

FIREARMS CONTROL BRIEFING

QUICK FACTS

Guns and Violence in SA

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1. GUN VIOLENCE IN SA

MURDER

23 people are shot and killed every day in SA.¹

SUICIDE

2 people commit suicide with a gun every day in SA.²

DISABILITY

138 people survive a gunshot every day in SA, often with severe disabilities.³

Severe disability is closely associated with spinal cord injury. The World Health Organization (WHO) identifies trauma, specifically motor vehicle accidents, as the leading cause of such injuries worldwide, followed by falls and violence. However, according to the WHO, SA has a very high violence-related traumatic spinal cord injury rate, at 21%.⁴

In 2014 gunshots overtook car accidents as the leading cause of traumatic spinal cord injuries in the City of Cape Town's government hospitals.⁵

THE IMPACT OF SA'S FIREARMS CONTROL ACT (2000)

SA's experience shows that strong gun laws save lives, and poor enforcement kills.

As shown in Graph 1:⁶

↑ Before the Firearms Control Act (2000) was passed into law, an average of 34 people were shot and killed a day.⁷

↓ Over the next 10 years this figure halved – in 2009, 18 people were shot and killed a day.⁸ Researchers have shown that SA's strong gun law saved lives by reducing the number of guns available in the country.⁹

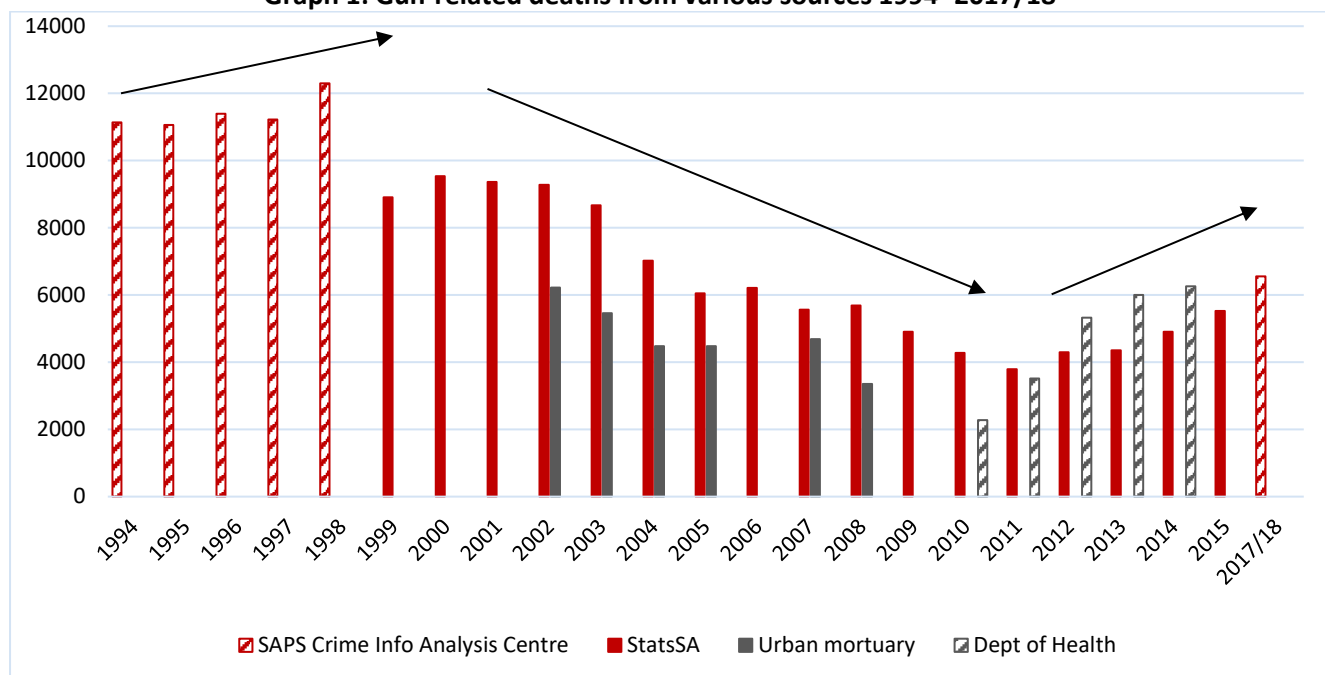
↑ In 2010/11 SA's murder, attempted murder and aggravated robbery rates began increasing.¹⁰ At the same time evidence of the Firearms Control Act not being properly implemented began mounting.¹¹ This included:

- Fraud and corruption by some police officers, gun industry members and gun owners.
- Poor enforcement of the law by police and poor compliance by gun owners.

