4,233 persons aged 19 and under have died annually from firearm injuries from 1980 to 1995. *Figures 1 and 2 depict this increase.*¹

The main factor affecting this rise was the sharp increase in the average annual number of firearm homicides. There were an average of 3,314 firearm homicides for those 19 and under from 1990 to 1995. This represents a 105 percent increase over the average of 1,615 firearm homicides that occurred between 1980 and 1989. Overall, an average of 2,252 persons aged 19 and under died annually from firearm homicides from 1980 to 1995. *Figures 3 and 4 display this increase.*²

Firearm related suicides have increased as well, but at a slower rate. From 1990 to 1995 there were an average of 1,468 firearm suicides. This represents an increase of 18 percent over the average of 1,249 firearm suicides from 1980 to 1989. Overall, an average of 1,331 firearm suicides for those aged 19 and under occurred from 1980 to 95. *Figures 5 and 6 display this increase*³

Unintentional firearm deaths have decreased significantly since 1980, but youths aged 19 and under have consistently accounted for a significant percentage of these deaths. From 1980 to 1995, over one third of all unintentional firearm deaths occurred among those aged 19 and under, with an average of 533 deaths annually. Overall, those aged 15 to 19 had the highest annual average of unintentional firearm deaths of any age group, at 285 deaths per year.⁴

Males aged 15 to 19 have the fastest rising firearm death rate. In 1994, the overall firearm death rate (comprised of homicide, suicide, and unintentional deaths, deaths associated with legal intervention and those of unknown origin) for this age group reached 49.2 per 100,000 population, more than double the rate of 22.3 per 100,000 in 1985. During the same time period, the overall age-adjusted firearm death rate rose only 18 percent, from 12.7 to 15.1 deaths per 100,000 population. Even with the recent decline in firearm deaths in 1995, the death rate for males aged 15 to 19 was 42.4 per 100,000 population, more than triple the rate of 13.9 per 100,000 population for the population as a whole.

The main factor influencing this rise was the number of firearm homicides. This increase is exemplified by the 129 percent increase in the firearm homicide rate among males aged 15 to 19. Overall, there were 31,953 firearm homicides from 1980 to 1995 among those aged 15 to 19. This number went from 1,743 in 1980 to 3,249 in 1995. These increases have far outstripped any growth that can be accounted for with demographic factors and point to a rising tide of violence that has heretofore not been successfully addressed by public policies at the local, state or federal level. In the last two years, however, there has been a reduction in the number of firearm homicides in this age group as well.⁵

Along with the rise in firearm related deaths among those aged 15 to 19 in the past 15 years, there has also been a significant rise in the rate at which youth commit homicide. This trend contradicts the overall decrease in violent crime that has been seen nationally. In demographic terms, the homicide rate rises rapidly in the middle to late teen years and then drops off dramatically as age increases. That young offenders commit more homicides than older ones is not new. What is new is the sharp increase in the murder rate in the last decade. During this time period the number of firearm homicides by those aged 10 to 17 more than doubled. This rise has been not followed by a comparative one in older offenders. In fact, the rate for these older offenders has leveled off or even decreased. Thus, much of the increase in the overall homicide rate can be attributed to the rise in homicides by young offenders. This rise is especially significant since the number and rate of non-firearm homicides remained virtually unchanged during the same time period. *Figure 6* shows this rise.⁶

There has also been a rise in the number of so called "cross over killings", in which offenders are younger, sometimes significantly younger, than their victims. Analysis of the Supplementary Homicide Reports (SHRs) by experts has found that more than three quarters of offenders aged 13 to 17 were younger than their victims. In fact, 53 percent of killers were five or more years younger than their victims in 1995. Interestingly, this trend is not replicated in older offenders. In fact, only 35 percent of killers had victims that were five or more years younger than they were in 1995. This trend has existed for the last ten years and has increased since 1985, a fact which contradicts conventional theories that the rise in juvenile homicides came from juvenile offenders killing each other.⁷

The volatility of the trends in youth crime statistics, especially in the last fifteen years, makes it difficult to predict with confidence what future trends will emerge. Statistically, the youth violent crime rate and the size of the population 19 and under have headed in opposite directions from 1980 to 1995. Youth violent crime rates rose sharply in the middle 1980's while the size of the population 19 and under was decreasing. This trend reversed itself in the middle 1990's where youth violent crime decreased while the size of the population aged 19 and under rose. Current statistics show a continuation of the decline in youth violent crime that began in 1995, while the size of the population age 19 and under is projected to increase by 10 to 15 percent. The complex interaction of these factors and others makes it difficult to predict what trends will emerge in the future.⁸

