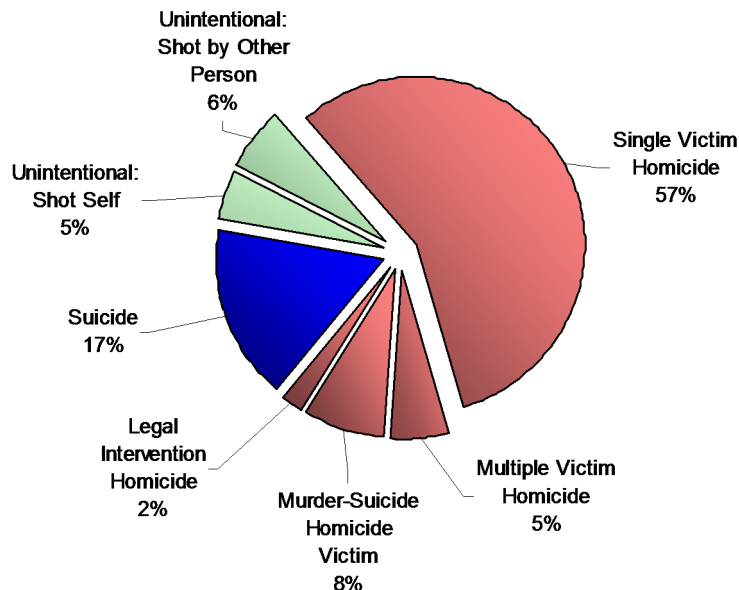


Deaths Due to Firearms to Children Aged 0-17 Years Miami-Dade County, 1994-2007, Part 2: Circumstances



Between 1994-2007, 241 children aged 0-17 years old have died from firearm injuries in Miami-Dade County. In 2007, deaths due to firearms were the second leading cause of death to children in this age group.

Access to a loaded firearm increases the risk of firearm-related death to children. Most children that kill or injure themselves with a firearm do so within the home or a friend's home. This is due in part to the misperceptions of adults regarding a child's behavior around guns, including underestimating a child's ability to gain access to a gun, ability to distinguish between a real and toy gun and to consistently follow rules about gun safety. This report examines the circumstances surrounding fatal firearm injuries that occurred to Miami-Dade County children aged 0-17 years between 1994-2007.

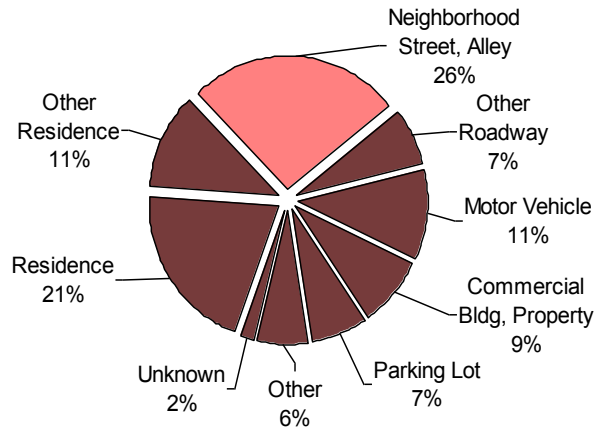


- The figure above describes the types of firearm deaths that involved children aged 0-17 years between 1999-2007. The majority were homicides (174 deaths, 72%) followed by suicides (40 deaths, 17%) and unintentional firearm deaths (27 deaths, 11%).
- Most homicides involved a single victim (57% of all deaths). There were 13 victims (5%) that died in incidents that involved multiple homicide victims. Nineteen children (8%) died as homicide victims during the commission of a murder-suicide, 15 were shot by parents and 4 were shot by intimate partners. Five additional homicide victims (2%) died as a result of law enforcement intervention.
- Among the 27 unintentional firearm deaths, 10 victims (5%) shot themselves, 16 victims (6%) were unintentionally shot by another person and in 1 case the shooter was unknown.
- 97% of the firearm-related deaths occurred within Miami-Dade County. Seven other deaths occurred in Broward County (5), Glades County (1) and out-of-state (1).

