Firearm Homicide in New Zealand: victims, perpetrators and their weapons 1992-94

Philip Alpers & Barbara Morgan

Abstract

Aim: To determine the firearms licensing status and mental and criminal history of perpetrators in firearm homicide, plus the legal status of the firearms used. The location of the shooting, its motivation and the relationship between perpetrator and victim were determined, as well as the type, ownership, origin and security storage of the firearms involved.

Method: All New Zealand firearm homicides in the three-year period 1992-1994 were identified. Case summaries were obtained from the New Zealand Police under the provisions of the Official Information Act. A standardised questionnaire was then used to obtain additional data from the case file. All the questionnaires were completed.

Results: Most victims were killed by a licensed gun-owner, while 62.5% (and ten out of eleven female victims) were killed with a legal firearm from the collection of a licensed gun-owner. Almost all victims (95%) were killed by a familiar person. Half were shot by their partner, an estranged partner or a member of their own family. Of all the dead, 63% were shot during family violence, 91% of these with a legal firearm. Of the perpetrators, 82% had no predictive history of violent crime, while none had a history of mental illness.

Conclusion: These results contradict the suggestion that efforts to reduce firearm violence should be directed only at "criminals and the mentally ill", rather than "law-abiding gun-owners".

Background

In New Zealand, 300,000 licensed sporting shooters own an estimated 1.1 million firearms, enough for one in each occupied dwelling and sufficient to outnumber the combined arsenals of the police and armed forces by a ratio of 30 to 1. We own 16 times as many guns per capita as the English and the Welsh, 60% more than the Australians but less than half as many as the residents of the United States. An additional 13,700 long guns alone (shotguns and rifles) are imported to New Zealand in a typical year.

Each day an average of seven firearm offences involving danger to life are reported to the police, while one in five homicides are committed with a firearm. Despite a common certainty that firearms are increasingly misused, there has been little local research. Although critical data on the misuse of firearms are collected, they are not made available.

A common theme in the firearm injury prevention debate in New Zealand has been stated as follows: "It is clear that to spend a disproportionate amount of time on the firearms owned by registered owners is a waste of public resources when almost all offending with firearms occurs with those which are in the possession of unauthorised users," and: "New Zealand just about all crimes with firearms are carried out by drug dealers, gang members and the like -- all of whom do not possess firearm licences." These and other assertions echo the views of United States pro-gun groups whose stated intention is to divert efforts at firearm injury prevention away from legal gun owners and towards "the criminals."

In similar vein it has been stated that a large proportion of perpetrators in multiple firearm homicides "have a long history of violent sociopathic behaviour," that "very few homicides are committed by people who have no prior history of violence," and that "firearms are being blamed when the real cause is mental health disorders." Suggested solutions include incarcerating career criminals and the mentally suspect, while opposing any firearm legislation inconvenient to gun owners.

This study tests the hypotheses that firearm homicide in New Zealand is most commonly committed:

- by individuals without firearms licences
- by violent criminals and the mentally ill
- with illegal weapons

Methods

Details of all firearm homicides which occurred during the years 1992-1994 were obtained from New Zealand Police records. Extracted from this study were one justifiable law enforcement shooting, one where the firearm was used to bludgeon, not to shoot, and one in which a firearm was used to wound a third party while the only person killed was knifed. In another case, two of six homicide victims killed during a multiple shooting event were excluded as they died by other means. Under the provisions of the Official Information Act (1982), a standardised multiple-choice questionnaire was completed and returned by police involved in each shooting. Follow-up correspondence achieved a completion rate of 100% of questions answered.
Results

During the study period, 29 homicidal shooting events left 40 victims and nine perpetrators dead by gunfire, an average of 13 victims and 16 total deaths per year.

Of the 40 victims, 29 (72.5%) were male, and 11 (27.5%) female. The age range of victims was from 14 to 83 years with an average age of 38. Four (10%) of the victims were killed during the commission of another felony, in each case a robbery. One of these victims was shot in the course of a drug-related robbery. One other victim was determined at trial to have been shot in self defence during an argument.

Of the 34 perpetrators, 33 (97%) were men, while one was a woman. Their ages ranged from 19 to 66. The average victim was shot by a 31 year-old perpetrator.

