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WEEK IN IDEAS | APRIL 30, 2011

Week in Ideas: Christopher Shea

By CHRISTOPHER SHEA

Regulation



AFP/Getty Images

Gun shows, in the weeks after they occur, have little effect on local murder or suicide rates, a study finds.

Guns That Don't Kill

Gun shows, in the weeks after they occur, have little to no effect on local murder or suicide rates, a study finds. That holds whether or not the shows check the background of gun buyers.

Researchers looked at data involving 3,400 shows in California and Texas, from 1994 to 2004. Those states were chosen for their size and their opposite approaches to regulation: California demands on-site background checks and a 10-day waiting period, while Texas is basically regulation-free.

The authors compared rates of gun-related and non-gun-related murders and suicides in the four weeks before a gun show to rates in the four subsequent weeks. They also ran checks five miles, 10 miles, and 25 miles from the center of the ZIP Codes in which the shows occurred. They found no spike in gun-related deaths in either state, at any of those distances.

"The Short-Term and Localized Effect of Gun Shows: Evidence From California and Texas,"
Mark Duggan, Randi Hjalmarsson and Brian

A. Jacob, *the Review of Economics and Statistics* (forthcoming)

Health



Real Men Avoid Doctors

Sixty-five-year-old men with "macho" attitudes are about half as likely as their peers to have gotten basic preventative medical care in the past year, a research paper shows.

Researchers drew their information from the



Gallery Stock

Men with "macho" attitudes are less likely to seek preventative medical care.

Wisconsin Longitudinal Study, analyzing data for roughly 1,000 men who graduated from high school in 1957. The men had been shown statements about, among other things, male identity: "Men should have the final say about large family purchases," "men should never

admit to weakness," and so on. They rated agreement on each item on a scale of 1 to 5.

Men who rated in the top quarter on this test of "idealized" masculinity were 46% less likely to have gotten three basic preventative measures—a physical, a prostate exam and a flu shot—in the past year than the rest of the men. The tendency may help to explain why American men's average life span is shorter than women's.

Curiously, the more high-paying and prestigious the macho men's jobs, the less likely they were to get a regular physical.

"Macho Men' and Preventive Health Care: Implications for Older Men in Different Social Classes," Kristen W. Springer and Dawne M. Mouzon, Journal of Health and Social Behavior (forthcoming)

Economics

Thanks for Nothing

Awards that cost companies nothing to provide can pay dividends in productivity, a study finds.

Researchers in Switzerland hired 150 people to do two hours of real work for a nonprofit group. They were paid a flat rate of \$37 to search the Web for information useful in fund-raising, namely, contact information for local-government officials who might be approached for grants. The nonprofit group made clear to the students that it had no jobs to offer them if they performed well.

The workers were assigned to small groups and given enough privacy that, if they chose, they could slack off at their computers. Eighty-three of the 150 were assigned to groups whose members were informed they'd be competing for a certificate of special thanks.

Despite the brevity of the job and the fixed wage, both groups were productive. More importantly, the workers competing for a frameable piece of paper gathered, on average, 12% more information than those that did not.

"Getting More Work for Nothing? Symbolic Awards and Worker Performance," Michael Kosfeld and Susanne Neckermann, American Economic Journal: Micro (forthcoming)

Psychology



Getty Images

Teddy bears may counteract the pain of social rejection, researchers say.

The Power of a Teddy Bear

People who feel the pain of social rejection often retreat from human interaction, but touching a teddy bear may counteract the tendency.

Researchers gave 181 undergraduates a personality test, followed by bogus results. Some subjects were told they'd been diagnosed as "the type who will end up alone later in life." Others were told they were almost certain to have "rewarding relationships." After this spot of good or bad news, participants were asked to evaluate a teddy bear supposedly being

considered for sale.

Half the participants were encouraged to hold the bear as they evaluated it, while the others could only look at it from a distance.

After that, all participants were offered the chance to volunteer for more studies, which would involve more time interacting with people in a lab setting.

People primed to think about future social exclusion who had touched the bear volunteered for twice as many experiments as people primed to think about exclusion who did not touch the bear.

"Touching a Teddy Bear Mitigates Negative Effects of Social Exclusion to Increase Prosocial Behavior," Kenneth Tai, Xue Zheng and Jayanth Narayanan, Social Psychological and Personality Science (forthcoming)

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