



Americans Against Gun Violence
P.O. Box 661252
Sacramento, CA 95866
(916) 668-4160 / (888) 286-8122
www.aagunv.org / info@aagunv.org

Should law-abiding people own guns for self-protection? In general, no.

There is no doubt that on occasion, an honest, law-abiding person is able to effectively protect himself, herself, or a family member with a gun, but on the whole, guns in our homes and in our communities are far more likely to be used to kill, injure, or intimidate honest law-abiding people than to protect them.

It's estimated that there are approximately 200-300 million privately owned firearms in the United States,¹ and that 38-48% of adults keep firearms in their home.² Most persons who keep handguns at home cite "personal protection" as the reason for having firearms.³ In fact, however, several studies in the medical literature have shown that guns in the home are much more likely to be used to kill,^{4,5} injure,⁶ or intimidate⁷ a household member than to protect against an attacker. In one of the best known studies on this subject, it was found that for every one time a gun in the home was used to kill an intruder, there were 43 firearm-related homicides, suicides, or accidental deaths involving household members.

Numerous other studies in the medical literature have shown that the presence of a gun in the home is associated with an increased risk of a household member becoming a victim of homicide or suicide.^{8,9,10,11,12} Most school shootings, including the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre, are committed with guns brought from home.¹³ Other studies have shown that the purchase of a handgun is associated with an increased risk of the purchaser becoming a victim of suicide or homicide over the ensuing five to six years.^{14,15}

The evidence in the medical literature that widespread firearm availability is associated with more risk than benefit is consistent with data from law enforcement agencies and other government sources. An analysis of crime and criminal victimization data from 1987-1992 showed that the ratio of violent crimes committed with a handgun to protection of person with a firearm was 15:1.¹⁶ A more recent study showed that assault victims who were carrying a gun at the time of the assault were 4.5 times more likely to be shot and 4.2 times more likely to be killed than assault victims who were not carrying a gun.¹⁷

The contention that "responsible gun ownership" deters crime is based largely on anecdotal reports and quasi-scientific studies published outside of the medical literature. One of the most often quoted studies claims that there are 2.5 million incidents of defensive gun use annually in the United States.¹⁸ This study was a telephone survey in which none of the alleged defensive gun uses reported by telephone respondents was actually confirmed. The estimate of 2.5 million defensive gun uses annually in this study is an extrapolation based on the result that 66 out of 4,977 respondents to the survey (1.3%) reported using a gun defensively in the past year. Other authors have pointed out the inherent fallacy in extrapolating from 66 unconfirmed reports of defensive gun use to the conclusion that there are 2.5 million defensive gun uses annually in the U.S.^{19,20} It has also been noted that a higher portion of the population reports having had contact with space aliens than having used a gun defensively.²¹

Another study frequently cited by opponents of gun control purports to show that allowing private citizens to carry concealed weapons reduces crime.²² Serious methodological flaws have also been noted in this study,^{23,24} and its conclusion is not consistent with other studies in the criminology literature.^{25,26} In a review of the literature on firearms and violence, the Committee on Law and Justice of the National Academy of Sciences recently concluded that there is no credible evidence that the carrying of concealed weapons by private citizens reduces crime.²⁷

Based on the evidence summarized above, in addition to an abundance of other evidence too extensive to be included in this brief summary, **Americans Against Gun Violence recommends that it is safest not to keep a gun in your home, especially if there are children or adolescents present. If you do have a gun, it is safest to keep the gun stored unloaded, securely locked, with the ammunition locked up separately. If you have children, be sure to inquire about the presence of guns in other homes where your children play.**

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