Relationship of Perpetrator to Victim

Thirty-eight victims (95%) were killed by a person familiar to them. Twelve (30%) were shot by a family member; two by their partner; six (15%) by an estranged partner; twelve (30%) by a friend or acquaintance; and three by a known sexual rival. Another three were killed by a known gang rival, while only two were killed by a stranger.

Location of Shooting

Of all victims, 22 (55%) were shot in their own home, while six (15%) were shot at their place of work. Five (12.5%) were killed at the perpetrator’s home or workplace, six (15%) in a public place, and one on licensed premises. Thus 28 (70%) of victims were shot at home or at work.

Previous Criminal Convictions and Mental Illness

Thirty three (82.5%) of victims were shot by a perpetrator with no previous conviction for violent crime. None of the victims were killed by a perpetrator who had been diagnosed or reported as being mentally ill prior to the event. For this survey, police also reported that none of the victims were killed by a perpetrator subsequently found to have a mental or violent history which, had it been known in advance, could have permitted authorities to prevent the shooting.

Firearms Licensing and the Use of Legal Firearms

Of all 40 victims, 21 (52.5%) were shot and killed by a licensed sporting shooter. Of these, thirteen (62%) were shot by a close family member or a current partner who held a licence. All (100%) of the licensed perpetrators in these 21 killings were males, every one of them well known to the victim.

However the remaining 19 (47.5%) of victims were not all shot by unlicensed individuals with stolen, sawn-off, or otherwise “illegal” firearms. Police report that several of the victims were killed by perpetrators who, though not holders of a current firearms licence, nevertheless had easy access to a category of weapon referred to in this study as a “legal firearm”. This is the most common type of gun in New Zealand.

Take for example a perpetrator who borrows a gun from his licensed brother, to kill his landlord. Or a young man with no licence who takes his father’s lawfully held shotgun to shoot his partner. Neither firearm is “illegal” in the sense that, like most firearms kept at home, both were lawfully held for a non-criminal, sporting purpose. Such is the apparent free movement of such firearms from licensed to unlicensed New Zealanders, particularly in rural areas, that our survey used a flowchart (Figure 2) to recognise this common category of firearm. The result is that 25 victims (62.5%) were shot with a legal firearm from the collection of a licensed sporting shooter.

Ten (91%) of eleven female victims were shot with a legal firearm. All (100%) of 25 victims of legal firearms were shot by a family member, partner, estranged partner, known sexual rival, friend or acquaintance.

Firearm Type, Origin and Storage

Nineteen (47.5%) of 40 victims were killed with a sporting rifle, thirteen (32.5%) with a sporting shotgun, four (10%) with a sawn-off firearm and five (12.5%) with a handgun (revolver or pistol). Thus, 32 (80%) of victims were shot with a common sporting long gun.

Police reported no suggestion that any of the firearms involved had been illegally imported.

Four (10%) of 40 victims were shot with a firearm previously reported to police as stolen. Five (12.5%) were killed with a firearm which had been taken or temporarily “converted” without permission from its lawful owner, while two were shot with a firearm borrowed with the permission of its owner.

In nine of 40 cases (22.5%), police reported that the method of storage used by the licensed owner of a stolen or converted firearm was a factor in its availability to the perpetrator. In eight of these nine cases (89%) police reported that the firearm was taken without permission from insecure storage which breached the Arms Regulations at the time. Only one firearm stolen for a killing was securely stored according to the law when taken.

Family Violence Shootings

Where the victim was killed by a family member, a current or estranged partner or a known rival in a family sexual triangle, the shooting was classified as family violence.

Twenty-two (55%) of all 40 victims were killed in the course of family violence. Thirty-one (63%) of the 49
total shooting deaths occurred as a result of family violence (22 victims, plus 9 perpetrators). The average number of shooting deaths per family violence event was 2.2.

Twenty-one (95%) of the 22 victims were shot at home or at work, while 16 (73%) were killed by a licensed sporting shooter and 20 (91%) were shot with a legal firearm.

