

Arming the academy: How carry-on-campus impact incidence of reported sexual assault crimes

Leslie A. Bastro
Youngstown State University

Karen H. Larwin
Youngstown State University

Marla E. Carano
Youngstown State University

ABSTRACT

Discussions have recently intensified regarding how to curtail the disturbingly high amount of sexual assaults that occur each year on U.S. College and university campuses. One suggestion to assist in the reduction of these crimes would be to allow students to carry concealed weapons as a means of self-protection. Considering the current culture of the gun control debate, and the emotionally charged implications of such potential legislation, it is prudent to analyze existing data that could shed light on whether or not this would be a viable solution. Using “The Campus Safety and Security Data” managed by the federal government, this study investigated trends in reported sexual assault crimes in three states where laws have changed regarding concealed carry on college and university campuses. This general linear model analysis revealed that the frequency of reported sexual assaults consistently increased from pre- to post legislation that permitted concealed weapons on college campuses. While the current investigation looks at the data trends from only three states with available data, the findings indicate that the change in the laws have failed to have a positive impact in reducing the number of reported sexual assault crimes.

Keywords: Conceal-Carry, Higher Education, Sexual Assault, Crimes, Alcohol

INTRODUCTION

In America, there may not be a more highly contested or debated issue than that of gun control. Background checks, federal databases to track gun sales, bans on semi-automatic or assault style weapons, as well as arming teachers and school officials are just a few of the countless controversial issues related to weapons policy and ownership today (Doherty, 2015). With the fear of gun violence on the rise, many Americans are falling on one side or the other of a polarizing issue; those who believe gun laws should be relaxed and those who want stricter control. Despite the increased frequency of mass shootings throughout the country, support for stricter gun laws continues to fall. According to a Gallup Poll, three in five Americans (roughly 60 percent) supported stricter gun laws ten years ago (Swift, 2014). Now, more than half of all Americans, 55 percent, support the notion of stricter gun laws and laws covering the sale of firearms (CNN, 2016). Politicians and legislators across the country are seizing the opportunity to ease certain gun regulations, specifically laws concerning the right to carry concealed weapons on college campuses. All 50 states allow citizens to carry concealed weapons as determined by rules and regulations set forth by individual state legislatures (GAO, 2012). Currently, there are 19 states that have banned guns on college campuses and 22 states where the college or university can individually make the decision to allow concealed weapons on campus (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2015). By 2012, 200 college campuses across six states allowed concealed weapons on campus, which included classrooms and dormitories (Birnbaum, 2013; Gilroy, 2012). As Texas' campus-carry bill went into effect in January, 2016, that number has increased to nine states allowing students and faculty to carry concealed weapons onto college campuses. These states include Arkansas, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Mississippi, Oregon, Utah, and Wisconsin (Mulhere, 2015; Schwartz, 2015). In 2015, 10 state legislatures' present bills that would allow guns on college campuses (Hess, 2015; Schwartz, 2015). According to Mulhere (2015), over the past few years, bills have been introduced in at least half of the 50 state legislatures. The threat of gun related violence both on and off campus has sparked a reevaluation of the Second Amendment and the right of law-abiding citizens to defend themselves.

LITERATURE

The vast majority of the 4,800 two- and four- year colleges and universities in America are gun-free, and several studies conclude that students and faculty want to keep it that way. Recently, Thompson et al. (2013) examined at the viewpoints of undergraduate students in regards to concealed carry laws on college campuses. Fifteen Midwestern universities participated in the study and 78 percent of the students polled were not in support of repealing concealed gun laws on their campus. The study conducted by Thompson et al. (2013) mirrored previous results of Bennett, Kraft, and Grubb (2012) where 70 percent of faculty surveyed were not in support of concealed guns on campus. Thompson et al. (2013) also found that 93 percent of students across the fifteen universities felt safe on their campus, with 81 percent indicating that they were not concerned with becoming a victim of a crime or violence on their campus.