Overall Firearm Deaths for Ages 19 and Under 1980 to 1995

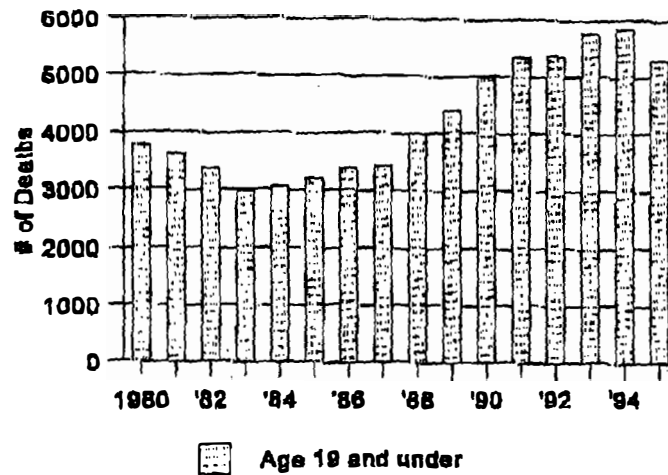


Figure 1

Compiled from data gathered on the National Center for Injury Control and Prevention web site at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/>

Average Overall Firearm Deaths Ages 19 and Under

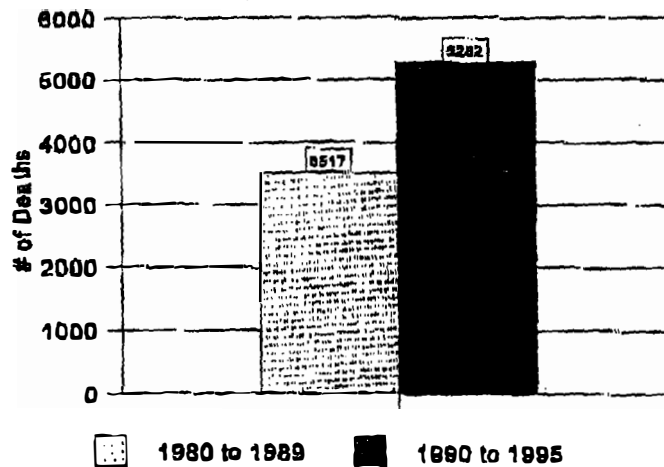


Figure 2

Compiled from data gathered on the National Center for Injury Control and Prevention web site at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/>

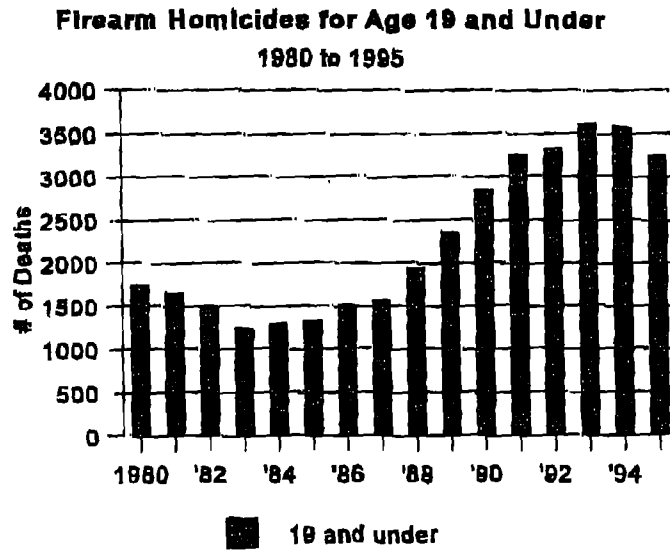


Figure 3

Compiled from data gathered on the National Center for Injury Control and Prevention
web site at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/>