Firearm Homicides, 1994-2007

Location of Homicides

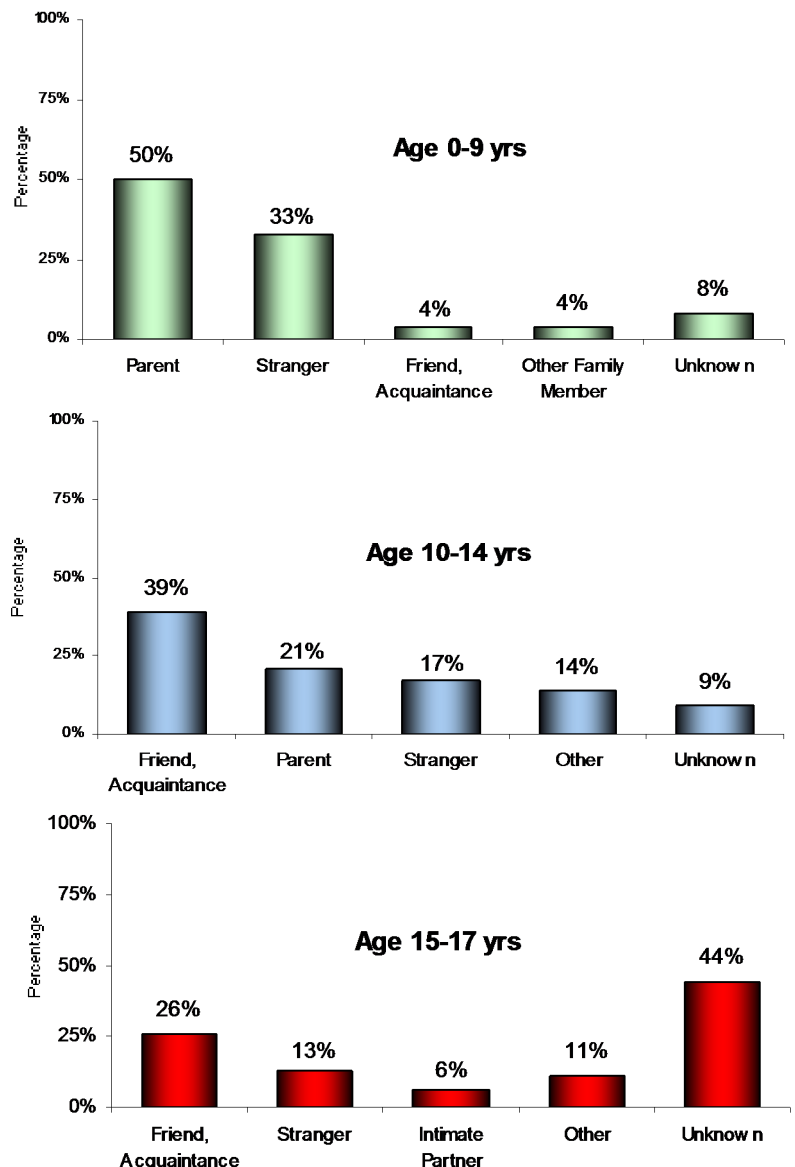
- 32% of the firearm homicides occurred in a private residence and 21% occurred within the victim's own home.
- 26% of the deaths occurred in the street or alley in the victim's neighborhood. Another 7% occurred on highways or other roadways.
- 11% of homicides involved victims that were shot inside a motor vehicle.
- Homicides that were preceded by the commission of a crime occurred most frequently on a neighborhood street (33%) or commercial building (22%).



Victim-Suspect Relationship

The 3 figures to the right show the relationship of the homicide victim to the person that shot them for 3 different age groups: 0-9 years, 10-14 years and 15-17 years. Overall, of the 114 cases where the suspect was identified, most of the victims (71%) knew the person that killed them.

