

For Immediate Release: TK, 2015

Self-Defense gun Use is Rare, Study Finds

Federal data shows guns are rarely used to kill criminals or stop crimes; 14 states had no justifiable homicides in 2012

Washington, DC — Private citizens rarely use guns to kill criminals or stop crimes, a new study from the Violence Policy Center (VPC) finds.

The study, *Firearm Justifiable Homicides and Non-Fatal Self-Defense Gun Use*, shows that private citizens are far more likely to use guns to harm others or themselves than to use them to kill in self-defense. The study finds that in 2012, the most recent year for which data are available, there were only 259 justifiable homicides nationally involving a private citizen using a firearm and that 14 states reported zero justifiable firearm homicides that year. That same year, there were 8,342 criminal firearm homicides.

Comparing these numbers, in 2012 for every justifiable homicide in the United States involving a gun, guns were used in 32 criminal homicides. And this ratio does not even take into account the tens of thousands of lives needlessly lost in gun suicides and unintentional shootings that year.

“The NRA has staked its entire agenda on the claim that guns are necessary for self-defense, but this gun industry propaganda has no basis in fact,” states VPC Executive Director Josh Sugarman. “Guns are far more likely to be used in a homicide than in a justifiable homicide by a private citizen. In fact, a gun is far more likely to be stolen than used in self-defense.”

In addition, only a tiny fraction of the intended victims of violent crime or property crime employ guns for self-defense. Over a five-year period, less than one percent of victims of attempted or completed *violent crimes* used a firearm, and less than a tenth of one percent of victims of attempted or completed *property crimes* used a firearm.

“This study demonstrates how very flawed is the basic premise of having more people carrying guns in our public places,” said Eileen McCarron, president of the Colorado Ceasefire Capitol Fund. This year, as well as in 5 preceding years, the General Assembly has rebuffed attempts to allow virtually every non-criminal adult to legally carry concealed weapons in public.

The study analyzes data from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program’s Supplementary Homicide Report (SHR) and cites survey data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS).

--In 2012, there were only 259 justifiable homicides involving a private citizen using a firearm. That same year, there were 8,342 criminal firearm homicides.

--In 2012, for every justifiable homicide in the United States involving a firearm, guns were used in 32 criminal homicides. This ratio does not include the tens of thousands of lives taken in suicides or unintentional shootings.

-- Fourteen states reported zero justifiable firearm homicides by civilians in 2012: Alabama, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Montana, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Dakota, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Wyoming.

--Intended victims of *violent crimes* engaged in self-protective behavior with a firearm in only 0.8 percent of attempted and completed incidents between 2007 and 2011.

--Intended victims of *property crimes* engaged in self-protective behavior with a firearm in only 0.1 percent of attempted and completed incidents between 2007 and 2011.

--A significant percentage of the persons killed in a firearm justifiable homicide were known to the shooter, not random strangers. In 2012, 35.5 percent of persons killed in a firearm justifiable homicide were known to the shooter, 51.4 percent were strangers, and for 13.1 percent of persons the relationship was unknown.

--The shooters in justifiable homicides are overwhelmingly male. In 2012, of the 259 firearm justifiable homicides, 91.5 percent were committed by men.

--The 259 justifiable homicides by private citizens in 2012 do not include shootings by law enforcement.

“Purchasing a gun may help enrich the firearms industry, but the facts show it is unlikely to increase your personal safety,” Sugarmann adds. “In fact, in a nation of more than 300 million guns, it is striking how rarely guns are used in self-defense.”

The Violence Policy Center (www.vpc.org) is a national educational organization working to stop gun death and injury. Follow the Violence Policy Center [on Facebook](#) and follow [@VPCinfo](#) on Twitter.

The Colorado Ceasefire Capitol Fund (www.ColoradoCeasefire.org) is a Colorado-based advocacy organization that works to reduce gun violence by enacting stronger gun safety measures.