

Firearm Deaths and Injuries in Duval County

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A leading cause of death for adolescents and young adults in Jacksonville, the state of Florida and the United States is intentional injury. This challenges public health leaders to find the causes and interventions that will decrease preventable deaths. Comparable size urban counties in Florida illustrate the gravity of the problem in Jacksonville. The rate for firearm assault deaths in Duval County was 8.4 per 100,000 population in 2005, compared to 2.3 in Hillsborough and 5.0 in Orange Counties. However, the rate for firearm assault deaths for ages 15-24 in Duval County was even more alarming with 18.5 per 100,000 for combined years 2004 and 2005 compared to Hillsborough County with 6.9 per 100,000 and Orange County with 9.4 per 100,000.¹

This 15-24 age group had the highest percentage of gun related emergency room visits of any other age group, with 49.6% of all gun injuries in 2005. Overall, the rate for emergency room related gun injuries in Duval County was 28.4 per 100,000 in 2005 compared to 4.0 and 4.8 per 100,000 for Hillsborough and Orange Counties, respectively. For hospitalizations, Duval's rate was 17.3 per 100,000, which was 380.6% higher than the rate in Hillsborough County and 220.4% higher than the rate in Orange County.¹

As with many health problems, minority populations are

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particularly hard hit, with blacks experiencing 69% of all homicide deaths from firearms in Duval County, although they represent only 31% of the population. The homicide death rate due to firearm discharge for blacks in 2005 was 18.3 per 100,000 compared to 2.8 per 100,000 for the white population. The rate for all firearm-related deaths (intentional and unintentional) in 2005 was 16.8 per 100,000, 97.6% higher than Hillsborough and 84.6% higher than Orange counties. Blacks are more likely to be hospitalized or require emergency room treatment for gun related injuries than whites. Seventy nine percent of individuals hospitalized and 80% of individuals admitted to the emergency room for firearm injuries were black. Gender differences are profound with the percent of men admitted to the emergency room and the hospital for firearm injuries at 90% and 93%, respectively.¹

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The recent killings at the Virginia Tech University brought home one of the problems contributing to gun violence, which is easy access to firearms by those who are mentally unstable. Few would argue that restricting access to guns by criminals, the mentally ill, and unsupervised adolescents should be integral to prevention efforts to reduce this needless carnage. Unfortunately, most guns used in crimes are initially purchased legally, with the guns used in crimes frequently purchased through unregulated secondary sales.² Johns Hopkins University researchers and co-directors of the Center for Gun Policy and Research, Vernick and Webster, recently identified policies that can *prevent the diversion of guns to the illicit market*, providing direction for prevention efforts. However, public health, law enforcement, sports associations and community groups are challenged to create policies and interventions that provide this restricted access without restricting access to sportspersons and law abiding citizens.

Identifying policies that can help reduce violent injuries in Jacksonville is also a challenge. The Duval County Health Department (DCHD) has convened a group of community leaders from medicine, law enforcement, public health, education and social services organizations to conduct a systematic review of the evidence to identify policies and programs that have been demonstrated to work. Applying the principles of evidence-based public health is an important service that medicine and public health can provide the community.

**Contact Rebecca Filipowicz at 904-665-3116
for a copy of the Violent Death and Injury Report.**

Resources

1. Institute for Health, Policy and Evaluation Research, Center for Health Statistics Report on Violent Death and Injury. Volume 6, Issue 2, 2007. 6,12,15,16.
2. Vernick JS, Webster DW. Policies to prevent firearm trafficking. *Inj Prev.* 2007 Apr;13(2):78-9.