As the number of guns began increasing in SA from 2010/11 so did incidents of gun violence. Currently 23 people are shot and killed every day in SA.¹²



Graph 1: Gun-related deaths from various sources 1994 -2017/18



GUN VIOLENCE VICTIMS

The face of gun violence is a young black man living in a metro area:¹³

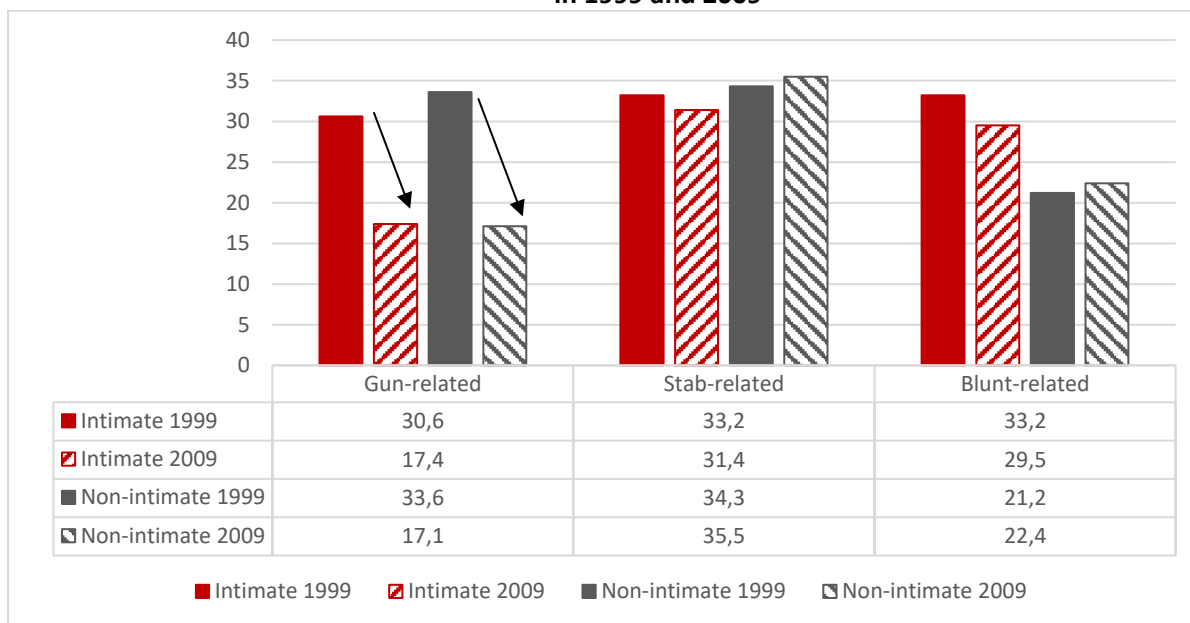
- Men make up 89% of gun murder victims in SA.
- Men living in metro areas have a “notably higher” rate of murder.
- Murder rates are highest in the 15–29 years age group.
- Homicide rates are highest among people categorized as black.

Guns and Women

While women make up only 11% of gun-related murder victims, guns still play a significant role in violence against women, being used to murder, injure, threaten and intimidate:

- Women are most at risk of being shot in their home by their intimate partner.¹⁴
- Most victims have been threatened with a firearm before being shot.¹⁵ The four main types of threatening gun-related behaviour by men are: 1) Threatening to shoot their partner; 2) Cleaning, holding or loading a gun during an argument; 3) Threatening to shoot a person or pet the partner cares about; and 4) Shooting a gun during an argument.¹⁶
- Intimate partner violence and gun deaths are particularly high in families where men use a gun for work, such as in the police, army or private security industry.¹⁷
- Two national studies of femicide (the murder of women) show that the number of women killed by their intimate partner (called intimate femicide) has dropped from four women a day in 1999 (an average of one woman being killed every six hours) to three women a day (one every eight hours) in 2009.¹⁸ As shown in Graph 2 below, the reason is a substantial decline in the number of women that were shot and killed compared to deaths resulting from stab and blunt injuries; researchers attributed this decline to the Firearms Control Act (2000).¹⁹