- One-half of child victims aged 0-9 years old were shot by their parent (all by the father of the victim and 10 of 12 during a murder-suicide incident). One-third of the victims did not know the shooter and these victims were usually shot in their neighborhood by a stray bullet.
- Homicide victims aged 10-14 years old were most often shot by a friend or acquaintance, usually while showing off a weapon or settling an argument. Another 21% were shot by their parent (4 fathers, 1 mother) and 17% of victims did not know their assailant.
- Among 15-17 year old victims, 26% were shot by a friend or acquaintance. Another 6% were shot by an intimate partner (4 female, 2 male victims), usually after a break-up in the relationship. The victim-suspect relationship could not be determined for 44% of the victims and often reflected a victim found dead in the street with no suspects identified from the preliminary police reports.



Firearm Homicides, 1994-2007

Firearm Characteristics

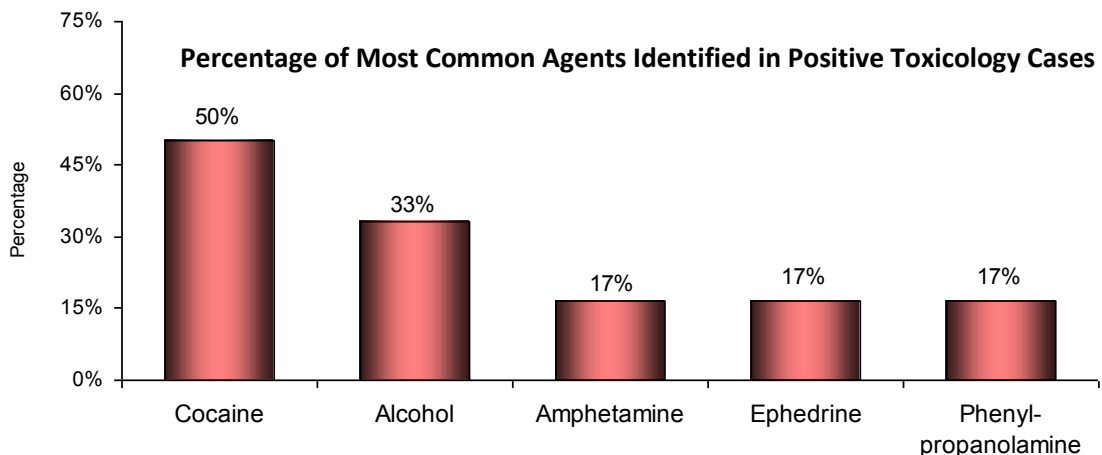
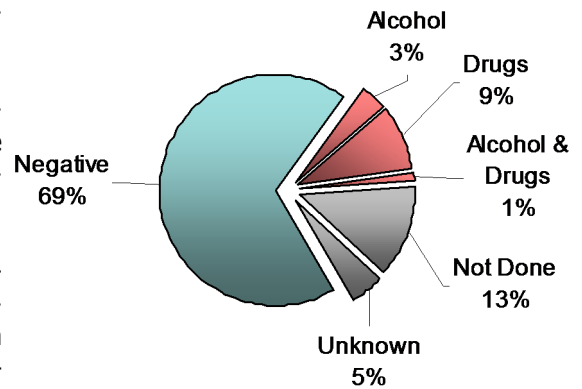
- Information regarding the type of firearm used in the commission of homicides was limited, with only 57% of cases containing some reference to the type of firearm used in the incident.
- Of the 57% of deaths where the firearm was identified, 79% were shot with a handgun. Another 19% of victims were shot with either an assault rifle (7%), shotgun (7%) or rifle (5%).
- Of the 44 cases identified as being either a revolver or semi-automatic handgun, the most common type was a 9mm semi-automatic weapons (18 cases).