**Murder/Suicide Shootings**

Thirteen (32.5%) of all 40 victims were killed by a perpetrator who committed suicide shortly after. All 13 victims of murder/suicide (100%) were shot by a family member, a former partner or a known sexual rival (all of whom were male), with an average age of 42 years. Twenty-two (45%) of all 49 deaths in this survey were due to murder/suicide, while the average number of deaths per murder/suicide was 2.4.

Twelve (92%) of 13 victims of murder/suicide were shot at home or at work, while ten (77%) were killed by a licensed sporting shooter and 12 (92%) were shot with a legal firearm.

**Discussion**

The findings of this study contradict the hypothesis that firearm homicide is most commonly committed by unlicensed perpetrators with illegal weapons.

Most gun homicide victims were shot with a legal firearm held by a licensed sporting shooter. The findings reported here are consistent with those reported elsewhere.

In Canada, 77% of murders in a limited sample were committed with lawfully held firearms. Another study found that 78.3% of firearm-related domestic homicides in Canada were committed with firearms in the legal possession of licensed owners. Even in New South Wales, where licensing non-compliance by gun-owners is even more common than in New Zealand, 62% of firearms seized in domestic-violence incidents were legally owned.

Legal guns are also implicated in forms of firearm misuse more common than homicide. Research in New South Wales indicates that firearm suicide is most often committed with a lawfully held firearm. As in Australia, three quarters of firearm-related fatalities in New Zealand are the result of suicide.

Although data were not made available for this study, it seems reasonable to assume that the majority of unintentional firearm-related injuries and deaths in New Zealand (hunting, farming or play-related accidents) also occur with lawfully held firearms. In addition, a recent survey of non-fatal firearm misuse in this country showed that nearly half the firearms involved were reported by police to be legal, while half the perpetrators in firearm-related domestic disputes were licensed sporting shooters.

It seems clear that legal firearms and their owners are also common culprits in the wider misuse of guns in New Zealand.

Given the very small proportion of victims who died during the commission of another felony (10%) or in a drug-related killing (2.5%), the claim that firearm homicide is the province of addicts, dope-pushers and career criminals is clearly not supported by the facts.

Likewise, the argument that firearms are useful for self defence must be balanced against the finding that only one firearm homicide victim in forty was found to be justifiably shot. A survey of 587 firearm deaths in Brisbane, Queensland found only one homicide by a civilian killing a felon. The authors commented that in a house with a firearm “statistics also suggest that it is more likely that all family members will shoot each other dead before any external aggressor is killed.”

In the United States, studies show that a firearm in the home is rarely used for self defence, but much more commonly to injure and to kill kin and kin. As in rape and assault, “stranger danger”, “home invasion” and “dark alley” encounters are extreme rarities in the real world of firearm homicide in both New Zealand and Australia. Instead, 95% of victims in this study were killed by familiar people, usually by intimates and family, usually in the safest place they know. Firearm homicide is a crime among friends.

**Predictions of Dangerousness**

In recent submissions to Parliament a pro-gun lobby group claimed that in New Zealand in 1993 “50% of all homicides were committed by persons with a psychiatric history of violence.” A request for the source of this information remains unanswered. The present study shows that in firearm homicide at least, such assertions are not supported by the facts.

None of the perpetrators in this survey are known to have been diagnosed, described to authorities or even seriously suspected by others of being mentally ill before the shooting. Given the wide variety of definitions of “dangerousness” we attempted to uncover any suggestion of mental abnormality. One perpetrator was said after the event to be depressed at his financial situation. In another case a terminally ill man who killed his wife and then himself was known by family and friends to be depressed due to his illness. In four other cases the perpetrator was later said to seem upset, angry or despondent following a breakup with a partner. Again in hindsight, one trial witness thought it “strange” that the accused dozed off at a concert nine days before he killed.

Yet none of these moods proved serious enough to report to authorities before the event. Certainly, none would have justified an arrest or the confiscation of firearms. Perhaps most importantly, in no case were friends or family sufficiently concerned to remove, secure or disable the many guns which these men had at their disposal.
Predictions of emotional dangerousness are notoriously unreliable. As one authority put it: “the vast majority of homicides are carried out by people who are psychologically indistinguishable from the general population prior to the event.” Even counting all offenders who at some time had been in contact with professional helpers, including drug & alcohol counselling, the most comprehensive homicide study in Australasia found that only 16% of offenders qualified as having a previous “mental disorder”. This was less than the percentage of the general adult population who have had measurable psychiatric problems.