Statistics from several studies show that crime on American college campuses is

exceedingly low when compared with the national average. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) found that in 2012, 88,444 crimes were reported to college and university police with 96.8 percent occurring as property crime and only 3.2 percent violent crimes (as reported in National Crime Victims Rights Week [NCVRRW], 2015). A further breakdown of the violent crimes showed that 46.0 percent were aggravated assaults, 31.8 percent were robberies, 22.2 percent were forcible rapes, and only 0.1 percent were murder or non-negligent manslaughter (as reported in NCVRRW, 2015). The U.S. Department of Education found that the rate of homicide on college campuses account for only about 0.07 per 100,000 of enrollment (as cited in Thompson et al., 2013). In comparison, the overall homicide rate for persons aged 17 to 29 in the United States is 14.1 per 100,000 (Thompson et al., 2013). Though reported crime rates remain relatively low on college campuses, and overall violence rates continue to fall nationally, the push to allow concealed weapons on college campuses continue to gain momentum.

A study conducted by Kovandzic and Marvell (2003) and another by Ayres and Donohue (2003) on right to carry laws both found no statistical evidence pointing to the fact that having more citizens armed with guns decreases violent crime. These findings contradict the conclusions of Lott and Mustard's (1997) controversial "more guns, less crime" hypothesis. Kovandzic and Marvell (2003) also concluded that carrying concealed weapons might lead to increased property crimes and robberies, two offenses that are already among the majority of crimes committed on college campuses. Along with the conflicting results from both studies, the ambiguity of the Second Amendment continues to add fuel to both sides of the argument. The Supreme Court of the United States, with its decision in the case *District of Columbia v Heller* (2008), found that citizens have a right to possess a firearm for self-defense. The Court also decreed that the ruling should "not cast doubt on...laws forbidding the carrying of firearms in sensitive places such as schools and government buildings" (Birnbaum, 2013, p. 9). In the ruling, the court failed to specify the meaning of "sensitive places" resulting in the interpretation of "sensitive places" decided by each state's legislative branch.

One of the nation's largest groups to support the push for guns on campus is Students for Concealed Carry (SCC). It was created in direct response to the 2007 massacre at Virginia Tech, in which 33 college students and faculty members were killed when a classmate went on a shooting rampage around the campus. The organization currently has about 43,000 members and works to support state legislatures in their bid to expand concealed carry rights to colleges and universities (SCC, 2012). The SCC and its supporters believe that "public colleges are taxpayer funded institutions" so they should not be exempt from the taxpayer-funded public laws (Goral, 2012, p. 43). The SCC wants concealed carry laws relaxed on college campuses so law-abiding citizens can defend themselves against violent crime.

Numbers indicate that using a gun in self-defense is rare. In 2013, only 281 Americans out of the 12,253 that were murdered died by justifiable homicide, meaning a private citizen killed a felon while in the act of committing a felony (FBI, 2014). The SCC argues that none of the colleges or universities that currently allow concealed guns to be carried on campus has seen an increase in gun violence, gun accidents, or gun thefts (SCC, 2012). The SCC also contests that due to strict gun permit laws, only students who are age 21 or older would be allowed to carry; a statistic the SCC believes breaks down to only about "one armed citizen in any given classroom, if not the entire building"

(Goral, 2012, p. 43). A study conducted by Bouffard, Nobles, Wells, and Cavanaugh (2012) found that the prevalence of at least one legally concealed handgun in a given classroom can range from 10 percent up to 82 percent, depending on the type of courses found within a specific building. This could amount anywhere from less than one to as many as nine guns per classroom (Bouffard et al., 2012). Additionally, a study completed by Thompson et al. (2013) found an even bigger potential for gun carrying students. Their numbers show that on a campus of about 100,000, as many as 1,500 students could be carrying a concealed weapon on any given day (Thompson et al., 2013).

