

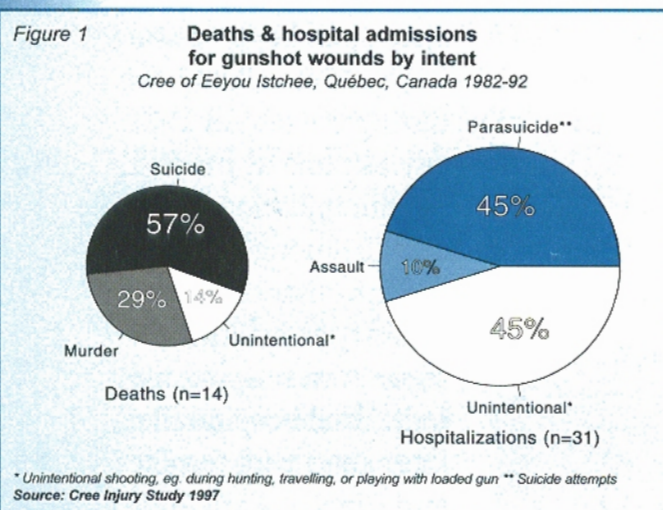


Direction de la santé publique

INJURIES FROM GUNS IN CREE COMMUNITIES OF EYYOU ISTCHEE, QUÉBEC, CANADA: A TEN YEAR STUDY

Another 31 Cree with gunshot wounds were admitted to hospital, where they stayed for a total of 215 days:

- about one-half were intentional shootings — 14 persons shot themselves (parasuicides) and 3 were shot by others (assaults);
- the other half were unintentional shootings while hunting or transporting a loaded gun.



Guns caused 12% of all deaths and 3% of all hospital admissions for injuries. That is, 1 in 8 fatal injuries and 1 in 30 hospital admissions for injury resulted from a gunshot wound.

The number of injuries from guns was high for such a small population. The Cree population was about 8,000 during the study. There were on average about 1 death and 3 hospitalizations each year in Eeyou Istchee. The situation was compared with that for the province of Québec (**Figures 2 & 3**). Cree were 2.5 times

more likely to die and 9 times more likely to spend time in hospital from a gunshot wound compared to all people in Québec. However, when compared with Inuit in Nunavik, Cree death rates were only half as high and hospitalizations one-quarter as high.

Since 1992, the last year examined in the study, injuries from intentional gunshot wounds — suicides and assaults — have continued to occur in Eeyou Istchee.

WHO GOT SHOT? WHAT HAPPENED?

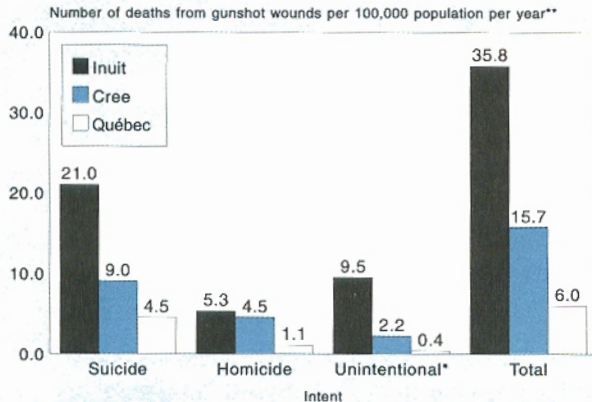
The answers to these questions depend on the kind of shooting. For suicides and parasuicides, most victims were young males between 15 and 35 years old. Alcohol was an important contributing factor to these shootings. Other factors included breakup or separation from a girlfriend or partner. Most incidents occurred at home in the village and not in the bush. In all cases for which information was available, the guns had not been locked up. While most suicide victims were male, victims of homicide and assault included both males and females.

Safe storage of guns means unloading before a gun is taken home. As soon as you get home, the gun should be locked up. Bullets should also be locked away. A trigger lock provides added protection.

Many unintentional shootings occurred while hunting in the bush or while transporting a loaded firearm to or from the bush. Two-thirds of victims were shot by another person's gun and one-third by their own gun. Alcohol was

involved less often in unintentional shootings than in suicides and assaults.

Figure 2 Death rates from gunshot wounds by intent
Cree of Eeyou Istchee, Québec, Canada 1982-92 (n=14 during 10 years),
Inuit of Nunavik 1980-94 (n=34 during 15 years)
& the province of Québec 1990-91 (n=422 during 1 year)



* Unintentional shooting, eg. during hunting, travelling, or playing with loaded gun ** For Cree, rate per 100,000 person years during 10 years; for Inuit during 15 years; rates are not age-adjusted
Source: Cree Injury Study 1997

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO PREVENT INJURIES FROM GUNS?

