

Guns for Protection: Empowering or Imperiling?

Depiction Suggestions

- ◆ Emphasize that wielding a firearm in self-defense may ironically increase one's risk of death or injury by increasing the likelihood that the assailant will use his or her own weapon.

Still feeling humiliated from a home robbery three weeks earlier, a homeowner decided to fight back when three gunmen invaded his house. Feigning illness and asking to retrieve medication, he was allowed by the men to go into his bedroom where he kept a handgun. He grabbed the gun and started firing at the intruders, saying "No one is ever going to rob me again." He killed one of the men, but was himself killed when hit with nineteen return bullets from the others.

—LA Times, 6-1-00

- ◆ Consider having a character use a gun in what he/she believes is self-defense only to be charged with murder or manslaughter because it's determined that excessive or unjustified lethal force was deployed.

After his cabin was broken into several times, a Minnesota man rigged it with a shotgun which was set to shoot below the knees if the locked doors were opened. The contraption worked when a would-be burglar did break in and was shot in the leg. But for these efforts at property protection, the cabin owner was both sued by the invader and sentenced to jail.

—St. Paul Pioneer Planet, 11-25-00

- ◆ Consider having characters successfully use alternatives to guns for self-defense, such as pepper spray or mace.
- ◆ If a character is offered a gun for self-protection or retaliation, consider having him or her refuse it as a bad idea that could just worsen the situation.
- ◆ Consider the reality that in self-defense, homeowners often freeze-up or tremble when trying to use a gun, rendering them unable to deploy it. Or show them as being too paralyzed by fear to even reach for the gun.
- ◆ Consider emphasizing that what the shooter thinks is self-defense may simply be an escalating confrontation between two people that led to a shooting; both sides may claim self-defense and neither side may be right.
- ◆ Exhibit alternate forms of household security when possible, such as alarms, dogs, lights triggered by movement, and so on. Consider making the point that, unlike guns, none of these are potentially lethal to household members themselves.
- ◆ Consider showing someone who is attempting to use a gun in self-defense being overpowered by their attacker who then uses the gun against him or her.

A crack-shot physician, who never went anywhere without a weapon and fervently believed in guns for protection, used one in a shoot-out with two intruders in his home. He shot and killed one intruder, but was himself killed by the return fire.

–Seattle Times, 1-6-00

- ◆ Consider reflecting the reality that guns in the home are far more likely to be used against members of the household than against intruders.

A businesswoman bought her husband a gun for Christmas, but after learning he had a girlfriend, used it to kill him. She was sentenced to life for first-degree murder.

–Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 12-12-99

- ◆ Drawing from a recent tragedy involving an actor killed by police after reportedly pointing a toy gun, try highlighting the fact that even the presence of fake guns can cause very real death by inadvertently drawing fire.

- ◆ Try making the point that having guns in the house may actually increase the possibility of home invasion robbery since firearms are an attractive target for theft.

- ◆ Consider depicting the reality that women are far more likely to be shot by husbands or lovers than by an intruder. Odds are that a gun in her home will be used against her rather than in her defense.

The day after a young wife gave her estranged husband's gun to the police, fearing he might use it to kill her, the husband applied for and received a concealed weapons permit. He used a newly acquired gun to fatally shoot her and their daughter.

–Seattle Times, 12-13-98

Spotlight on Depiction of Health and Social Issues

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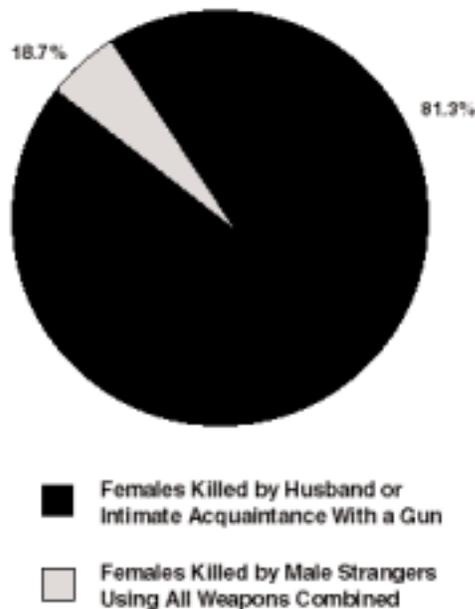
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Guns for Protection: Empowering or Imperiling? *Taking Aim at Friends and Lovers*