Proponents who want to keep guns off of college campuses cite many reasons for their stance. Organizations such as The Campaign to Keep Guns Off Campus and Students for Gun Free Schools (SGFS) maintain that universities and colleges should be a place where students can learn, debate, question, and express themselves openly and freely. It is a university's lawful duty to make sure all students, faculty, and visitors are exposed to a healthy environment, and introducing guns onto a campus would create fear, distrust, and uncertainty (Brady Center, 2007). Courts have found that a college or university may be held accountable and liable if they are unable to maintain a safe environment for their students (Brady Center, 2007). Recently, a feminist media critic was slated to give a speech at Utah State University. Due to death threats and the inability to ensure her safety, as well as that of the audience members, her appearance was canceled. Because Utah allows the carry of concealed weapons on college campuses, the university was unable to require attendees to pass through metal detectors or leave concealed firearms at home (Bowerman, 2014).

Another argument for the ban of guns on campus highlights the inability of law enforcement to know who the true perpetrator is during a campus crisis. When a multitude of people are shooting or even wielding guns, chaos ensues, which could potentially lead to innocent lives being lost (Goral, 2012). Information and statistics from Morrison (2006) and Goral (2012) demonstrates that even law enforcement officers with detailed training and many years of service only hit an intended target about 25 percent of the time. Students who are allowed to carry a concealed weapon only go through minimal training with potentially no more practice at wielding a weapon than what was required to obtain the permit (GAO, 2012)

The Campaign to Keep Guns Off Campus has been instrumental in leading colleges and universities to resist the pro-carry gun lobbyists and to sign a resolution opposing the repeal of concealed carry laws (Wood, 2013). According to The Campaign to Keep Guns Off of Campus website (2015), the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), over 370 individual colleges and universities across 42 states, and 48 college presidents have signed the resolution to keep their campuses a gun free zone.

Some argue that allowing guns on campus could introduce more risks for students (SGFS, n.d.). A study conducted by Miller, Hemenway, and Wechsler (2002) found that white males who participated in binge drinking, engaged in risky and aggressive behavior while drunk, and who attended college in the south, would most likely have firearms at college. Their findings are consistent with a 1997 College Alcohol Study in which gun-owning college students were more likely to drink frequently and excessively and engage in activities that put themselves and others at risk, such as drunk driving, vandalizing, and participating in unprotected or nonconsensual sex (Miller, Hemenway, & Wechsler,

2002). Mixing guns with on-campus drinking behavior could put many students at an increased risk for sexual assault, accidental shootings, gun theft, and even suicide. According to Miller, Hemenway and Wechsler, (1999) alcohol is involved in roughly two-thirds of college suicides, 90 percent of campus rapes and in 95 percent of the violent crimes on campus (as cited in Brady, 2007).

Due to the low possibility of homicide on a college campus, Birnbaum (2013) suggests increasing resources to prevent and protect students from sexual assault and rape, rather than arming students with weapons. The most vulnerable age group for sexual assault and rape is that of women aged 18 to 24 (Sinozich & Langton, 2014). Data from the NCVRW (2015) and the U.S. Department of Justice suggests that sexual assault victimization on college campuses is common, with 22.2 percent of all campus crime falling under the rape category. The National Crime Victimization Survey defines rape as “the unlawful penetration of a person against the will of the victim, with use or threatened use of force, or attempting such an act” (Sinozich & Langton, 2014, p.11). A sexual assault is defined “across a wide range of victimizations separate from rape or attempted rape” and can include “attacks or attempted attacks involving unwanted sexual contact between a victim and offender” (Sinozich & Langton, 2014, p. 11). One argument for allowing concealed weapons on campus is that it might reduce the number of sexual assault and rape occurrences (Schwartz, 2015). Yet statistics show that in 80 percent of all rape cases, the victim knew the offender; either as friends, acquaintances, or an intimate partner (Hess, 2015; Sinozich & Langton, 2014). Furthermore, many rape situations begin with some sort of consensual behavior, which may make utilizing a gun extremely difficult (Schwartz, 2015).