Graph 2: Manner of death for women in SA killed by both intimate and non-intimate partners in 1999 and 2009



2. GUNS AND GUN OWNERS IN SA

LICENSED

- There are almost 4.5 million (4,487,837) licensed guns in SA (owned by civilians, private security companies as well as the state).²⁰
- 90% of gun owners are civilians: There are almost 1,8 million (1,749,034) civilian gun owners who own almost 3 million (2,990,256) guns.²¹
- 81% of legal gun owners are men.²²
- 64% of licensed gun owners are over the age of 50.²³
- The majority of licensed gun owners live in just three provinces Gauteng (37%), KwaZulu-Natal (14%), and the Western Cape (12%).²⁴
- 49% of legally owned guns are handguns (pistols or revolvers).²⁵
- The majority of legally owned handguns are licensed for self-defence purposes.²⁶

UNLICENSED

Being unlicensed, it is impossible to accurately estimate the number of unlicensed guns in SA, what's important to note though is that:

- Unlicensed guns are highly prized by people who cannot access them through legal channels.
- Most unlicensed guns were once legal before they leaked into the illegal pool. Diversion occurs through one of three ways:
 1. **Loss and theft** is the most significant mechanism: Civilians – not the police – are the greatest source of illegal guns in SA, losing on average seven times more guns than the police (see Guns and Self-defence below for more information on gun loss and theft).²⁷
 2. **Cross-border trafficking:** Contrary to common perceptions that guns are smuggled into SA from our neighbours, indications are that handguns in particular are trafficked from SA to neighbouring countries.²⁸

3. **Fraud, corruption and poor enforcement of the law:** This means that people who do not meet the legal criteria of “fit and proper” are illegally granted gun licences.
- Contrary to popular belief, AK47 assault rifles are seldom used to commit crimes. Instead handguns (pistols and revolvers) are the weapon of choice: Between 1999/2000 and 2013/14, handguns were used in 94% of murders, 94% of attempted murders and 97% of aggravated robberies in which a gun was used.²⁹
- Guns are robust commodities and once a legal gun leaks into the unlicensed pool it can be used repeatedly to commit crimes until it is ‘mopped up’.

3. GUNS AND SELF-DEFENCE

Most handguns in SA are licensed for self-defence.³⁰ However, international and national research shows that while having a gun may make you feel safer, it doesn’t make you safer:

1. Guns are highly prized items and are targeted by criminals who cannot acquire them legally: Civilians in SA reported the loss or theft of 8,948 guns in 2016/17, which is an average of 25 guns every day (the police lost an average of 2 guns a day in this time).³¹ 95% of civilian gun losses are reported to the police as ‘stolen’³² indicating they were deliberately targeted by criminals.
2. Guns are rarely used in self-defence against a criminal attack.³³ This is because criminals carefully choose the time and place of attack, making sure victims are vulnerable and outnumbered to increase the success of a crime.
3. A gun in the home is more likely to be used to commit murder, suicide or to threaten and intimidate someone known to the owner e.g. an acquaintance, friend or family member including a spouse, than to successfully protect against an intruder.³⁴
4. You are four times more likely to have your gun stolen from you than to use it in self-defence, and for every gun used in self-defence, six more are used to commit a crime.³⁵
5. If you shoot your gun at armed criminals they will shoot back 100% of the time, putting your life and the lives of bystanders at risk.³⁶

In summary: **Choosing to buy a gun for self-defence is not effective as it arms criminals and endangers yourself and your family.**

¹ South African Police Service 2017/18 national crime statistics: 41.3% of murders are gun-related; 20,336 murders that year.

² Matzopoulos, Richard. et al. 2015. Injury-related mortality in South Africa: a retrospective descriptive study of postmortem investigations. Bull World Health Organisation, Volume 93, pp. 303-313.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.2471/BLT.14.145771>.

³ A comprehensive global study on gun violence and disability – see Buchanan, Cate. (Editor). 2013. Gun Violence, Disability and Recovery, [Surviving Gun Violence Project](#) - estimates that for every person shot and killed as many as six victims will survive, often with severe disabilities.