Fact Sheet

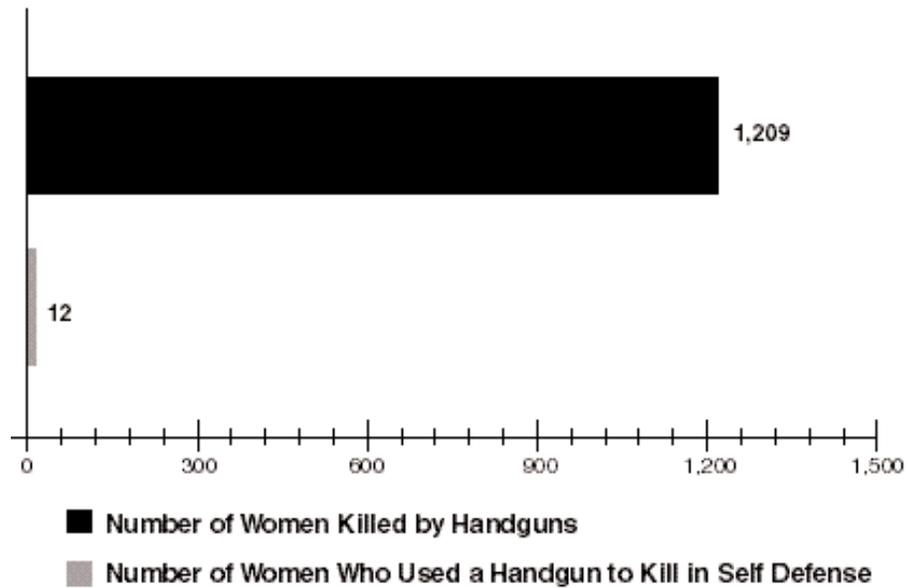
- ◆ A gun in the home is 22 times more likely to be used to shoot a family member or a friend than an intruder.¹
- ◆ Women are 12 times more likely to be shot by a spouse or loved one than by a stranger.²
- ◆ On average, more than one woman every day of the year is shot and killed by her husband or intimate acquaintance during the course of an argument.³
- ◆ Handguns account for 77% of the gun-related intimate partner violence homicides against females.⁴
- ◆ Assaults on family and intimates involving firearms are 12 times more likely to result in death than are assaults using other types of weapons.⁵
- ◆ Among all female victims murdered in 1997, 29% were killed by husbands or boyfriends.⁶
- ◆ 48% of 1997 firearm victims knew their killers.⁷
- ◆ More than twice as many females were murdered by a spouse or intimate acquaintance with a gun than were killed by a stranger with a gun, knife, or any other kind of weapon.⁸
- ◆ Males murdered 90% of female firearm victims.⁹

Percent of Females Killed by Acquaintances Versus Strangers



Source: Violence Policy Center. Analysis of FBI Supplementary Homicide Report, 1997.

Number of Women Killed by Handguns Compared to the Number of Women Who Killed in Self Defense Using a Handgun



Source: 1998 Violence Policy Center Analysis of FBI Supplementary Homicide Report Data.

- ◆ A murder of a household member is almost three times more likely to occur in homes with guns than in homes without guns.¹⁰
- ◆ Despite the widespread belief that a safe home is guaranteed by the presence of a firearm, the opposite may be true.¹¹
- ◆ Gun ownership may provide a false sense of security that can be fatal.¹²
- ◆ Rather than confer protection, guns kept in the home are associated with an increase in the risk of homicide by a family member or intimate acquaintance.¹³
- ◆ 13% of 1997 firearm perpetrators were family members.¹⁴

Sources

1. Kellermann et al., *Journal of Trauma*, 1998, 45 (2).
2. Saltzman et al., *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 1992, 267; FBI Supplementary Homicide Report, 1997.
3. Analysis of 1996 Washington D.C. homicide data, Violence Policy Center, 1998.
4. U.S. Department of Justice, FBI Uniform Crime Reports, 1998.
5. Saltzman, J., et al., *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 1992, 267.
6. FBI Uniform Crime Reports, 1998.
7. FBI Uniform Crime Reports, 1998.
8. *Journal of Trauma*, 1992.
9. FBI Uniform Crime Reports 1998, based on 1997 data.
10. Johns Hopkins University School of Public Health Center for Gun Policy.
11. Firearm Injury Center, University of Pennsylvania Medical Center.
12. American Bar Association.
13. *New England Journal of Medicine* 1993 study.
14. FBI Uniform Crime Reports, 1998.

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