The U.S. Department of Justice gathered data on the perceptions rape victims had of their attacker. Of women attacked while on campus, 47 percent believed their offender was under the influence of alcohol. Ninety-seven percent of the attackers were deemed male and more than half of all offenders were perceived to be white (Sinozich & Langton, 2014). A strong argument for keeping guns off campus follows from the fact that the profile of men assaulting women follows a pattern similar to the profile of men who are most likely to be college gun owners, as referenced by Miller, Hemenway, and Wechsler (2002) and the 1997 College Alcohol Study. A recent study conducted by The Campaign to Keep Guns Off Campus looked at two states, Utah and Colorado, which allow concealed weapons on campus. Utilizing data from the FBI Uniform Crime Statistics, the study found that as the student population decreased, campus crime increased where concealed carry is allowed (Campaign to Keep Guns Off Campus, 2015). Moreover, the fastest growing crime on both Utah and Colorado campuses is that of rape. Crime statistics from 2012 demonstrate that the rate of rape increased 25 percent in Colorado (The Campaign to Keep Guns Off Campus, 2015). In 2013, the rate of rape increased to 36 percent in Colorado and in Utah; these numbers jumped to the highest level in ten years, with 14 per 100,000 (The Campaign to Keep Guns Off Campus, 2015).

The lawmakers, lobbyists, and students who are speaking up and gathering support in an attempt to make it legal to carry concealed guns on campus claim a fundamental and constitutional right to self-defense. Their belief is that having more weapons at the ready will reduce the occurrence of violence on campuses across the country (Lott, 2010). The opposing view is that adding guns to a college campus will increase the risk of accidents and violent crime and cause an entire population to feel

unsafe and insecure. Both sides of this hotly debated campus-carry issue are locked in a contentious fight with more empirical evidence needed in order to make informed and safe decisions. The current investigation focuses on the incidence of sexual assault across campuses. Using federally reported data, this investigation examines the frequency and trends of reported sexual assault crimes, based on the ability for individuals to choose to carry their concealed weapons on campus.

METHODS

The current investigation used data from “The Campus Safety and Security Data” webpage (<http://ope.ed.gov/campussafety/#/>) managed by the federal government. Data were extracted in an effort to examine the frequency of reported sexual assaults crimes. This investigation included data from three states. Data were available on the school level and was available for the period both before and after laws changed in the respective states. A complete list of the post-secondary institutions included in the current investigation is presented in Appendix A. The states in which these schools are located and the number of schools which provided data are presented in Table 1 (Appendix B)

As indicated in Table 1, the sample size for this investigation is fifty-four schools across 13 years of data (2001-2013), resulting in a total sample of $n = 702$ data points from the colleges and universities included in this investigation.

RESULTS

The current investigation examines the trends in reported sexual assault crimes in three states where the laws have changed. Specifically, data included was reported for schools in the states of Colorado, Mississippi, and Utah. Data were examined based on the reported frequencies. The analysis examines the frequency of reported sexual assault crimes in an effort to reveal if trends change across time. The results of the general linear model are presented in Table 2 (Appendix B).

As indicated in Table 2, both analyses resulted in a non-significant interaction between year and condition. Results also indicate that there is no significant finding for year, suggesting that the rate of sexual assaults across the 2001 to 2013 period did not significantly change. Most notably however is the significant main effect for the “condition” variable; specifically, the frequency of sexual assaults where carry-on—campus is permitted relative to the frequency of sexual assaults where carry-on-campus is not permitted. This result suggests that schools with carry-on-campus have a significantly higher incidence of sexual assault crimes when carry-on-campus is permitted. This can be further illustrated with a graphical depiction of the data. As indicated in Figure 1(Appendix C), the initial analysis reveals that across the years of 2001-2013, frequency of reported assaults were consistently higher where carry-on-campus was permitted. Illustrated differently, *Figure 2* (Appendix C) provides the trend in the frequency of sexual assaults for each state included in the current investigation, with a red line demarking when the law changed. While each state changed their laws during a different year, the data is centered around the change in the law (time interruption) to illustrate the data trend before and after the law change.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The current investigation takes a look at the impact of carry-on-campus laws on the frequency of sexual assault. Using existing federal data, the frequency of sexual assault crimes is examined. Much of the legislation has cited a need for changing the carry-on-campus laws in order to reduce the incidence of sexual assault (Birnbaum, 2013). This investigation examines the trends in the frequencies before and after law changes in three states. The trends observed across these three states, which include data from fifty-four colleges and universities, suggest that changes to permitting carry-on-campus has not been accompanied by a reduction in the frequency of sexual assault crimes. In fact, the trends indicate that there has been a significant increase in these crimes once the laws are changed. The findings of this investigation are consistent with previous studies, however, unlike previous investigations, this study focused on the relationship between carry-on-campus law changes and trends in sexual assault.

