



MEDIA STATEMENT

Are guns effective for self-defence?

27 August 2019: Given the high levels of violent crime in South Africa, many of us have been victims of crime or know someone who has been a victim. People living in South Africa are scared: A recent StatsSA Victims of Crime Survey found that people fear being attacked in their homes and neighbourhoods, with one-third of households surveyed not going to open spaces or parks for fear of crime, and just less than a quarter preventing children from playing outside for the same reason.¹

With 56 murders a day, of whom 23 are shot and killed,² people are looking for ways to protect themselves, their families and their possessions.

Is getting a gun the best solution to ensure our safety?

South African research undertaken in two Johannesburg police precincts shows you are four times more likely to be shot at if you use your gun in self-defence.³ International research from Philadelphia in the USA not only supports this finding, but shows that you are 4 to 5 times more likely to be shot (not just shot at) if you have a gun in your possession when attacked, compared to someone who was not carrying a firearm at the time.⁴

Furthermore, international research shows that guns are very rarely used in self-defence against a criminal attack.⁵ The most recent comprehensive research from the USA, which used national FBI and crime survey data, shows that guns that have been bought for protection are 32 times more likely to criminally murder others than to kill in self-defence.⁶

Rather than being effective for self-defence, there is substantial international evidence showing that having a gun for self-defence puts you and your family at risk for death and injury.⁷ A gun in the home is more likely to be used to commit murder, suicide or to threaten and intimidate someone known to the shooter e.g. a family member including a spouse, a friend or acquaintance, than to successfully protect against an intruder. This includes intimate-femicide (the killing of a female intimate partner by a male), femicide-suicide (where the male perpetrator kills himself after killing his female intimate partner) and family murder-suicide, as well as accidental injury and death.

Research in South Africa confirms global data which shows that more women are killed by an intimate partner than a stranger.⁸ As of 2018, eight women are murdered a day, an estimated three of whom are shot and killed.⁹ This is a 50% increase from 2009, when two women were shot and killed a day.¹⁰ **NOTE:** See graphic below for a profile of 21 women who have been shot and killed in 2019, symbolising the 21 women shot and killed each week in South Africa (3 a day), also available online at www.gfsa.org.za/take-action/resources/send/3-media-releases/108-women-s-month-profile-of-21-women-shot-and-killed-a-week-in-sa.

A further risk is that guns bought for self-defence end up arming criminals. Guns are highly prized items and are targeted by criminals who cannot acquire guns legally: Civilians in South Africa reported the loss or theft of 8,867 guns in 2017/18, which is an average of 24 guns every day (the police lost an average of 1 gun a day in this time).¹¹ Between 2004/05 and 2014/15, 95% of civilian gun losses were reported to the police as 'stolen'.¹²

While we don't know how these guns were stolen (e.g. from a safe, from a car, from a person), the 1999 study conducted in two Johannesburg police precincts showed that you are 4 times more likely to have your gun stolen from you than to use it in self-defence when under attack.¹³

Says Claire Taylor, a researcher at Gun Free South Africa, "People in South Africa are scared, and are looking for ways to protect themselves. There is a widespread belief that buying a gun for self-defence will help protect you and your family from criminals.

This is a myth. The evidence overwhelmingly shows that guns are rarely used for self-defence; and when a gun is used in self-defence it increases the risk of being shot at, and thus shot, 4 to 5 times. And, most importantly, it is 4 times more likely to be stolen than to be used for self-defence, so arming criminals.

A gun in the home is also more likely to be used to commit murder, suicide or to threaten and intimidate someone known to the shooter e.g. an intimate partner, than to successfully protect against an intruder Finally, guns bought for self-defence arm criminals: almost 70% of guns reported as lost or stolen in South Africa between 2000 and 2014 (the years for which breakdowns are available) were lost by, or stolen from, civilian gun owners."¹⁴

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SYMBOLISING THE

WOMEN SHOT & KILLED EVERY WEEK IN SOUTH AFRICA

3 a day (2018 stats)



Name: Sinazo Kleinboo
Age: 14
Girl shot at point blank range while walking home from school in Motherwell



Name: Xolile Mnana
Age: NA
Man kills ex-girlfriend, wounds her sister before killing self



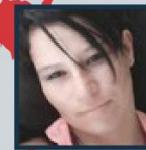
Name: Chanty Duvies Barnard
Age: NA
Woman killed along with Mary Abbott Coetzee by an unknown gunman on a motorbike in South Hills, Johannesburg



Name: Tasneem Simons
Age: 22
Pregnant 22 year old shot in head, killed in crossfire while taking down the washing



Name: Thandiwe Mavaneni
Age: 33
Police officer shot, dies in domestic dispute



Name: Mary Abbott Coetzee
Age: NA
Woman killed along with Chanty Duvies Barnard by an unknown gunman on a motorbike in South Hills, Johannesburg



Name: Jessica Kuhn
Age: 24
Woman killed in Benoni roadside shooting after bakkie runs out of fuel



Name: Sadiqah Newman
Age: 26
Young pregnant woman shot in Manenberg walking to the shops to buy electricity



Name: Dawny Philile Mhlongo
Age: 30
Woman's body found dumped in field with multiple gunshot wounds after family reports her missing



Name: Francina Raphokwane
Age: 42
North West teacher gunned down while waiting for transport to school



