

Suicide is an issue of pressing importance to public health. In Vermont, suicide is the 8th leading cause of death (VDH 2005), while nationally it is only the 11th leading cause of death (CDC 2005). Firearms are of particular interest, as previous studies have shown Vermont has the highest number of suicides by firearms per 100,000 citizens compared to six other states in the region (Miller et al. 2004). It is possible that the leniency of gun-purchasing laws in Vermont contribute to the suicide rate by making a highly lethal means of suicide readily available, even for passing, spontaneous suicidal urges. Vermont lacks a waiting period for gun purchase, and there is no requirement to obtain a handgun license or safety training before buying a firearm (Brady 2008). The records at the Vermont Office of the Chief Medical Examiner contain information about every violent death in the state, and have been used to investigate many public health issues. These records were used to verify the elevated rate of suicide and suicide by firearm in Vermont, and to examine the effect of lenient gun-purchasing laws on these rates. This is done by determining, for each suicide by firearm, the source of the weapon and when the weapon was obtained relative to the time of death.

Sources Cited –

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