A number of nationally-based studies suggest that campus sexual assaults are not likely to be impacted by the presence or absence of carry-on-campus privileges. The National Crime Victimization Study: 2009-2013 found that more than eighty percent of reported sexual assaults have involved a close friend or “non-stranger”, with more than 25% of these attacks being committed by a person previously intimate with the victim (NCVS, 2014). Research suggests that these events happen predominately during parties and events, and upward to 55% of the victims of sexual assault and 74% of the self-report data from perpetrators report being under the influence of alcohol (Abbey, 2015). At the same time, national data suggests that only about 3% of sexual assaults occur when the perpetrator is using a firearm (RAINN, 2015). And, while this data suggests that it is unlikely that a perpetrator of sexual assault would be armed in an effort to commit this type of crime, it is equally unlikely that the intended victim is armed and ready to shoot the perpetrator. Victims who are armed have likely been assaulted by the perpetrator previously, and have armed themselves to protect themselves from future attacks.

There have been 24 post-secondary campus shootings in 2015 (TIME, 2016). Legislative changes that expand gun-carrying privileges to college and university campuses are a growing trend in light of the nation’s increasing level of gun violence. While the current investigation looks at the data trends from only three states with available data, the findings indicate that the change in the laws have failed to have a positive impact in reducing the number of reported sexual assault crimes. It is understandable that lawmakers, activists, and community members want to mobilize and enact policies to protect our country’s colleges and universities. However, it may be prudent to decelerate the trend toward reactive legislation and instead focus attention on a deeper understanding of violent acts on campuses and the cultural practices that contribute to those acts. If able to engage in thoughtful deliberation and debate based on quality research, administrators and policy makers can develop proper rules and regulations to assist in a safer campus environment for all.

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APPENDIX A

State (year of law change)	Schools Providing Data	
UTAH (2004)	Dixie State	Univ Utah
	Salt Lake CC	Utah State
	Snow College	Utah Valley
	Southern Utah U	Weber State
Mississippi (2011)	Alcorn State	Meridian
	Coahoma	Miss Delta CC
	Copiah-Lincoln	Miss Gulf Coast CC
	Delta State	Miss State U
	East Central CC	Miss U for Women
	East Miss CC	Miss Valley State
	Hinds CC	Northeast Miss CC
	Holmes CC	Northwest Miss CC
	Itawamba	Pearl River
	Jackson	Southwest Miss CC
	Jones County Jr	Univs of Miss
		Univs So Miss
	Colorado (2003)	Adams State
Arapahoe		Metro
Col Mesa		Morgan
Col Mountain		Northeastern Jr
Col Northwestern CC		Otero
Col School of Mines		Pikes Peak
Col State U		Pueblo
CC Aurora		Red Rocks
CC Denver		Trinidad
Fort Lewis		University of Colorado
Fort Range CC		University of Northern Colorado Western State