⁴ Bickenbach, Jerome (Editor). 2013. International Perspectives on Spinal Cord Injury. World Health Organization. Available online at www.who.int/disabilities/policies/spinal_cord_injury/en/ (accessed 1 February 2017), p. 20.

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- ⁵ Joseph, Conran. 2015. Incidence and aetiology of traumatic spinal cord injury in Cape Town, South Africa: a prospective, population-based study. *Spinal Cord*, Volume 53, pp. 692–696. [doi:10.1038/sc.2015.51](https://doi.org/10.1038/sc.2015.51).
- ⁶ Data from four sources are illustrated in Graph 1: 1) SAPS CIAC data are sourced from Chetty, Robert. 2000. *Firearm Use and Distribution in South Africa*. Pretoria: The National Crime Prevention Centre. 2) StatsSA data for 1997-2013 are sourced from Matzopoulos, Richard. et al. 2016. Where have all the gun deaths gone? *South African Medical Journal* June 2016, Volume 106, Number 6 pp. 589-591; StatsSA data for 2014 and 2015 are sourced from StatsSA's Nesstar available online at www.statssa.gov.za. 3) Urban mortuary data are sourced from the National Injury Mortality Surveillance System (NIMSS), reports are available online at www.mrc.ac.za/crime/publications.htm. 4) Department of Health data are sourced from a written reply by the Minister of Health, National Assembly of South Africa. Internal question paper no. 37-2015: Date of publication: 4 September 2015 responding to Groenewald, Pieter. 2015. Question No. 3408.
- ⁷ Chetty, Robert. 2000. *Firearm Use and Distribution in South Africa*. Pretoria: The National Crime Prevention Centre.
- ⁸ Matzopoulos, Richard. et al. 2015. Injury-related mortality in South Africa: a retrospective descriptive study of postmortem investigations. *Bull World Health Organisation*, Volume 93, pp. 303-313. doi.org/10.2471/BLT.14.145771.
- ⁹ See: 1) Matzopoulos Richard. et al. 2014. Firearm and Nonfirearm Homicide in 5 South African Cities; A Retrospective Population-Based study. *American Journal of Public Health*, Volume 104, Number 3, pp. 455-460. 2) Abrahams, Naeemah. et al. 2013. Intimate partner femicide in South Africa in 1999 and 2009. *PLoS Medicine*, Volume 10, Number 4. 3) Campbell, Nathan. et al. 2013. Firearm injuries to children in Cape Town, South Africa: Impact of the 2004 Firearms Control Act. *South African Journal of Surgery*, Volume 51, Number 3, pp. 92-96.
- ¹⁰ South African Police Service annual crime statistics, available online at www.saps.gov.za. The most recent national crime statistics (2017/18) show that murder increased 31% between 2011/12 and 2017/18 (15,554 to 20,336), attempted murder 24% (14,370 to 18,233) and aggravated robbery 37% (100,769 to 138,364).
- ¹¹ Matzopoulos, Richard, et al. 2018. A retrospective time trend study of firearm and non-firearm homicide in Cape Town from 1994 to 2013. *South African Medical Journal*, Volume 108, Number 3 pp. 197-204. [doi:10.7196/SAMJ.2018.v108i3.12756](https://doi.org/10.7196/SAMJ.2018.v108i3.12756).
- ¹² South African Police Service 2017/18 national crime statistics: 41.3% of murders are gun-related; 20,336 murders that year.
- ¹³ Matzopoulos, Richard. et al. 2015. Injury-related mortality in South Africa: a retrospective descriptive study of postmortem investigations. *Bull World Health Organisation*, Volume 93, pp. 303-313. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2471/BLT.14.145771>.
- ¹⁴ Women's vulnerability to a gun in the home confirmed by international research, a number of sources are cited in Shaw, Margaret. 2013. Chapter 2: Too Close to Home – Guns and Intimate Partner Violence. *Small Arms Survey 2013*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. SA research confirms this risk, see Abrahams, Naeemah. et al. 2010. Guns and gender-based violence in South Africa. *South African Medical Journal*, Volume 100, Number 9, pp. 586-588.
- ¹⁵ Geneva Declaration Secretariat. 2011. Chapter 4: When the Victim is a Woman. *Global Burden of Armed Violence 2011: Lethal Encounters*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- ¹⁶ Rothman, Emily. et al. 2005. Batterers' Use of Guns to Threaten Intimate Partners. *Journal of the American Medical Women's Association*, Volume 60, Number 1, pp. 62–68.
- ¹⁷ Mathews, Shanaaz. et al. 2008. Intimate femicide–suicide in South Africa: a cross-sectional study. *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*, Volume 86, pp. 552–558.
- ¹⁸ Abrahams, Naeemah. 2012. Every Eight Hours: Intimate femicide in South Africa 10 years later. Research Brief August. South African Medical Research Council: www.mrc.ac.za/policybriefs/everyeighthours.pdf.
- ¹⁹ Ibid.
- ²⁰ Phiyega, Riah. 2015. Implementing the Firearms Control Act. PowerPoint presentation by the National Police Commissioner at the National Firearms Summit, Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, 24-25 March.
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²¹ Data sourced from: 1) Wits School of Governance Public Safety Programme. 2015. Analysis of the Firearms Control Act on Crime (1999 to 2014). University of the Witwatersrand. 2) Phiyega, Riah. 2015. Implementing the Firearms Control Act. PowerPoint presentation by the National Police Commissioner at the National Firearms Summit, Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, 24-25 March.