Type of Firearm	Number	Percent
Unknown Firearm Type	75	43%
Known Firearm Type	99	57%
Handgun: Revolver	12	12%*
Semi-automatic	32	32%*
Unknown type	35	35%*
Assault Rifle	7	7%*
Shotgun	7	7%*
Rifle	5	5%*
Other	1	1%*

* reflect percentages for 99 cases where firearm type was known

Homicide Victim Toxicology

- 69% of the firearm homicide victims had no alcohol or drugs present in their system at the time of their death. No female homicide victims had positive toxicology tests although 10/36 victims were not tested.
- Of the 14% of victims that tested positive for substance use, cocaine was the most common substance identified (present in 50% of all positive screens) followed by alcohol (33%).
- Thirteen percent of the victims did not have a toxicology test done because they were admitted to hospitals for more than 1 day prior to their death making a post-mortem test by the medical examiner meaningless. The toxicology laboratory does not routinely test for marijuana so no reliable data is available on use of this drug.



Firearm Homicides, 1994-2007

Homicide Circumstances

The precipitating circumstances surrounding homicides were identified for 145 of 174 (87%) deaths (80% for male victims and 94% for female victims). The table below shows that most child homicides were precipitated by either a crime (19%) or an argument (17%). One-third of the victims of crime-related homicide were the persons committing the crime and robbery was the most common type of crime committed (23/32 cases). Males were involved in 31 of 32 crime-related homicides.

Firearm homicides due to child abuse was the 3rd most common circumstance (12%). Fifteen of the 20 child abuse deaths involved murder-suicide where fathers shot their own children before taking his own life. Five of these incidents involved multiple child deaths. There have been no child-involved murder-suicides since 2003.

Ten of the 18 "Bystander" deaths involved child victims less than 14 years old, with most being shot by random gunfire while they played in their neighborhood or were riding in a motor vehicle.

Deaths related to romantic relationships explained 13 (8%) of homicides. Females were victims in 6 of 8 intimate partner violence shootings while 5 males were shot in conflicts involving jealousy of another male.

The number of incidents listed for gang activity or being drug-related is known to be undercounted because the only files reviewed were preliminary police reports and these activities are often not known until later in the police investigation.

Homicide Circumstances	Males		Females		Total	
	Number	Percent *	Number	Percent *	Number	Percent *
Crime-related: Decedent was Victim	21	15%	1	3%	22	13%
Decedent was Suspect	10	7%	0	0%	10	6%
Argument	28	20%	2	6%	30	17%
All Child Abuse Incidents	6	4%	14	39%	20	12%
# From Parent Intimate Partner Violence	4	3%	12	33%	16	9%
Gang-related Violence	15	11%	2	6%	17	10%
Bystander: Hit by Crossfire/Stray bullet	6	4%	8	22%	14	8%
Drive-by Shooting (unintended victim)	2	1%	2	6%	4	2%
Drive-by Shooting	12	9%	0	0%	12	7%
Gun Play	9	7%	2	6%	11	6%
Drug-related	6	4%	2	6%	8	5%
Victim's Intimate Partner Problems	2	1%	6	17%	8	5%
Victim's Jealousy	5	4%	0	0%	5	3%
Legal Intervention	5	4%	0	0%	5	3%
All Other Known Circumstances	7	5%	3	8%	10	6%
Unknown Circumstance	27	20%	2	6%	29	17%

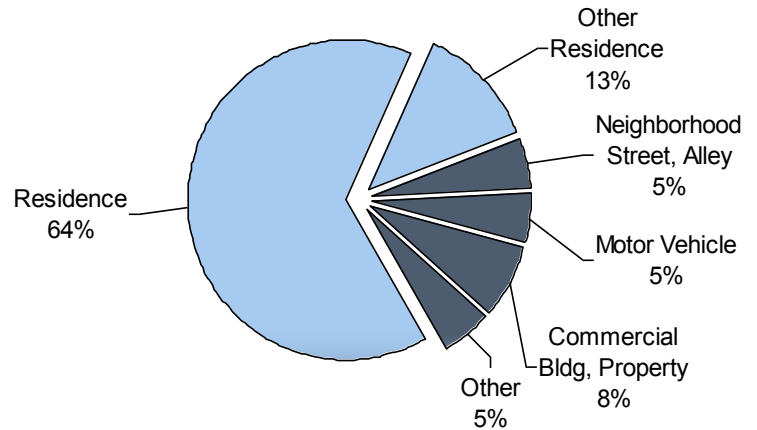
Types of Crime in Homicides	Number	Percent *	Number	Percent *	Number	Percent *
Robbery: Decedent was Victim	14	45%	0	0%	14	44%
Decedent was Suspect	9	29%	0	0%	9	28%
Revenge: For Previous Homicide	2	7%	0	0%	2	6%
For Previous Crime	1	3%	0	0%	1	3%
Drug Trade Victim	2	7%	0	0%	2	6%
Kidnapping Victim	2	7%	0	0%	2	6%
Armed Break-in	0	0%	1	100%	1	3%
Burglary Suspect	1	3%	0	0%	1	3%

