Weapon Carrying at School and Suicide Attempts among U.S. Teens

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A recent study found that high school students who report carrying a weapon on school property may be at increased risk for suicidal behaviors. This result occurred even after adjusting for known suicide risk factors.

Researchers used 2017 data from the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, a nationally representative survey of high school students. They examined the relationship between weapon carrying on school property in the past 30 days and suicide attempts in the past year, controlling for sociodemographic characteristics and known risk factors for suicide. Those risk factors included past-year experience of bullying; ever experiencing forced sexual intercourse; feeling sad or hopeless in the past year; cigarette smoking and binge drinking in the past 30 days; and lifetime use of cannabis, illicit drugs, and prescription medication.

The researchers found that youth who reported carrying a weapon on school property were twice as likely to have attempted suicide in the past year as those who did not report carrying a weapon on school property.

Understanding the association between weapon carrying and suicide attempts among teens will allow school staff to better identify students at risk. This study highlights the importance of directing suicide prevention and intervention efforts to youth identified as having easy access to weapons.