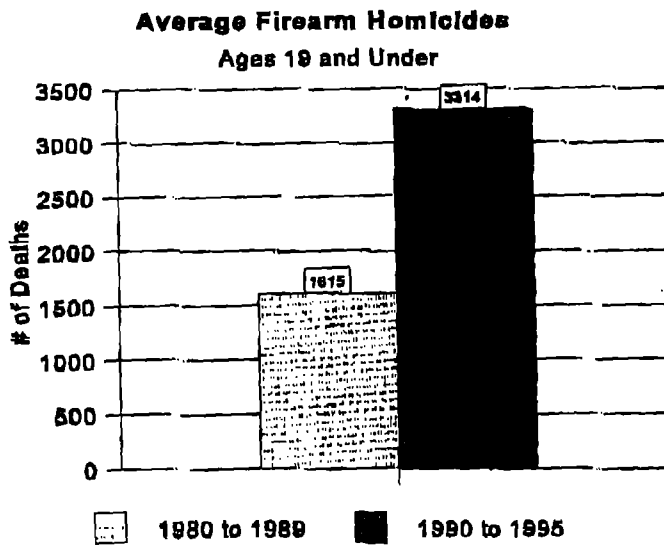


Figure 4

Compiled from data gathered on the National Center for Injury Control and Prevention
web site at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/>

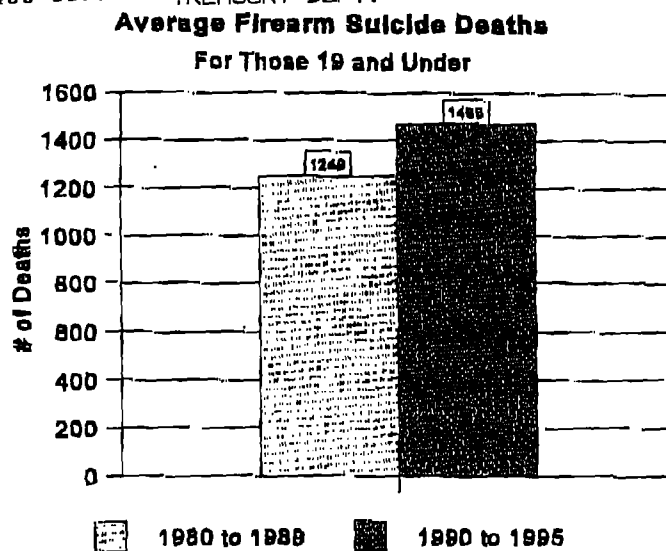


Figure 5
Compiled from data gathered on the National Center for Injury Control and Prevention
web site at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/>

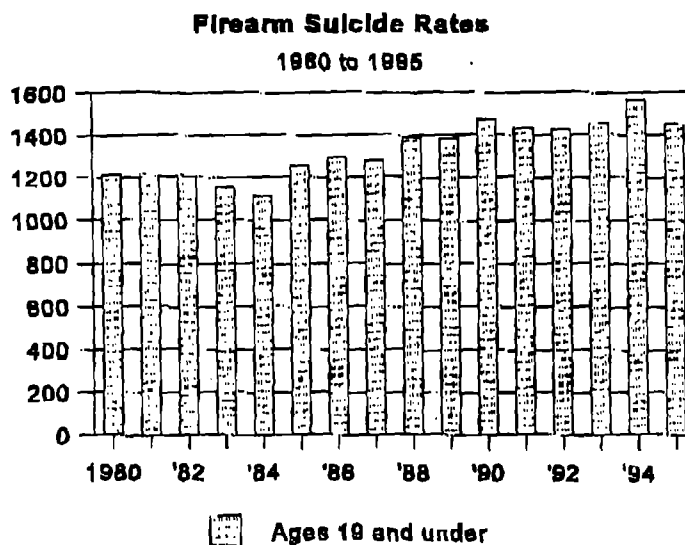


Figure 6
Compiled from data gathered on the National Center for Injury Control and Prevention
web site at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/>

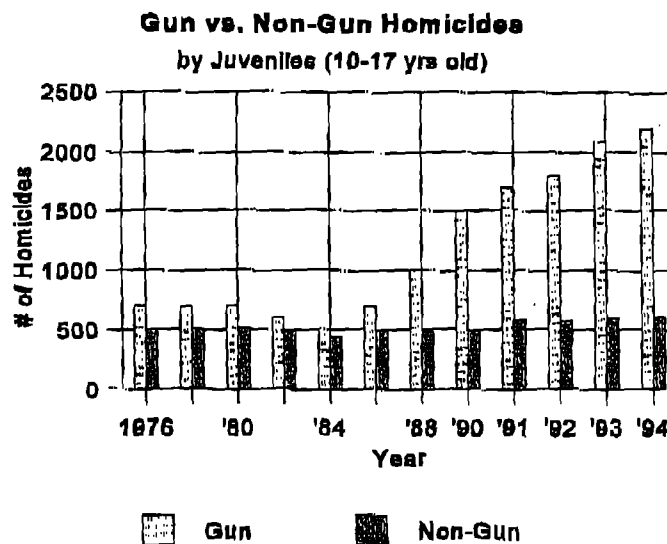


Figure 7

Sources: Blumstein, Alfred, "Linking Gun Availability to Youth Gun Violence", *Journal of Law and Contemporary Problems*, Duke University, Spring 1995, p.18.