* percentages add up to >100% because some cases had more than one circumstance

Firearm Suicides, 1994-2007

Location of Suicides

- 77% of the 40 firearm suicides occurred in a private residence and 64% occurred within the victim’s own home.
- Another 8% of suicides occurred in a commercial building or property and 5% occurred inside a motor vehicle.
- The 36% of suicides that did not occur at the victim’s residence took place an average of 3.1 miles from the victim’s home.



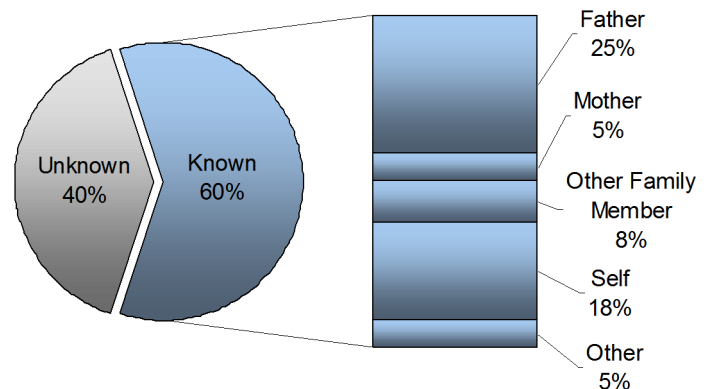
Firearm Characteristics

- Information regarding the type of firearm used to commit suicides was available for 88% of the deaths.
- 79% of victims shot themselves with a handgun and another 10% used a shotgun (5%) or rifle (5%).
- Of the 22 cases that involved a revolver or semi-automatic handgun, the most commonly used handguns were the .38 caliber revolver (8 cases), .22 caliber revolver (4 cases) and .25 caliber semi-automatic (4 cases).

Type of Firearm	Number	Percent
Handgun: Revolver	15	38%
Semi-automatic	7	18%
Unknown type	9	23%
Rifle	2	5%
Shotgun	2	5%
Unknown Firearm Type	5	12%

