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Delinquency and Gun Violence: The Intervening Role of Values toward Guns

Ryan Spohn

Abstract:

The current research project examines the intervening role of values towards gun possession and gun use in predicting involvement of high school-aged males in general delinquency and gun-related delinquency. As the first step of the project, we examine the factors that influence the values that the youth have towards gun possession and gun use. The most important factors producing positive values towards guns are a need for protection, having friends who carry guns, being a gang member, and being a victim of a gun crime. In contrast, frequency of church attendance reduces such values. As the next step, we examined social control, victimization, and gun-related factors that influenced participation in general delinquency and whether gun values served as an intervening mechanism in this process. We found that social bonds to parents and school, having witnessed a killing, owning a handgun, and carrying a gun out of a need for protection all increased the likelihood of delinquency, and values towards gun possession and use did not mediate these relationships. Finally, we narrowed our focus to gun-related delinquency. We found that Hispanic ethnicity, having men in one's family that carry guns, and owning a handgun all increased gun-related delinquency, and these relationships were not mediated by values towards guns. Our findings suggest that attempts to alter youth's values towards gun possession and gun use will have little impact on gun-related crime or delinquency in general. Instead, we should target our efforts on keeping handguns out of their possession.