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WMJ: Report describes population and geographic characteristics of firearm deaths

MADISON – The firearms mortality rate in Wisconsin is lower than the national average, but has continued to rise over the past 15 years. A research [report](#) published in the [current issue](#) of *WMJ*, assessed demographic and geographic factors contributing to Wisconsin’s rising deaths due to firearms.

“Our goal is to contribute empirical information essential to the future development of gun safety policies and programs that will educate the public on the responsible use and storage of firearms and may reduce firearm mortality throughout the state,” wrote authors Wen-Jan Tuan, MS, MPH, and John J. Frey III, MD.

To better understand the relationship between firearm deaths and population characteristics, the authors examined patterns of firearm-related deaths in Wisconsin from 2000 through 2014, looking at reason, age, sex, race/ethnicity and region of the state.

The study showed that about 14 percent of all injury-related deaths in Wisconsin were caused by firearms. The majority (97 percent) of firearm fatalities were due to suicides and homicides, with the overall number and rate of gun deaths by suicide consistently outnumbering homicides.

Males were the predominant group to use a firearm to commit suicide, with white men age 45 and older from rural regions and small towns the largest risk group. Homicides by firearms show a large racial disparity, with the highest rates among young African-Americans in southeastern Wisconsin. Firearm homicides among minority populations are 26 times that of whites.

“Firearm mortality imposes a wide array of health, societal and financial problems on many vulnerable populations. Solutions will require changes in public policy and finding effective preventive strategies used by community-based clinicians, public health agencies and public interest organizations. In the study, we hoped to show characteristics associated with gun deaths as the first step toward addressing them,” wrote the authors.

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