Name: Candice Williams
Age: 35
Attacked and shot dead while sleeping at home



Name: Sharon Islam
Age: 37
Woman shot and killed during robbery in Musina, Limpopo



Name: Chuma Sinethemba Mhuluhulu
Age: 28
Young pregnant woman shot and killed by unknown gunman in Kwadwesi, PE



Name: Barbara Haines
Age: 34
Professional nurse murdered in front of children by husband



Name: Sandra Schwartz
Age: 39
Brakpan mother allegedly used husband's gun to shoot 2 daughters, son & herself



Name: Zingisa Nobandla Mabandla
Age: NA
Ward councillor shot by her husband, Chief of the Amabhele clan in Tsolo



Name: Martha Gama
Age: 43
Husband kills wife, a mother of 3, and then himself



Name: Lee-Ann Schwartz
Age: 16
Brakpan mother allegedly used husband's gun to shoot 2 daughters, son & herself



Name: Fezeka Ncgobo
Age: 17
Durban school mourns pupil's death after alleged murder-suicide



Name: Elma Davis
Age: 51
Murder-suicide: Husband shoots globally recognised bowls player



Name: Sheree Schwartz
Age: 19
Brakpan mother allegedly used husband's gun to shoot 2 daughters, son & herself



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¹ Statistics South Africa. 2017. Victims of Crime Survey 2015/16.

² South African Police Service 2017-2018 national annual crime statistics.

³ Altbeker, Antony. 1999. Guns and Public Safety: Gun crime in Alexandra and Bramley. GFSA.

⁴ Branas, Charles, et al. 2009. American Journal of Public Health, Vol. 99, No. 11 pp. 2034-2040.

⁵ Hemenway, David, et al. 2015. The epidemiology of self-defense gun use: Evidence from the National Crime Victimization Surveys 2007–2011. Preventive Medicine, Vol. 79, pp. 22-27: This USA study shows that self-defence gun use occurs in fewer than 1% of contact crimes.

⁶ Violence Policy Center. 2015. [Firearm Justifiable Homicides and Non-Fatal Self-Defense Gun Use: An Analysis of Federal Bureau of Investigation and National Crime Victimization Survey Data.](#)

⁷ See:

- United Nations. 2019. Understanding homicide: typologies, demographic factors, mechanisms and contributors. Global Study on Homicide. Vienna: UNODC.
- Santaello-Tenorio, Julian, et al. 2016. What do we know about the Association between Firearm Legislation and Firearm-related Injuries? Epidemiologic Reviews Journal. Vol. 8, pp. 140–157.
- van Kesteren, John. 2014. Revisiting the Gun Ownership and Violence Link: A Multilevel Analysis of Victimization Survey Data. British Journal of Criminology. Vol. 54, pp. 53-72.
- Anglemyer, Andrew, et al. 2014. The Accessibility of Firearms and Risk for Suicide and Homicide Victimization Among Household Members: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis. Annals of Internal Medicine. Vol. 160, pp. 101-110.
- Shaw, Margaret. 2013. Too Close to Home – Guns and Intimate Partner Violence. Small Arms Survey 2013: Everyday Dangers. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Hemenway, David. 2011. Risks and Benefits of a Gun in the Home. American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine. Vol. 5, pp. 502-511, which summarises the scientific literature on the health risks and benefits of having a gun in the home for the gun owner and his/her family, concluding that, “The evidence is overwhelming for the fact that a gun in the home is a risk factor....”

⁸ 57% of female homicides in 2009 were committed by an intimate partner, up from 50% in 1999, though the researchers note that these figures are likely to be higher as e.g. in over 20% of femicides in 2009 no perpetrator was identified. Source: Abrahams, Naeemah, et al. 2012. Every Eight Hours: Intimate femicide in South Africa 10 years later. MRC Research Brief, August. Tygerberg: South African Medical Research Council.

⁹ Figure calculated based on the following:

- South African Police Service 2017-2018 annual crime statistics, which show that 41.3% of the 20,336 murders that year were gun-related. Source: South African Police Service 2017–2018 national annual crime statistics.
- The most recent national mortuary study which shows that 11% of gun homicide victims are female. Source: Matzopoulos, Richard, et al. 2015. Injury-related mortality in South Africa: a retrospective descriptive study of postmortem investigations. Bull World Health Organisation, Vol 93, pp. 303-313.

¹⁰ Matzopoulos, Richard, et al. 2015. Injury-related mortality in South Africa: a retrospective descriptive study of postmortem investigations. Bull World Health Organisation, Vol 93, pp. 303-313.

¹¹ South African Police Service 2017/2018 Annual Report.

¹² Wits School of Governance Public Safety Programme. 2015. Analysis of the Firearms Control Act on Crime (1999 to 2014). University of the Witwatersrand.

¹³ Altbeker, Antony. 1999. Guns and Public Safety: Gun crime in Alexandra and Bramley. GFSA.

¹⁴ 67% were from civilians, 12% were from the police, 10% from government departments and 9% from the private security industry. Source: Wits School of Governance Public Safety Programme. 2015. Analysis of the Firearms Control Act on Crime (1999 to 2014). University of the Witwatersrand.

¹⁵ 67% were from civilians, 12% were from the police, 10% from government departments and 9% from the private security industry. Source: Wits School of Governance Public Safety Programme. 2015. Analysis of the Firearms Control Act on Crime (1999 to 2014). University of the Witwatersrand.