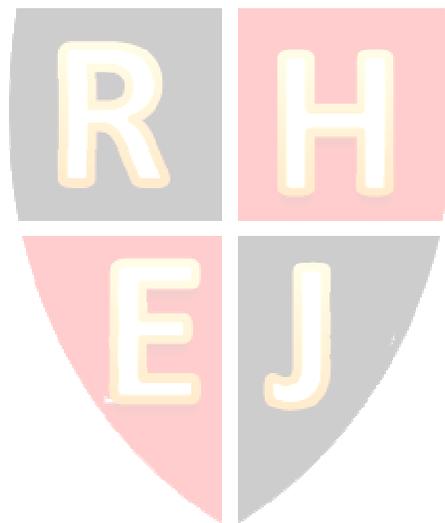
APPENDIX B

Table 1.
States Providing Change Data for Carry-On-Campus

State	Year of Law Change	Number of Schools
Colorado	2003	23
Mississippi	2011	23
Utah	2004	8

Table 2. *Results of the GLM*

Analysis	Variables	F	df	sig.
3 States (<i>n</i> = 702)	Year	1.081	12	0.373
	Condition (Carry vs No Carry)	28.832	1	0.001
	Year * Condition	0.366	7	0.922



APPENDIX C

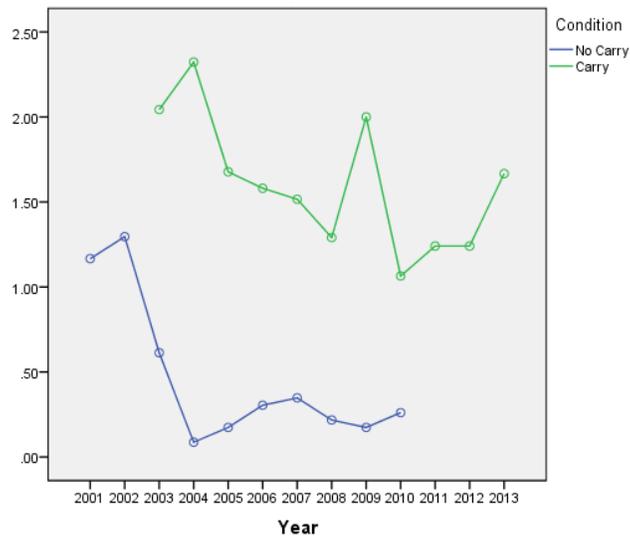


Figure 1. Rates of Sexual Assaults Based on Colorado, Mississippi, and Utah Data

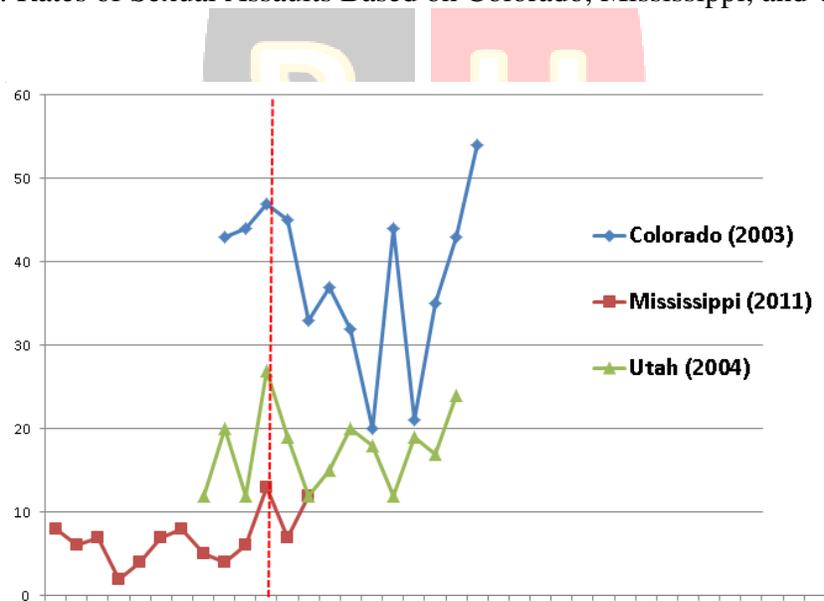


Figure 2. Frequency of Sexual Assault Pre-to Post Law Change.