Firearm Owner

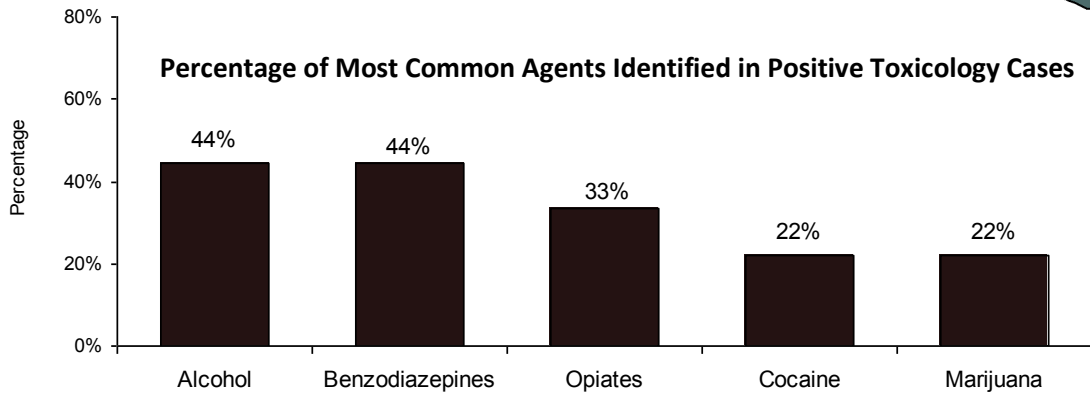
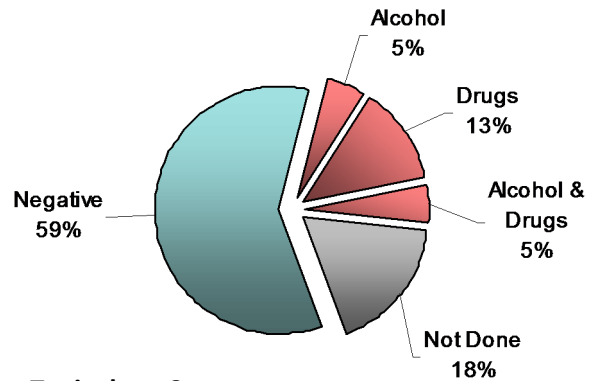
- Information on how youths obtained the gun used in suicides was documented for 24 of 40 (60%) deaths. Of these 24 suicides, 38% used a gun belonging to a family member, usually a parent. Another 18% reported that the gun belonged to the victim but it was not documented how the youth obtained the firearm.
- Overall, 10 of the suicide victims used a family member’s gun that was inadequately stored (unlocked and loaded) to commit a suicide in their own home.



Firearm Suicides, 1994-2007

Suicide Victim Toxicology

- 59% of firearm suicide victims had no alcohol or drugs present in their system at the time of their death. However, 86% of female victims tested negative for substance use at the time of death compared to 55% of male victims.
- Alcohol and benzodiazepines were the most common substances identified in suicide victims (44%).



Suicide Circumstances

The table below summarizes the external circumstances believed to have played a role in child suicides. Of the 87% of suicides with known circumstances, over 1/3 had two or more documented circumstances thought to have contributed to the suicide. Four circumstances were most commonly associated with child suicide victims: being depressed at the time of death (28%), experiencing intimate partner problems (20%), having difficulties with family relationships (18%) and having problems at school (15%).

The types of records available for review did not provide a thorough investigation of all the factors that may have precipitated the suicides. Therefore, the circumstances identified represent only what was assessed at the scene of the incident. Suicide surveillance needs a more in-depth follow-up of events preceding the suicide and individuals who were close to the victim. Many important risk factors, like whether the child had previous suicide ideations/attempts, whether they were under medical treatment for mental illness or whether they experienced an acute crisis in the preceding 24 hours were not available.

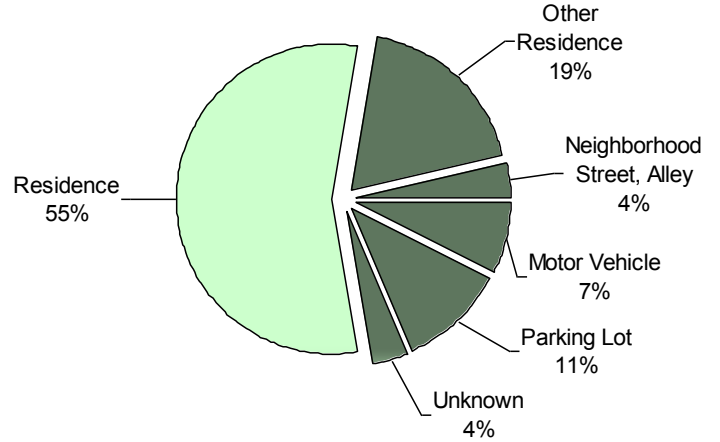
Circumstances of Suicide	Males		Females		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Depression	9	27%	2	29%	11	28%
Victim's Intimate Partner Problems	6	18%	2	29%	8	20%
Family Problems	3	9%	4	57%	7	18%
School Problems	5	15%	1	14%	6	15%
Russian Roulette	3	9%	0	0%	3	8%
Bullying	1	3%	0	0%	1	3%
Crime Subject (auto theft)	1	3%	0	0%	1	3%
Acute Crisis (shot friend)	1	3%	0	0%	1	3%
Parent Intimate Partner Violence	1	3%	0	0%	1	3%
Sexual Identity Problems	0	0%	1	14%	1	3%
All Other Known Circumstances	4	12%	0	0%	4	10%
Unknown	9	27%	0	0%	9	23%

