

## Juveniles and Firearms: Recent Data Trends

The [2022 Annual Report](#) from the North Carolina Child Fatality Task Force (CFTF) highlights a significant increase in firearm-related deaths among North Carolina's youth. The CFTF Annual Report, submitted in May of 2022, details child fatalities that occurred in North Carolina in 2020. According to the CFTF, rates for suicides, homicides, and firearm deaths for children in North Carolina all increased in 2020. CFTF Annual Report, p. 2. Firearms were used in 12 of the 20 suicides reported among youth ages 10 – 14 and in 19 of the 35 suicides reported among youth ages 15 – 17. All 11 of the homicides reported against youth ages 10 – 14 involved a firearm and 48 of the 50 homicides reported against youth ages 15 – 17 involved a firearm. Table 1, CFTF Annual Report. Suicide was the leading cause of death among youth ages 10 – 14 and homicide was the leading cause of death among youth ages 15 – 17. Table 2, CFTF Annual Report.

These numbers reflect an increasing trend of firearm-related deaths among youth. While there were 525 firearm-related youth deaths between 2011 and 2020, 105 firearm-related youth deaths were recorded in 2020 alone. CFTF Annual Report, p. 18.

Is this trend rooted in more violent firearm usage by youth? The suicide data clearly reflects youth use of firearms to kill themselves. Do the homicide numbers reflect youth shooting other youth? Data from the Division of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (DJJDP) may shed some light on that question.

### Increase in Delinquency Complaints Alleging a Firearm Offense

According to the [2021 Annual Report](#) from DJJDP, overall rates of delinquency are historically low. According to the report, the rate of delinquency complaints against youth for offenses committed between the ages of 6 and 15 hit an all-time low (11.16) in 2021. DJJDP Annual Report, p. 10. While offenses committed at ages 16 and 17 have only been subject to juvenile jurisdiction since the end of 2019, the rate of delinquency complaints for offenses at these ages was lower in 2021 than it was in 2020. DJJDP Annual Report, p. 10. This speaks to a decrease in the volume of juvenile crime.

At the same time, the DJJDP Annual Report points to one worsening trend—an increase in the percent of complaints alleging a firearm offense. Before juvenile jurisdiction was expanded to include offenses committed at ages 16 and 17, firearm offenses made up 4% of all juvenile complaints. DJJDP Annual Report, p. 4. That number rose to 13% of the juvenile complaints received in 2021. Two-thirds of those complaints alleged firearm offenses committed at ages 16 or 17.

The substantial contribution of older juveniles to this increase raises questions. It is possible that 16- and 17-year-old youth were historically alleged to have committed firearm offenses at the same rate. Prior to raise the age implementation, these cases were subject to criminal jurisdiction. Some

of the increase in the volume of firearm offenses alleged against juveniles in 2021 may simply represent a shift from criminal jurisdiction to juvenile jurisdiction for these offenses. However, the significant increase in allegations of firearm offenses by juveniles may also indicate that gun violence is becoming more prevalent among the juvenile population. It may be that homicide is the leading cause of death among older adolescents, in part, because of the increased use of firearms among youth.

## **Addressing Firearm Usage by Youth**

### *Annual Report Suggestions*

Both the DJJDP and CFTF Annual Reports provide suggested strategies for reducing violent firearm usage by youth. The DJJDP Annual Report notes that the Department reached out to its partners to identify prevention and intervention strategies. DJJDP Annual Report, p. 4. The report highlights a program coordinated through the Fayetteville Police Department called Educating Kids about Gun Violence (EKG). This program focuses on increasing firearm awareness among middle school students. DJJDP Annual Report, p. 5. The DJJDP Annual Report also notes that the Department will be seeking new funding to educate youth and their families about responsible gun ownership and the dangers of guns.

The CFTF Annual Report suggests a statewide firearm safe storage initiative to reduce firearm-related fatalities among youth. CFTF Annual Report, p. 20. The CFTF Annual Report also asserts that there is a children's mental health crisis in North and Carolina. The report emphasizes the need for increased support for the children's behavioral health system, especially in schools. CFTF Annual Report, p. 21.

### *Federal Funding Opportunity*

The federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) recently released a [funding opportunity](#) to provide resources for youth violence prevention programming. Funding will support youth violence prevention programs that target youth in middle school and high school who have multiple risk factors for violence. The specific objectives for the funding are (1) to increase protective factors to prevent violence and delinquent behavior and (2) to contribute to sustained future reductions in youth violence, with an emphasis on gun and gang violence. OJJDP anticipates making four awards of up to \$250,000 each for a three-year project period.

This funding solicitation strongly encourages the use of evidence-based strategies, including OJJDP's [Comprehensive Gang Model](#). That model includes [five interrelated core strategies](#) of community mobilization, opportunities provision, social intervention, suppression, and organizational change and development. Funding from this solicitation can be used for opportunities provision (specific education, training, and employment programs targeting gang-involved youth) and/or social intervention (youth-serving agencies, schools, grassroots groups,

**On the Civil Side**

A UNC School of Government Blog

<https://civil.sog.unc.edu>

---

faith-based organizations, law enforcement agencies, and other criminal justice organizations reaching out and acting as links to gang-involved youth, their families, and the conventional world and needed services). Communities in search of strategies to address violent firearm usage among youth may want to explore the Comprehensive Gang Model, whether or not they apply for this funding opportunity.