²² Wits School of Governance Public Safety Programme. 2015. Analysis of the Firearms Control Act on Crime (1999 to 2014). University of the Witwatersrand.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ South African Police Service Annual Reports.

²⁸ McKenzie, Katharine. 1999. Domestic Gun Control Policy in Ten SADC Countries. GFSA. Hennop, Etienne. (2000) Chapter 2: 'Illegal Firearms in Circulation in South Africa' in Gamba, Virginia. (ed) 2000. Society Under Siege: Managing Arms in South Africa. Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies

²⁹ Wits School of Governance Public Safety Programme. 2015. Analysis of the Firearms Control Act on Crime (1999 to 2014). University of the Witwatersrand.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ South African Police Service 2016/2017 Annual Report.

³² Wits School of Governance Public Safety Programme. 2015. Analysis of the Firearms Control Act on Crime (1999 to 2014). University of the Witwatersrand.

³³ See: 1) Hemenway, David. et al. 2015. The epidemiology of self-defense gun use: Evidence from the National Crime Victimization Surveys 2007–2011. Preventive Medicine, Volume 79, pp. 22-27: This USA study shows that self-defence gun use occurs in fewer than 1% of contact crimes. 2) Violence Policy Centre. 2016. Firearm Justifiable Homicides and Non-Fatal Self-Defense Gun Use: An Analysis of Federal Bureau of Investigation and National Crime Victimization Survey Data. Available online at www.vpc.org/studies/justifiable16.pdf: This USA study based on FBI data shows that guns are very effective for attack but very bad for defence: For every incident that a gun was used to kill someone justifiably in self-defence, there were 32 gun-related criminal murders. In addition, a significant percentage (27%) of the people killed justifiably were known to the shooter.

³³ See: 1) Santaello-Tenorio, Julian, et al. 2016. What do we know about the Association between Firearm Legislation and Firearm-related Injuries? Epidemiologic Reviews Journal. Volume 8, pp. 140–157. Oxford University Press. 2) van Kesteren, John. 2014. Revisiting the Gun Ownership and Violence Link: A Multilevel Analysis of Victimization Survey Data. British Journal of Criminology. Volume 54, pp. 53-72. 3) Anglemeyer, 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. Volume 160, pp. 101-110. 4) Hemenway, David. 2011. Risks and Benefits of a Gun in the Home. American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine. Volume 5, pp. 502-511, available online at <http://ajl.sagepub.com/content/early/2011/02/01/1559827610396294> (accessed 10 August 2016), 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...."

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ See: 1) Altbeker, Antony. 1999. Guns and Public Safety: Gun crime in Alexandra and Bramley. GFSA. 2) Hemenway, David. et al. The epidemiology of self-defense gun use: Evidence from the National Crime Victimization Surveys 2007–2011. Preventive Medicine, Volume 79, October 2015, pp. 22-27.

³⁶ Altbeker, Antony. 1999. Guns and Public Safety: Gun crime in Alexandra and Bramley. GFSA.