For Cree, safe storage of all guns and ammunition should be the most practical way of preventing injuries from guns. When leaving the bush, guns should be unloaded. On arrival back in the village, all guns should be immediately locked up in a gun cupboard with a padlock. Trigger locks can also be useful. Ammunition should be locked up too.

While special gun lockers can be bought, you can also make your own by adding a padlock and sturdy latch to a regular closet or cupboard, or by building a gun storage locker. It may be better to use a padlock than a special locker, since a padlock can be cut off and replaced if you lose the key. If you use a separate storage locker for ammunition, this provides even more protection.

If a depressed or drunk person can easily put their hands on a loaded gun, it makes it simple for them to go out and shoot themselves or someone else. But if guns and ammunition are locked away, this may be enough to stop a temporarily

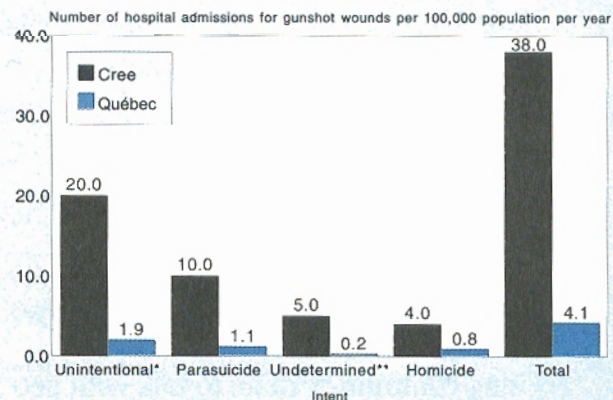
upset young man from getting at the gun until he has time to calm down and sober up.

In the Santé Québec Survey in 1991, about one-third of Cree said that they already kept their guns locked up. Unfortunately, the other two-thirds did not.

The Canadian government recently introduced new laws to try to prevent deaths from guns. Many groups, including aboriginal bands across the country, opposed these laws. However, the Cree of Eeyou Istchee took a positive position and worked with the government to improve the laws so that injuries from guns could be prevented. The Cree also did their best to ensure that the laws would respect hunting as an important part of Cree traditional life.

Locking a gun away does take a few moments for the gun owner, but it makes life safer for family and community. This is one way of showing love and concern for others.

Figure 3 Rates of hospital admission for gunshot wounds by intent
Cree of Eeyou Istchee, Québec, Canada 1982-92*** (n=31 during 10 years)
& the province of Québec 1990-91 (n=286 during 1 year)



* Unintentional shooting, eg. during hunting, travelling, or playing with loaded gun ** Intent undetermined, parasuicide suspected; *** For Cree, rate per 100,000 person years during 10 years; rates are not age-adjusted
Source: Cree Injury Study 1997

Because of the importance of hunting in their culture, both Cree and Inuit have more guns in their homes than the average family in Quebec. While most Cree homes have guns, in the entire province of Quebec only about 1 in 4 homes has a gun.

Some people might therefore say that nothing can be done to prevent injuries among the Cree, short of getting rid of all the guns. However, the presence of guns is not the only reason that gunshot wounds occur. The recent increase in gunshot deaths from suicide and violence among the Cree, together with even higher rates among the Inuit, show that there is more than one reason why people get shot. Nevertheless, there is no

WAYS OF PREVENTING GUN INJURIES:

- Establishing community regulations (bylaws) for locked storage of guns, with checks to make sure that regulations are enforced.
- Making people more aware of the danger of drinking alcohol when they are unhappy or angry.
- Learning better ways than getting drunk to deal with problems .
- Helping men to communicate and share their feelings when they are upset, instead of hurting themselves and others.
- Learning to recognize when people are depressed and need help.
- Reducing the amount of violence and suicides that children and adults watch on TV.
- Using community radio to talk with people about gun safety, safe storage of guns, and how to prevent violence and suicide.

doubt that the presence of guns in the home and the community puts everyone at greater risk. If people want to keep guns for hunting, but also want to keep their loved ones safe and secure, special precautions have to be taken.

While locking a gun away does take a few moments for individual gun owners, it makes life safer for other family members and the community, and is a way of showing love and caring for others. Caring enough for yourself to get help when you are depressed or upset is also a way of expressing love for your friends and family who care about you.

Injury Prevention Series

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The image of Canada geese is based on a painting by Margaret Orr, a Cree artist from Eeyou Istchee. The geese symbolize Cree life and culture. Their upward flight evokes a sense of freedom, and suggests traditional values guiding the way to the future.

Information:

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