* percentages add up to >100% because some cases had more than one circumstance

Unintentional Firearm Deaths, 1994-2007

Location of Unintentional Deaths

- 74% of the unintentional firearm deaths occurred in a private residence and 55% occurred within the victim’s own home.
- Another 7% of unintentional deaths occurred inside a motor vehicle and involved finding a loaded gun under a seat.
- The 15% of deaths that occurred in a parking lot or neighborhood street involved the child being hit by crossfire or a stray bullet.
- The unintentional deaths that occurred outside the victim’s own residence, took place an average of 6.6 miles from the victim’s home.



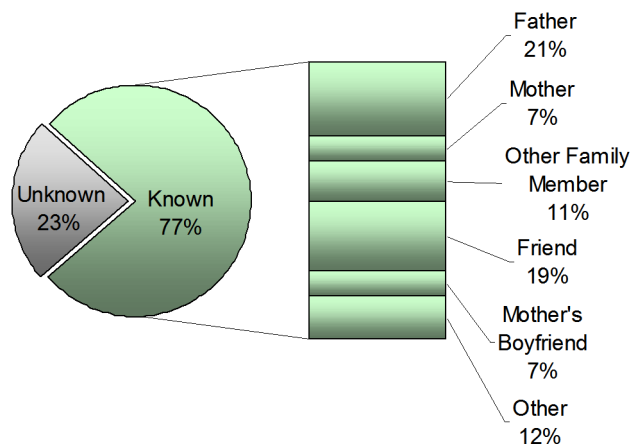
Firearm Characteristics

- Information regarding the type of firearm used in unintentional firearm deaths was available for 74% of deaths.
- 67% of victims were shot with a handgun. There was no single caliber of handgun that was most often responsible for these deaths.

Type of Firearm	Number	Percent
Handgun: Revolver	8	30%
Handgun: Semi-automatic	6	22%
Handgun: Unknown type	4	15%
Rifle	1	4%
Shotgun	1	4%
Unknown Firearm Type	7	26%

Firearm Owner

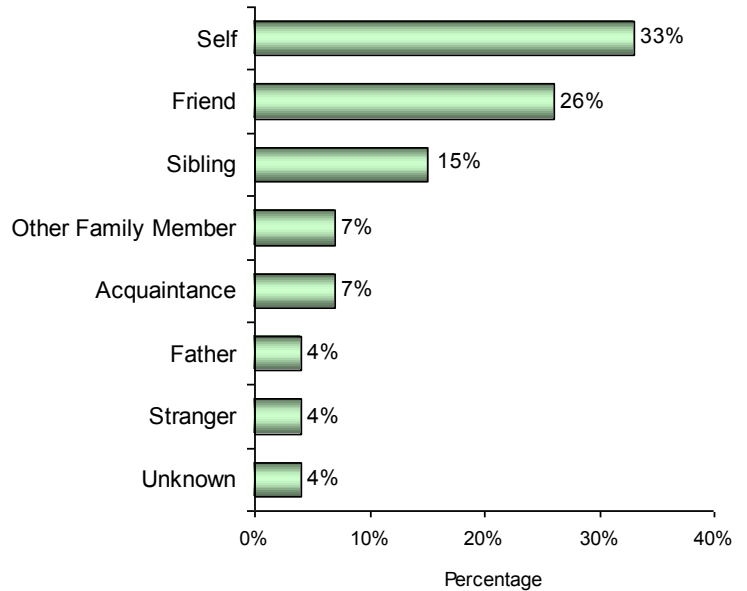
- Information on how youths obtained the gun used in unintentional shootings was documented for 77% of the deaths. Of these, 39% used a gun belonging to a family member, usually a parent. Another 19% reported that the gun belonged to a friend.
- To emphasize the preventable nature of these deaths, 11 of the 27 victims were shot using a family member’s gun that was inadequately stored (unlocked and loaded) in their own home or found in the family’s motor vehicle.



