

Guns in the Household: Family Choice Dynamics

Gun Death 5 Slide Series, Volume 5

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The Menges Group

Strategic Health Policy & Care Coordination Consulting

Introduction

- This fifth edition of our Gun Death 5 Slide Series explores how families can become better positioned to make a more data-driven and less belief-driven decision regarding keeping a gun in their homes.
- The next two slides summarize some of the key data points we have tabulated regarding home gun safety – conveying the overwhelming degree to which having a gun in the home leads to deaths among the household's members (versus protection of the household's members).
- The ensuing slides discuss ways objective information can be made more accessible to support family decisions, focusing on the health plans' role.

Data Findings

- Suicide is by far the leading gun death risk in the home. Roughly four in-home gun suicides occur for every in-home gun homicide.
 - This is driven by the facts that a) roughly $\frac{3}{4}$ of suicides occur in the home; b) roughly $\frac{3}{4}$ of homicides occur elsewhere; and c) nearly twice the overall number of suicides occur relative to homicides.
- Even when focusing on homicides that occur inside the victim's home, the chances of dying via homicide are far higher in a gun household than in a non-gun household.
- Suicide and homicide death rates vary widely by state, and these differences can be almost entirely explained by differences in the percentage of households with a gun.

Less than 1% of Private Citizens' Gun Killings Fulfill a Defensive/Protective Objective

Evidence from 2011 (tabulations using FBI data):

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|--------------------------|--------|
| Gun Deaths Via Homicide: | 11,068 |
| Gun Deaths Via Suicide: | 19,990 |
| Accidental Gun Deaths | 583 |

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| Gun Deaths Via Private Citizen Justifiably Killing Person During Commission of a Crime: | 260 |
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- For every gun killing that private citizens executed legally and *defensively* during 2011, **119** gun deaths occurred *offensively* and another **2** gun deaths occurred accidentally. By this metric, bringing a gun into the home is a stunningly unsafe decision.
- Guns cannot be programmed to be used only for defensive purposes.

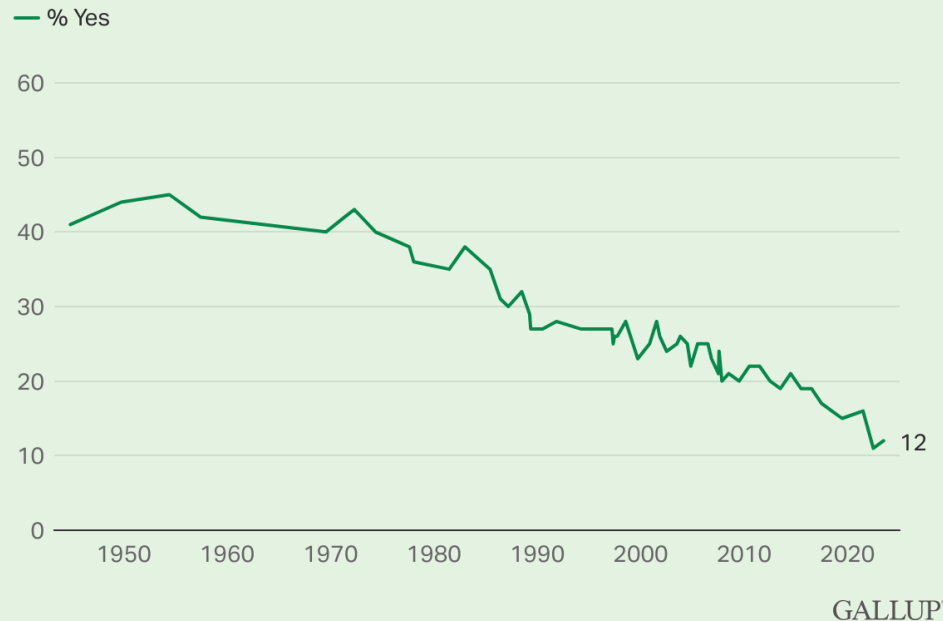
We're Optimistic Gun Ownership can Decrease – Akin to What's Happened with Cigarettes

- Adults in the US are free to own a gun, and this will continue to be the case. However, we are all also free to **NOT** own a gun – and to make our own decisions.
- Given the “checkmate” nature of the objective evidence, can we as a nation/culture make headway against the widely held *belief* that gun possession makes one's household safer?
- Cigarette use may provide an encouraging precedent where, similar to guns, adults are free to make their own personal decisions.

Cigarette Smoking Has Declined Since 1972

Cigarette Smoking Among U.S. Adults Near Record Low

Have you, yourself, smoked any cigarettes in the past week?



- In 1945, around 45% of US adults smoked cigarettes; today this rate has decreased to 12%.
- Lung cancer death rates peaked in 1990 at 91.1 per 100,000 for men and at 41.6 per 100,000 for women in 2002. Since then, the rates have decreased by 59% for men and 34% for women.
- Several methods have helped individuals reduce their reliance on tobacco: e.g., smoking cessation programs, nicotine replacement therapy, and tobacco control policies (such as tobacco-free campuses)
- While tobacco control policies have been effective at reducing cigarette smoking, the most significant factor that has led to the decline of cigarette use is that *smoking has become increasingly less socially accepted*. ([Cummings](#)).

Role of the Health Plan Community

- Health plans – particularly those serving Medicaid subgroups – have increasingly adopted a population health focus.
 - These organizations now often offer and deliver education around smoking cessation, nutrition, housing, etc. to their (typically large) enrollee populations.
- While health plans have no control over a given enrollee’s behaviors in these areas, they have **total control over the effort** they put forth to encourage healthy decisions to occur. The same is true with regard to gun ownership.
- We see health plans as being in an important position to amplify education efforts about individuals’ gun ownership choices. However, many health plans need to overcome taking the stance that “this isn’t in our lane.”
 - Health plans are encouraged to educate their enrollees (objectively) against handgun ownership with at least the same level of effort/investment deployed to educate against smoking.

What Can Health Plans Do?

- We encourage Medicaid MCOs (and all health plans, for that matter), to get more involved in disseminating objective data about the risks a gun at home creates.
 - This information can become a more frequent component of the health education materials. Data are readily available on each state's suicides and homicides, including the percentage occurring via firearm.
- Gun ownership can become part of a health plan's data capture and permit targeted education and information sharing -- e.g., asking at initial and other assessments: "Is there a gun in this home?"
- Objective data on the risks of gun ownership can be included in ongoing case management and care coordination efforts.

5 Slide Series Overview

Our 5 Slide Series is typically a monthly publication whereby we briefly discuss/address a selected topic outside the confines of our client engagements. The Menges Group has developed a variety of datasets that we use to support our 5 Slide Series and client projects.

To be added to our list to receive these as they are published (or to be removed), please email us at pcall@themengesgroup.com. If you have questions about the content or data sources we have available, please email us at jmenges@themengesgroup.com.

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