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Gun Related Youth Violence: Fear of Victimization versus the Influence of Significant Others

Ryan Spohn and Samantha Lane

Abstract

Differential association/social learning theories have received considerable empirical support as an explanation of participation in delinquent acts, including violent delinquency (Heimer 1997). More recently, and primarily as a result of highly publicized school shootings in suburban high schools, fear of crime and victimization have received attention as motivators of gun-carrying and gun violence. These phenomena are generally not examined in unison, however, leaving open the question of their relative role as a cause of gun carrying and violence amongst youth. The current research project addresses this question. A major strength of the current research is the adoption of multiple measures of each perspective. We examine the impact of the attitudes and behaviors of family members and friends on the gun-related behaviors of a sample of male high school age youth. Moreover, we adopt a variety of measures of fear of victimization and actual victimization in schools, on school grounds, and in neighborhoods. The primary goal of this research is to enhance our understanding of the multiplicity of factors that contribute to youthful involvement with firearms and violent delinquency.