Juvenile Gun Violence: Essay, Research Paper

Juvenile gun violence is an ever-increasing problem in our country. With a wave of school shooting behind us it is time to get this under control. Many studies have been done on how to effectively diminish juvenile gun violence. It is clear that this must be handled on a state and local level with the federal government backing the states. Prevention and law enforcement is the key to successfully eradicate our nation of the ugly stain caused by youth gun violence.

Prevention should begin in the home. Studies show that “gun ownership by adults and the introduction of their children into recreational gun culture appears to reduce problems associated with teenage violence” (Bilchik 11). If a child has grown up around guns and is taught from an early age the proper usage and safety, they are less likely to use it in an inappropriate manner. Legal gun owners usually learn about guns at home, while the illegal owners learn on the street.

Many juveniles claim that they carry a gun for protection. They feel that they need protection on the way to and from school, which makes schools a prime setting for violence. According to Welsh, “Thirty-seven percent of all violent crimes experienced by youths aged twelve to fifteen occurred on school grounds” (Welsh 185). An astonishing thirty percent of students surveyed said they had been victims of assault while en route to or in school.

Juveniles resort to violence, usually involving guns, instead of communicating with each other. “Although guns are more available today, youth also now show an increasing tendency to use them to settle disputes. When youth who are already predisposed to violence have easy access to guns, they may be more likely to become violent” (Bilchik 9). “In 1987, 75% of U.S. homicides committed by 15-24-year-olds involved firearms (Giller 249). Conflict management and anger management should be taught in the schools. Give juveniles other options besides resorting to violence. Welsh states that with these programs “youths involved in disputes learn how to identify their interests in a specific interaction, express their views, listen attentively, and seek mutually acceptable solutions (Welsh 192). Programs that teach students about gun safety and gun misuse including accidental shootings should be implemented into schools, especially in areas of high gun violence. Begin teaching children at an early age that guns are not toys and should never be handled without adult supervision. Explain to children that a gunshot wound is a very serious injury and is not like they see on TV. Children should be talked to about guns and why they are only to be used by adults.

Households with children and guns can be an extremely dangerous situation. If the child is told simply to not touch the gun then his/her first reaction will be curiosity about it. Teach children about firearms and always practice gun safety rules. The National Rifle Association gives tips on proper safe gun handling, “always keep the gun pointed in a safe direction, always keep your finger off the trigger until ready to shoot, and always keep the gun unloaded until ready to use” (Connors 1). If a parent talks to the child about guns and proper gun safety then the child is less likely to be involved in gun violence. Educating our children about guns and gun misuse is a key factor in prevention of gun violence.

Most juvenile gun violence occurs on the streets as a result of drug dealings. The dealers carry guns to protect their business while the members of the community carry guns to protect themselves from the drug dealers. This promotes a feeling of fear on the streets and causes more violence. The police can have an effect on this situation. The Kansas City Weed and Seed Program focuses on policing the streets in order to get guns off the streets. They use every opportunity “including traffic and curfew violations…. During these routine stops, police look for infractions that give them legal authority to search a car or pedestrian for illegal weapons” (Bilchik 28). By making their presence known on the street they reduce the amount of juveniles carrying a firearm, therefore providing a safer community. This program proved effective by reducing crime by at least 50 percent during a six-month period.

Law enforcement plays a large role in the fight against juvenile gun violence. There are many ways for our police to deal with this problem. There are numerous laws on the books that if strictly enforced would deter many juveniles from possessing a firearm. The Youth Handgun Safety Act prohibits a juvenile to possess a handgun or ammunition. If every juvenile arrested with a handgun in possession were prosecuted then many juveniles would be discouraged from even risking it. Project Exile in Richmond, Virginia encourages strict enforcement of gun laws by prosecutors. For example, it is illegal for a person to carry a gun while in possession of drugs. Once the prosecutors actually began enforcing these statutes the crime rates went down and many guns were seized. The Gun Free Schools Act enacted in October 1994 requires that any student who brings a firearm to school be referred to the criminal justice or juvenile delinquency system. The juvenile should immediately have this go on his record and be punished. The threat of having a juvenile record might cause some students to think twice about bringing a gun to school.

There are other proposals on how to reduce the amount of juvenile gun violence we have in our country. For example, all gun owners could be licensed and have mandatory registration on all guns. That way only legal gun owners could buy guns and the gun could be traced back to the owner. This would cause the owners to safeguard their guns and therefore keep them out of children’s and criminal’s hands. Also, a thorough background check should be made on all sales and transfers of a firearm. At this point in time background checks are not required by law in all states and on all firearm transactions. This creates a loophole in the system in which persons not legally able to purchase a gun are still allowed to do so.

Now that juvenile gun violence is in almost every community it has become a social issue that demands attention. Firearms should be kept out of the hands of children and should not be used by juveniles against each other. There are numerous programs that have begun to educate today’s youth about gun violence and how to prevent it. These programs need to be implemented in schools and communities all over the country. Legislature should be passed to make it more difficult for criminals to acquire guns but not infringe on the law-abiding citizen. The laws we have should be enforced and more juveniles should be prosecuted in order to make it a risk to possess a firearm. A combination of prevention and law enforcement strategies must be enacted in order to resolve this problem within our country.

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