The same seems true of predictors based on aggressive criminal behaviour. In this study less than one in five perpetrators had a previous conviction for violent crime. This is the same proportion reported among homicide offenders (all weapons) in New Zealand. These are the same perpetrators had a previous conviction for aggressive criminal behaviour. In this study less than 2% of all firearms. That said, the sample was small: five victims killed with four handguns in New Zealand is 15,000 to 20,000, or less than 2% of all firearms. That said, the sample in this study was small: five victims killed with four handguns over three years.

Multiple Shootings

In the past eight years, Australia and New Zealand have suffered twelve multiple shootings in which five or more people died. In these alone, 85 people were killed. Of the perpetrators, more than 80% were licensed sporting shooters. A substantial majority of them also had no previous criminal or mental history.

Although many people are tempted to say of the killer “he must have been mad to do what he did,” although some reassure themselves that gun killers are insane or criminal men unlike anyone they know, the truth is much more mundane. As the cartoon character Pogo once said: “We have found the enemy, and he is us.”

Firearm Type

The distribution of long guns (shotguns and rifles) identified in this survey roughly parallels their ratios in legal ownership. However the proportion of victims shot with pistols and revolvers (13%) is surprisingly high, given that the suspected population of registered handguns in New Zealand is 15,000 to 20,000, or less than 2% of all firearms. That said, the sample in this study was small: five victims killed with four handguns over three years.

Storage And Theft

This study highlights a need for the enforcement of current laws relating to the safe storage of firearms. Police report that two victims were shot with firearms taken from an unlocked farm vehicle. Seven were killed with weapons easily taken from owners who kept them insecurely stored. Another was borrowed by an unlicensed perpetrator from a licensed relative. In all ten cases, the licensed gun-owners appear to have neglected their legal duty, yet none suffered any sanction at the hands of police.

In a recent survey of New Zealand farmers and farm workers, 43% reported firearms stored in unlocked areas. This implies that 34,000 farming families are currently in breach of the security provisions of the Arms Regulations.

When asked how many firearms are taken in thefts each year, Police Headquarters report they have no way of knowing and cannot provide an estimate. In the absence of universal firearm registration, little can be done to trace long guns in New Zealand.

Firearms in Family Violence and Murder/Suicide

Nearly two thirds of the total deaths in this study occurred as a result of family violence. Almost three quarters of family violence victims were shot by a licensed sporting shooter, while nine out of ten were killed with a legal firearm.

Each of the murder/suicides also occurred in the context of family violence. In this category of killing, even higher proportions of victims were shot by licensed shooters or with legal guns.

It seems clear that legally held sporting firearms kept in private homes should remain an important target of violence prevention strategies.

Conclusions

This study suggests that injury prevention initiatives aimed at reducing firearm-related violence should continue to target those people who most commonly claim to be uninvolved.

As licensed sporting shooters and their firearms are the main culprits in such killings, so they should be encouraged to lead the way, taking responsibility for firearm security initiatives and violence reduction. Attempts to focus attention instead on “criminals and the mentally ill” should be recognised as diversions with little basis in fact.

One area deserving of further research is the non-enforcement of the only penalty available for insecure firearm storage. In addition, the lack of accessible data on firearm-related crime is surprising. Although a large quantity of information is collected and computerised, much of this is not made available.
Figure 1: Results


Figure 2: Flowchart

Legality of Primary Firearm, by Victim

Population of Victims: n=40

Did the perpetrator or the gun-owner have a firearms licence?

No: 3

Yes

Was the firearm an unregistered military-style semi-automatic (MSSA) or an unregistered handgun?

Yes: 4

Was the firearm sawn off?

No

Yes

Had the primary firearm been reported to police as stolen?

No: 4

Yes

Legal Firearms

Total: 25 (62.5%)

Illegal Firearms

Total: 15 (37.5%)

n=40


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We are indebted to the men and women of the New Zealand Police who took the time to add useful comments to our questionnaires, and to Acting Assistant Commissioner Neville Matthews, Police National Headquarters, for making our surveys possible. Among others who gave us good advice were: John Coote, John Crook, Colin Durville, Jo Herlihy, Jan Shield, James Gardiner, Phil Gubb, Taff Jones, John Langley, Mike Meyrick, Greg Newbold, Robyn Norton, Rebecca Peters, Jane & Jim Ritchie, Neville Robertson, Halina Strnad & Tessa Watson.

