

More guns...more or less crime?

An Australian perspective on an international question

McPhedran, S. (2013). *Crime Prevention and Community Safety*, 15:127-133.

Executive Summary

Introduction

- Potential relationships between legal firearms ownership and firearms misuse remain poorly understood.
- There are no current studies examining relationships between levels of legal firearms ownership and firearms misuse in Australia.
- Despite the lack of empirical evidence, Australian firearms legislation has typically been based on the premise that reducing the number of legally owned firearms in society will correlate meaningfully with increased public safety and reduced firearms misuse.
- This paper analyses whether the number of legally owned firearms is correlated with the incidence of various firearm-related crimes in New South Wales, Australia.

Method

- Using 10 years of data, correlations were calculated between the number of registered firearms in New South Wales and firearms stolen, murder with a firearm, shoot with intent to murder, and robbery with a firearm.

Results

- There was a significant negative correlation between the number of registered firearms and shoot with intent to murder offences; that is, although the number of legally owned firearms increased, shoot with intent to murder offences decreased.
- There were negative, but not statistically significant, correlations between the number of registered firearms and murder with a firearm, robbery with a firearm, and firearm theft.

Conclusions

- It appears that there is little, if any, relationship between the number of legally owned firearms and firearms misuse in New South Wales, Australia.
- There have been ongoing increases in the number of legally owned firearms, but ongoing decreases in firearm-related crimes.
- This does not support the view that increases in legal ownership are associated with increases in violent crime.
- There was no evidence that rising numbers of legally owned firearms are linked with increasing levels of theft; the opposite was observed, with declines in theft occurring over a period of years.
- These results suggest the long-standing assumption that reducing the number of legally owned firearms is required in order to increase public safety needs careful reconsideration.
- Targeted law enforcement interventions to reduce levels of illegal firearms ownership may be the most appropriate and effective focus for violence reduction strategies.