Unintentional Firearm Deaths, 1994-2007

Victim-Shooter Relationship

- One-third of the unintentional shootings involved the victim shooting him/herself. At least 7 of the 9 victims were children under 16 years old who were left unsupervised by an adult when they found the gun.
- Another 26% of victims were shot by a friend. The majority of these shootings involved groups of teenagers showing off a gun when it accidentally discharged.
- Eight unintentional deaths were to children less than 5 years old; 5 shot themselves after finding the gun and 3 were shot by their siblings.



Unintentional Death Circumstances

There have been 27 unintentional child deaths between 1994-2007 and all involved inappropriate access to a firearm by children. One-third of the cases involved “gun play”, groups of teenagers, mostly aged 14-17, recklessly playing with a gun inside a residence. Another 1/3 of deaths were children less than 9 years old that found a gun within the home or in a vehicle and shot either themselves or a sibling. Five more deaths involved “gun handling or cleaning”. These deaths were differentiated from the “gun play” deaths in that they did not appear reckless and usually involved a firearm that discharged while being loaded/unloaded/cleaned or while being removed while it was concealed on the gun owner.

Circumstances of Unintentional Deaths	Males		Females		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Gun Play	8	38%	1	17%	9	33%
Child Playing with Found Gun	6	29%	3	50%	9	33%
Gun Handling or Cleaning	5	24%	1	17%	6	22%
Bystander: Stray bullet	3	14%	0	0%	3	11%
Drug-related	1	5%	0	0%	1	4%
Family Problems	1	5%	0	0%	1	4%
Unknown	0	0%	1	17%	1	4%

* percentages add up to >100% because some cases had more than one circumstance

Preventing Firearm Deaths

In Your Home ¹

- Before you buy a gun, consider less dangerous ways to keep your family and property safe, such as burglar alarms, window locks, dogs, etc.
- Don't buy a gun unless you have the necessary knowledge to use it safely.
- Firearms should be stored unloaded and in a locked place.
- Firearms should be locked up in a place that children cannot reach since children often have trouble telling the difference between a toy gun and a real gun.
- Bullets should be locked up in a place separate from where guns are secured.
- Trigger locks can be a helpful additional precaution for unloaded firearms. They must be applied to an unloaded firearm. Some trigger locks can be removed in as few as 6 seconds.
- If you keep an unlocked gun under your pillow at night, lock it in the morning before you go to work.

Teach Your Children¹

- Explain to children that guns are dangerous and that they should never touch guns without your permission.
- Talk to your children about the difference between the violence that they see on television or in the movies and real-life violence, where adults and children really get hurt.
- Tell your children that if they find a gun anywhere they should not touch it and should leave the area and go tell an adult. If they are in school and know of other children carrying a handgun they should tell an adult.

1: Injury Free Coalition for Kids, Firearm Injury Prevention
http://www.injuryfree.org/safetytpc_display.cfm?PermanentId=ADC74F45-E6D2-4BCA-8D270EDDD0370F76

Produced by the Miami-Dade County Injury Surveillance System

Data Sources: Medical Examiner Records, Miami-Dade Co. Medical Examiner Dept.
Death Certificates, Office of Vital Statistics, FL Dept. of Health
PHONE (IFCK): 305-804-7212 (MDCHD): 305-470-5649
E-MAIL: stephen.dearwater@jhsmiami.org
WEBSITE: <http://dadehealth.org/injury/INJURYintro.asp>