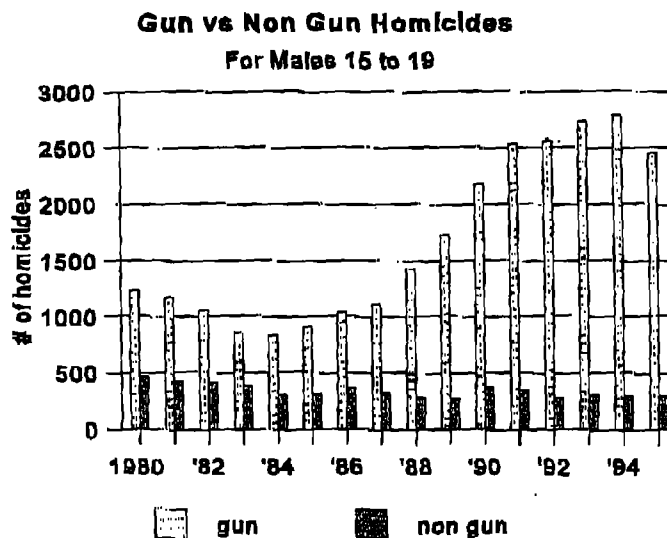


Figure 8

Compiled from data gathered on the National Center for Injury Control and Prevention web site at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/>

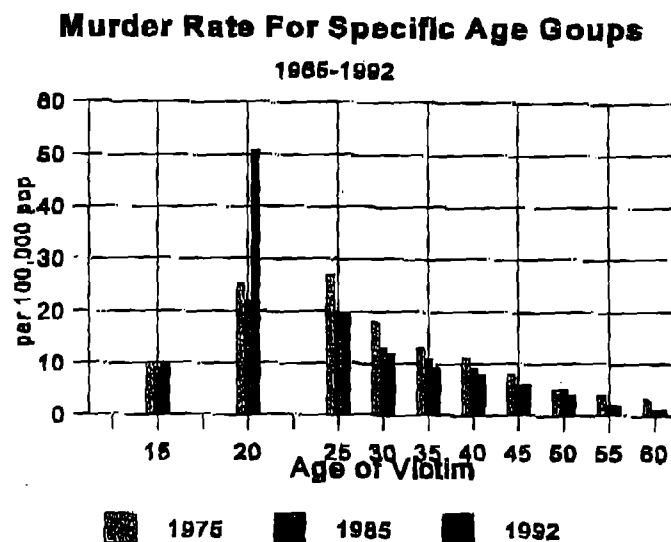


Figure 9

Source: Blumstein, Alfred "Violence by Young People: Why the Deadly Nexus" *National Institute of Justice Journal*, August 1995, p.

Endnotes

1. From data gathered from The National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (NCIPC) web site
<http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/osp/us8179/ofarm.htm>. Also files us8381, us8784, us9188, us9592 pp. 1-7.
2. From data gathered from The National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (NCIPC) web site
<http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/osp/us8179/fhomi.htm>. Also files us8381, us8784, us9188, us9592 pp. 1-7.
3. From data gathered from The National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (NCIPC) web site
<http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/osp/us8179/farmsuic.htm>. Also files us8381, us8784, us9188, us9592 pp. 1-7.
4. From data gathered from The National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (NCIPC) website
<http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/osp/us8179/ufarm/htm>. Also files us8381, us8784, us9188, us9592 pp. 1-7.
5. From data gathered from the (NCIPC) web site.
<http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/osp/us8179/fhomi.htm>. Also files us8381, us8784, us9188, us9592 pp. 1-7.
6. Blumstein, Alfred "Violence by Young People: Why the Deadly Nexus" *National Institute of Justice Journal*, August 1995, p. 5.
7. Cook, Philip J, and Laub, John, H "The Unprecedented Epidemic In Youth Violence", Duke University, Unpublished paper, pp. 23, 42-43.
8. Cook, Philip et. al., p. 4; Wickham, Dwayne " Avoid jailing juveniles with hardened adults", USA TODAY, February 10, 1998, p. 13A.