

An adolescent ailment

Life



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Gun Violence: An Adolescent Ailment BY Arod56 On an unseasonably cold March morning in 1993, high school sophomore Edward Gillom exited his first period classroom and made his way through the crowded hallways of Harlem High School. After engaging in a heated argument, allegedly over a girl, with Ronricas "Pony" Gibson and Ricoh Lee, Gillom pulled out a .38-caliber gun and opened fire. Gillom's shots fatally wounded Gibson and left Lee with a non-fatal gunshot wound to the neck (Washington Ceasefire, 2011 pg 1).

The shooting in Harlem, Georgia sparked national attention as one of the first high school shootings and added to the alarmingly high rates of gun violence by adolescents during the 1990s. According to the Virginia Youth Violence Project, forty-two homicides took place in American schools in 1993 (2009 pg/par). While the rate of gun violence in American schools has decreased substantially since the early 1990s, the death rate for adolescents due to firearms in the United States is still higher than in any other industrialized nation (Vittes, Sorenson, & Gilbert, 2003 pg/par).

The current generation of American teenagers has grown up surrounded by gun violence: in the news; in their video games; and in the television programs they watch. In the last twenty years, the United States has seen an upsurge of gun related crimes among adolescents; as a result, political leaders and their constituents have become outraged at how accessible the nation's gun laws make firearms to children and the mentally unstable to obtain, especially considering the dramatic decrease of gun control, which will inevitably lead to increased gun crimes involving teenagers and young adults.

Thomas Jefferson, the third president of the United States once said, " No free man shall be debarred the use of arms". The constitutional right to keep and bear arms stems from the right to self-defense, and in the 2008 Supreme Court case *District of Columbia v. Heller*, the court ruled that " the Second Amendment protects a pre-existing individual right to keep and bear arms... ncluding, the individual right to possess and carry weapons in case of confrontation" (National Rifle Association, 2011 par 4). Although the Constitution gives individuals the right to bear arms, it does not exclude " prohibitions on the possession of firearms by felons and the mentally ill, or laws forbidding the carrying of firearms in sensitive places... or laws imposing onditions and qualifications on the commercial sale of firearms," (Romano ; ump; Wingert, 2011 par 13).

In recent years there has been much discussion among the nation's lawmakers and their constituents as to whether or not the Second Amendment is still constitutional; the question is whether or not the Second Amendment should be revised, to prohibit the sale of firearms to those who do not meet certain conditions and qualifications, or even removed from the constitution. According to a national survey of 1 , 005 high school students, conducted by Vитtes, Sorrenson and Gilbert, " 63. percent of high school students believe that regulating he sale of guns does not violate the constitution" (2003, pg 12). In the same survey, 64. 6 percent responded that they would support stricter laws addressing the sale of firearms, and 82. 2 percent of those surveyed, believe that the government should make and enforce laws making it more difficult for criminals to obtain a gun" even if it

means law abiding citizens would have a harder time purchasing guns (2003, pg 9).

While the probability of the Second Amendment being removed from the Constitution is highly unlikely, the regulations that pro-gun control lobbyists have suggested seem incredibly logical. But despite the seemingly widespread support of stricter gun control, the gun control legislation that many Americans would like to see has yet to be passed by congress.

According to the Center for Responsive Politics, in 2008 the National Rifle Association, the largest anti-gun control agency, spent 2. million dollars lobbying for pro-gun legislation, which is forty one times more than what gun control lobbyist could spend (Romano & Wingert, 2011 par 7). The Gun Control Act of 1968, which is a revision of the National Firearms Act of 1934, established regulations for the selling of firearms and was passed in an effort to educe the amount of illegal firearm sales, to confine the sales of firearms to the buyer's state and to restrict certain people from, buying, selling, or transporting firearms (National Rifle Association, 2011b pg/par).

As a result, national law prohibits the sale of firearms to those whom are currently under indictment for a felony, have been convicted of a felony, an illegal alien, a fugitive from the law, has been dishonorably discharged from the military, addicted to illegal narcotics or are non- residents of the state in which they are trying to purchase a gun (National Rifle Association, 2011b pg/par). Despite these laws, lack of enforcement allowed individuals like Seung-Hui Cho and Jared Loughner, the shooters at the 2007 Virginia Tech massacre and the 2011 Tucson, Arizona shooting, to obtain firearms and take the lives of innocent people.

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The longer these laws go unenforced the longer gun violence crimes will continue to rise. There have been three noticeable periods in history during which the rates of adolescent gun violence peaked dramatically--1972-74, 1980 and 1992-3, with 1992-3 being the most dramatic increase (Wilkinson & Fagan, 2001 pg 110). During the fourteen year timep etween 1997 and 2011 there have been one-hundred and eighty-seven shootings on public school property in the United States (The Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, 2010).

In their study of adolescents and their exposure to gun violence Wilkinson and Fagan stated that, Although violence has been a recurrent theme for decades among urban delinquency, youth gun violence has become more prevalent and more concentrated spatially and socially in the past two decades. Starting in 1985, gun violence among teenagers rose sharply in prevalence; it diffused quickly through a generation of teenagers; it sustained a high prevalence and incidence for ver 5 years; and it has declined steadily in the past several years.

This patter resembles nothing less than the outbreak of a contagious disease (Wilkinson ; ump; Fagan, 2001 pg 109). Although this study was conducted in 2001, its findings remain true, according to the National Institute of Justice since 2002 the prevalence of adolescent gun violence in America has risen steadily since 2000 (2010, chart 1). This " outbreak" of violence among youth is most prevalent and abundant in urban communities with high rates of low-income families and gang activity like Chicago, Illinois.

In their 2009 report on youth violence in Chicago Roseanna Ander, Phillip Cook, Jens Ludwig and Harold Pollack stated that, " Over the past 50 years, our society has made far less progress in understanding how to protect our citizens from violence than from all manner of disease.