Notes and References

1 Coote, Inspector John. Firearms Licensing Coordinator, New Zealand Police National Headquarters, Wellington. As the necessary data have not been extracted from the Wanganui computer for some time, police estimate the number of current firearms licences to be "in the region of 300,000." Personal interview, 19 Jun 1995.

2 Self defence is not an acceptable reason for firearm ownership in New Zealand, so the great majority of private firearms are held for sporting purposes. For this reason gun-owners commonly refer to themselves as "licensed sporting shooters." Every civilian in possession of a powder firearm must possess a current firearms licence. Sporting long guns (shotguns and rifles) are not registered, while military-style semi-automatic rifles, handguns (pistols & revolvers), and restricted weapons (mainly fully automatic firearms) are individually registered and more carefully controlled. As a result, crime with registered firearms in this country is rare.


7 Forsyth (1985) p23. Per capita ownership of firearms, England & Wales: 0.02 (2 per 100 population)


13 Frontline police routinely record data on the licensing status of perpetrators and the origin and legality of the firearm involved in case files. Every offence report is also coded in the field according to seven different firearm types*, then entered in the GCS Wanganui computer. There if all remains, as "Police have no requirement" to extract these data. (Durville, C. O/C Research & Statistics, Police National HQ. Personal correspondence, 14 May 1995). "Military-style semi-automatic rifles have not been added to the list of choices since the category was created in 1992, nor is there a useful separation between powder handguns and the gas-powered handguns increasingly used in crime in New Zealand.

14 Badland, R (Bob). Firearms Programme Manager, NZ Mountain Safety Council. New Zealand Firearms Control, 1988 p53. This unattributed passage first appeared in Forsyth, C I H. Firearms in New Zealand, 1985 p98. When asked for supporting data Mr Forsyth replied that he was "under the belief that firearm possession becomes unlawful when the intent is formed to commit some unlawful act with a firearm. Additionally, it seemed clear that most violent offences with firearms involved people who would be unlikely to be licensed because of a record of previous offending. However, the Police were not able, a decade ago, to confirm this" (personal correspondence, 16 Jun 1995). Mr Badland replied to the same question: "Police stats -- cannot locate them now" (annotation to the author, 13 March 1995). Colin Durville, O/C Research & Statistics, NZ Police National HQ, Wellington, told us: "We do not collect those figures" (personal interview, 27 May 1993).

15 Hayes, F. Firearms Instructor, NZ Mountain Safety Council and arms dealer, Carterton. Letter to Snr Const Paul McLellan, then NZ Police Arms Officer, Auckland, 10 Jul 1989.


17 "...the National Rifle Association [of America] is aiming to remake its image from a pro-gun lobby to a law-and-order advocate. 'We want to turn NRA into the No1 crimefighting organisation in the United States,' says Wayne LaPierre, the executive vice-president, outlining a strategy he hopes will deflect new gun-control efforts..." Gun Lobby Seeks New Image. NZ Herald/AP, 7 Sep 1993.

18 Summer Newsletter. Sporting Shooters Association of New Zealand (SSANZ), Feb 1995 p5.
Programme list was cross-checked with all 28 Police District
1994 to 19 May 1995. The National Homicide Monitoring
Police National HQ. Also personal correspondence, 6 Sep
National Homicide Monitoring Programme, NZ
Radio New Zealand News

that country's high level of handgun violence.

United States, which are often distorted by the effects of
Commonwealth nations are preferred to those from the
first to compare like with like. Data from nearby and
these figures total 41 victims and 102.5%.

firearm registration, the last two can be ineffective as police
reluctant to divulge "priors", it was possible through court
killed by a friend and colleague, the other by an
by strangers. Of the remaining two, one was robbed and
self-defence acquittal and two convicted of lesser charges)

What does it prove to put in place stricter controls that will
issue: keep the scumbags, the crazies, off the streets...

