

March 8, 2010 Just the Facts: Reducing Domestic Homicide

Firearms and Family Violence

- Women's groups from across the country insist that the firearms law is an essential tool in combating violence against women.
- Access to firearms is also one of the top five risk factors associated with domestic homicide in Canada.¹
- In Ontario, a province where only 15% of homes have firearms, 55% of the perpetrators in domestic homicides had access to guns, which reinforces the idea that a gun in the home dramatically increases the risk of death in domestic violence situations.
- Firearms increase the chance that assault will escalate into murder, and are frequently part of the cycle of intimidation and violence that many victims face in their homes.
- For every woman killed or injured with a firearm, many more are threatened with guns.
- Legally acquired rifles and shotguns are the weapons of choice in cases of domestic homicides, accidents, and suicides, particularly among youth.
- On average, one in three women killed by their husbands in Canada is shot. Often children are also victims, as the presence of firearms not only increases the lethality of domestic violence situations, but the number of victims.
- Several public inquests into the murders of women and children recommended the licensing of gun owners and registration of guns to prevent further tragedies.
- Reducing the threat of firearms in domestic violence situations requires implementation in the community as well as an integrated approach.

Rural Women are Most at Risk

Opponents of gun control measures tend to come from regions where guns are more common, such as rural communities. However firearms figure most prominently in incidents of domestic violence in rural areas. A study done in the provinces of New Brunswick and PEI on family violence in rural settings found that two thirds of the women indicated there were firearms in their home, and said knowing about the firearms made them more fearful for their safety and well-being. Women were more likely to express concern for their safety when the firearms owners were not licensed, and the firearms not registered or safely stored.³ In Alberta, a shelter worker estimated that at least 40% of her clients had been threatened with a gun. In Alberta, 68% of firearm suicides were in rural areas.^{2,4}

Gun Law Threatened

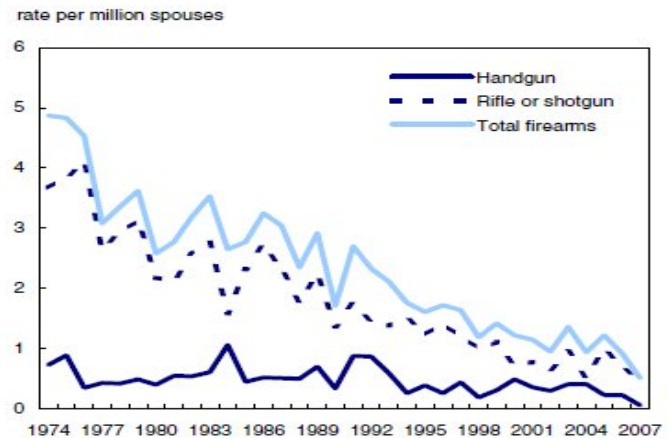
In November 2009, the House of Commons passed the second reading of Private Member's Bill C-391, which proposes to abolish the requirement to register rifles and shotguns, as NDP, Liberals and one Independent MP cast their votes with the government. The bill is now under review by a Parliamentary Committee.

Stronger Laws Make Women Safer

Stronger firearm laws were accompanied by greater decreases in murders of women. Canada's gun law is used by police to remove guns from dangerous people and to investigate crimes. The on-line registry provides police with round-the-clock access to information about the presence of legal firearms when they answer domestic violence calls.

- Homicides of women with firearms dropped by over 63% with progressive strengthening of gun controls laws (1991-2005), while murders of women with other means declined by only 38%.⁵
- Since the introduction of the Firearms Act, the rate of firearm-related spousal homicide decreased by two thirds.⁶
- While firearms were used in 40% of murders of women in 1989, they now account for under 15%, in part due to stricter controls on firearms.⁷

Spousal Homicide with Firearms (1974-2007)



Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Homicide Survey.

Women's Safety Experts Support the Law

Women's groups and front-line shelter workers continue to support the Firearms Act because they see firsthand that it works. On a national scale, the Canada's gun control legislation is supported by more than 300 organizations, including more than 100 women's groups and front-line shelters, such as: the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, the Canadian Federation of University Women, the consortium of 13 national Quebec women's groups, the Fédération des femmes du Québec, Kenora Sexual Assault Centre, Jewish Women International of Canada, METRAC, Montreal Assault Prevention Center, the National Council of Women of Canada, Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women, Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres, OAITH, Women's Sexual Assault Centre of Renfrew County, YWCA of Toronto and YWCA of Canada.

Canada's Gun Control Law

- All gun owners must have renewable gun licenses. Licensing is intended to reduce the chance that those who present a risk for violent action have access to firearms. Spouses must be notified before a license is issued.
- All guns must be registered once to their owners. Registration is intended to help enforce licensing and to reduce the chances that legal guns will be diverted into illegal markets.
- All guns must be safely stored to reduce the risk that these guns will be used impulsively.

"Duck Guns" Are Also Dangerous

Rifles and shotguns are the guns most often used to threaten women and children, and the weapons of choice in murders of police officers. Many are stolen from legal owners and are also seized from gangs. These recent domestic tragedies highlight the need for controls on all types of firearms:

- In February 2009 in Kingston (ON), Nadia Gehl was shot at a bus stop close to her home. Waterloo police apprehended her husband and two of his friends.
- In July 2009, Joan Hanson, her daughter Jolene and her nine-year-old granddaughter Misty were shot by her estranged husband who then turned the gun on himself with a rifle at her rural home in northern Alberta. Financial pressure is believed to have been a motive.
- In September 2009, Heidi Ferguson was shot by her estranged husband at her Orangeville(ON) home. An avid hunter and gun collector, it is believed that he later turned the gun on himself.
- In December 2009, in Saguenay (QC), Marie-Josée Desmeules was fatally shot in head by her husband with his hunting firearm. The man committed suicide.

International Campaign to End Armed Violence Against Women

Canada's firearms law has been held up as a model internationally because of its proven effectiveness in preventing murders of women. While some argue that owning guns is a right, international experts maintain that governments have an obligation to regulate firearms in order to reduce the risks of violence. The UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women⁸ and the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Small Arms⁹ emphasized that states which do not adequately regulate firearms are failing to meet their obligations under international law, particularly as it relates to preventing violence against women..

Gun Law: Improving Safety for All

The evidence shows that stronger gun laws help reduce gun related death, injury, violence and suicide.

- When controls on rifles and shotguns were strengthened in 1991, 1441 Canadians were killed with guns; in 2005, the number was 818.
- Murders with rifles and shotguns have decreased dramatically, from 107 in 1991, to 32 in 2008.
- Studies have correlated the introduction of the gun law with a significant reduction in firearms-related suicide rates, without evidence of displacement. All major suicide prevention groups in the country support the existing law, particularly because it is a preventative tool.

The Coalition for Gun Control

Founded in the wake of the Montreal massacre, the Coalition for Gun Control is the only national non-profit organization working to reduce gun injury, death and crime in Canada. We are endorsed by more than 300 crime and injury prevention, policing, health, child safety, victims' rights, grassroots and community organizations. These include: the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, the Canadian Public Health Association, the Dawson College Gun Control Committee, the families of the victims of the Montreal Massacre, YWCA of Canada, just to name a few.

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