NZ Herald

of New Zealand (SSANZ),

of NZ (SSANZ),

Beesley G, past Vice President, NZ Shooters Rights Assn.

only affect 'fit and proper' shooters?"  Braunias S, quoting

Our

Initially charge of murder or manslaughter (including one
self-defence acquittal and two convicted of lesser charges)
where the primary cause of death was by powder firearm.

Watson, T. Homicides - Analysis of Weapon/Method,
Police National HQ. Also personal correspondence, 6 Sep
1994 to 19 May 1995. The National Homicide Monitoring
Programme list was cross-checked with all 28 Police District
Commanders.

At the time of writing, three cases remain sub judice. Our
sources here include court records, court reporters and
representatives for both the defence and the prosecution of
the accused.

Even of the four victims of robbery, only two were killed
by strangers. Of the remaining two, one was robbed and
killed by a friend and colleague, the other by an
acquaintance and business partner.

Includes street, hunting cabin and forest road.

One other, a pubiclan shot in his own bar, is counted as
being killed at his place of work.

Although in a small number of current cases police were
reluctant to divulge "priors", it was possible through court
documents, court reporters, prosecutors, defense lawyers
and police to be sure of almost all previous criminal
histories. In one case, a relative of a perpetrator with
convictions for violence had asked authorities to take action
before he committed more violence. The man had no
psychiatric history.

Even in open-and-shut homicides, New Zealand Police
rarely seem to omit inquiries into the perpetrator's medical
history. In addition to a question which specifically asked
about the perpetrator's psychiatric history, we requested the
motivation for the shooting and a narrative of the lead-up to
the event. In none of these did police report that a
perpetrator had been diagnosed, described to authorities or
even seriously suspected by others of being mentally ill
before the shooting (see Discussion).

Given sufficient evidence, possible preventive measures
include: arrest, committal, removal of firearms and/or
revocation of firearms licence. In the absence of universal
firearm registration, the last two can be ineffective as police
have no record of the number of sporting long guns owned
by the suspect.

 Estranged partner, friend, business partner or employee

As one victim was shot with both a shotgun and a rifle,
these figures total 41 victims and 102.5%.

Where overseas comparisons are available we attempt
first to compare like with like. Data from nearby and
Commonwealth nations are preferred to those from the
United States, which are often distorted by the effects of
that country's high level of handgun violence.

Hung, K. Statistics Section, Department of Justice, Canada. Letter to Heidi Rathjen, Canadian Coalition for
Gun Control, 31 May 1994.

Dansys Consultants Inc. Domestic Homicides Involving
the Use of Firearms. Department of Justice, Canada, March

Bradley D, Nolan T & Sutton J. The Police Response to
Violence in the Private Domain. Australian Institute of

Vinson, T. Intentional Shootings. NSW Bureau of Crime
Statistics & Research, May 1975 p1-3. In NSW as in New
Zealand, three-quarters of firearm fatalities are due to
suicide.

Norton, R & Langley, J. Firearm Related Deaths in New

Under Section 58 of the Arms Act (1983) every injury or
death by firearm or airgun must be reported to police, yet
"Police do not keep a statistical record" of these compulsory
notifications (Jones, Chf Insp G P. NZ Police National HQ.
Personal correspondence, 17 Mar 1995). The NZ Mountain
Safety Council attempts to collect the same data from press
reports. When asked if their files contain any indication of
the perpetrator's licensing status, neither the Council's
Firearms Programme Manager nor its Executive Director
replied.

Gardiner J, Norton R & Alpers, P. Firearm Misuse in New
Zealand: Licence Status of Perpetrators and Legality of
Firearms. Paper presented to the Public Health Association

In the ten years from 1985-1994 a similar ratio was
maintained, with only four of 154 non-law-enforcement
firearm homicides ruled to be self defence shootings. NZ
Police National Homicide Monitoring Programme & Greg
Newbold, personal correspondence.

Cantor C, Brodie J & McMillen J. Firearm Victims: Who

Kellermann A, Westphal W, et al. Weapon Involvement in
Home Invasion Crimes. JAMA 1995;273:1759-62;
Sugarman, J & Rand, K. Cease Fire. Violence Policy
Centre, Washington DC, 10 Mar 1994 p66-67; Kellermann
A, Rivara F, Rushforth N, et al. Gun Ownership as a Risk
Suicide in the Home in Relation to Gun Ownership. N Engl J
Med 1992;327:467-72; Brent D, Perper J, et al. The
Presence and Accessibility of Firearms in the Homes of
Adolescent Suicides. JAMA 1991;266:2989-95; Lee R,
Waxweiler R, et al. Incidence rates of firearm injuries in
511-21; Kellermann, A & Reay, D. Protection or Peril? An
analysis of firearm-related deaths in the home. N Engl J
Accidental Firearm Fatalities in a Metropolitan County

Institute of Criminology, 1993 p37: where the relationship
was recorded, 12% of homicides were committed by
strangers. In 1990-91 the equivalent figure was 6%.

Belkowski, Dr L. Vice President, Sporting Shooters
Association of New Zealand. Submission in support of the
Mental Health (Compulsory Assessment and Treatment)
Amendment Bill. Social Services Select Committee, 3 May
1994 item 19 p3.
It appears that Dr Beltowski may have accepted this figure from the Caring Communities mental health lobby group. They have stated that in 1993 "37 of more than 70 violent crimes, mainly murders, were carried out by severely disturbed people." NZ Herald/NZPA, 13 Jun 1995. Two years after first making this claim, and despite several requests, Caring Communities has yet to publish evidence in support.


A 1976 report estimated 10,000 handguns in New Zealand (Forsyth, 1985). Although the latest police figures show 23,679 handguns registered, many of these are suspected to be non-firing antiques and heirlooms. Asked for an estimate of registered, working handguns, police say they "don’t know". Coote, Insp J. Firearms Licensing Coordinator, NZ Police National HQ. Personal interview, 19 Jun 1995.

Gardiner, Norton & Alpers (1995) also found that 13% of the firearms identified in press-reported non-fatal misuse of firearms in New Zealand were handguns.


Firearm Homicide in New Zealand: victims, perpetrators and their weapons 1992-94

Figure 1: Table of Results

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Column A: Homicide Charge or Type

Mur: murder        Man: manslaughter        M/S: murder/suicide

Column B: Homicide was an Event of Family Violence

Yes/No

Column C: Location of Homicide

V: victim’s        P: perpetrator’s
H: home           W: work
PP: public place  Pub: licensed premises

Column D: Relationship of Perpetrator to Victim

Ptnr: current partner        EstP: estranged partner
Fam: family member
Acq: friend or acquaintance
SexR: sexual rival well known to the victim
Gan: rival gang member well known to the victim
Stgr: stranger

Column E: Perpetrator had a Previous Conviction for Violent Crime

Yes/No

Column F: Perpetrator had a Previous History of Mental Illness

Yes/No

Column G: Perpetrator Held a Current Firearms Licence

Yes/No

Column H: Primary Weapon Used

Rifle: sporting rifle        *Case 15: see Notes & References No. 32
S/G: sporting shotgun
S/O: sawn-off sporting rifle or shotgun
H/G: handgun

Column I: Weapon was a Legal Firearm kept for Sporting Purposes

Yes/No

Column J: Origin of Primary Firearm

Stol: firearm was reported to police as stolen prior to the event
Con: firearm was taken without its owner’s consent, or “converted”
Bor: firearm was borrowed with its owner’s consent
Own: firearm was normally in the ownership of the perpetrator

Column K: Firearm was Insecurely Stored Contrary to the Law

Yes/No

Philip Alpers, August 1996
Firearm Homicide in New Zealand: victims, perpetrators and their weapons 1992-94

Figure 2: Flow Chart

**Legality of Primary Firearm, by Victim**

Population of Victims: n=40

- Had the primary firearm been reported to police as stolen?
  - No
  - Yes: 4

- Was the firearm sawn off?
  - No
  - Yes: 4

- Was the firearm an unregistered military-style semi-automatic (MSSA) or an unregistered handgun?
  - No
  - Yes: 4

- Did the perpetrator or the gun-owner have a firearms licence?
  - Yes
  - No: 3

**Legal Firearms**
Total: 25 (62.5%)

**Illegal Firearms**
Total: 15 (37.5%)