

**VIOLENCE  
POLICY  
CENTER**

SEP 16 1994

ACQUISITIONS

## DEADLY ODDS

### *An Analysis of Handgun Justifiable Homicides Committed by Women in 1992*

In 1992, for every time a woman used a handgun to justifiably kill a stranger in self-defense 239 female lives were ended in handgun homicides according to unpublished Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) justifiable homicide statistics.<sup>1</sup> For that year, 37 states reported no instances of handgun justifiable homicides by women, including New York, Georgia, North Carolina, Maryland, and Virginia. The ratio of homicides to justifiable homicides in states that recorded both ranged from Florida's high of 113 to one to Oregon's low of 12 to one.<sup>2</sup> [Please see charts on pages two and three.]

In 1992 the total number of justifiable homicides committed by private citizens was 348. Of these, 45 (13 percent) were committed by women. Firearms were used in 31 (69 percent) of the 45 justifiable homicides committed by women. Handguns were used in 26 (58 percent) of the women's justifiable homicides. That same year 4,993 women were victims of homicide (29 percent—1,448 women—were slain by husbands or boyfriends). Of these, 2,479 involved firearms (50 percent) and 1,908 involved handguns (38 percent).

Most justifiable homicides involving women do not fit the stereotype promoted by the firearms industry of a single woman defending herself against a predatory stranger. When women kill in self-defense the attacker is far more likely to be someone known to them than a stranger. Of the 26 handgun self-defense killings reported to the FBI 18 (69 percent) involved attackers known to the woman: seven involved acquaintances; five involved husbands; two involved common-law husbands; the remaining single instances involved an ex-husband, a boyfriend, a son, and one unknown relationship. Only eight attackers (31 percent) were classified as strangers.

These grim statistics dismantle the myth of the self-defense handgun. In 1992 public health researchers Arthur Kellerman and James Mercy warned: "Since women are most likely to kill or be killed by a close personal acquaintance, nonlethal efforts to recognize and break the cycle of domestic violence will probably have a far more favorable impact on rates of violence, serious injury, and homicide than promotion of firearms for self-defense."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The 1992 FBI Uniform Crime Reports defines a justifiable homicide as "the killing of a felon, during the commission of a felony, by a private citizen."

<sup>2</sup> The April 1994 Justice Department study Guns and Crime revealed that according to the National Crime Victimization Survey only about one percent (62,200) of all victims of violence used a firearm of any type (handgun, rifle, or shotgun) to defend themselves. Another 20,300 reported using a firearm to defend their property during a theft, household burglary, or motor vehicle theft. (It should be noted, however, that all self-defense uses were defined by the survey respondent, and would therefore include legitimate threats as well as perceived threats.) In comparison, the study reported, offenders armed with handguns alone committed a record 931,000 violent crimes in 1992.

<sup>3</sup> Arthur Kellerman, MD, MPH, and James Mercy, PhD, "Men, Women, and Murder: Gender-Specific Differences in Rates of Fatal Violence and Victimization," The Journal of Trauma, Vol. 33, No. 1, July 1992, p. 5.

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**USA TOTAL FEMALE HANDGUN HOMICIDES TO  
FEMALE HANDGUN JUSTIFIABLE HOMICIDES IN 1992**

FEMALE HANDGUN HOMICIDES	FEMALE HANDGUN JUSTIFIABLE HOMICIDES	RATIO OF HANDGUN HOMICIDES TO HANDGUN JUSTIFIABLE HOMICIDES
1908	26	73:1

**USA TOTAL FEMALE HANDGUN HOMICIDES TO  
FEMALE HANDGUN JUSTIFIABLE HOMICIDES AGAINST STRANGERS IN 1992**

FEMALE HANDGUN HOMICIDES	FEMALE HANDGUN JUSTIFIABLE HOMICIDES AGAINST STRANGERS	RATIO OF HANDGUN HOMICIDES TO HANDGUN JUSTIFIABLE HOMICIDES AGAINST STRANGERS
1908	8	239:1

**STATES REPORTING FEMALE HANDGUN HOMICIDES VERSUS  
FEMALE HANDGUN JUSTIFIABLE HOMICIDES IN 1992 RANKED BY RATIO**

STATE	NUMBER OF HANDGUN HOMICIDES	NUMBER OF HANDGUN JUSTIFIABLE HOMICIDES	RATIO OF HANDGUN HOMICIDES TO HANDGUN JUSTIFIABLE HOMICIDES
Florida	113	1	113:1
Illinois	74	1	74:1
Texas	189	3	63:1
Pennsylvania	57	1	57:1
California	320	6	53:1
S. Carolina	38	1	38:1
Missouri	35	1	35:1
Louisiana	53	2	27:1
Michigan	74	3	25:1
Oaklahoma	20	1	20:1
Washington	38	2	19:1
Tennessee	39	3	13:1
Oregon	12	1	12:1

**STATES REPORTING NO FEMALE HANDGUN JUSTIFIABLE HOMICIDES IN 1992  
RANKED BY NUMBER OF FEMALE HANDGUN HOMICIDE VICTIMS**

STATE	NUMBER OF HANDGUN HOMICIDES REPORTED IN 1992
New York	166
Georgia	72
North Carolina	72
Ohio	69
Maryland	60
Virginia	47
Indiana	40
Arizona	34
Alabama	29
Arkansas	29
Kentucky	26
Colorado	26
Mississippi	23
New Jersey	22
West Virginia	20
District of Columbia	18
Nevada	18
Kansas	17
Wisconsin	16
Minnesota	13
Massachusetts	11
Connecticut	9
New Mexico	8
Nebraska	7
Montana	6
Utah	4
Hawaii	3
New Hampshire	3
Idaho	2
Iowa	2
Rhode Island	2
Wyoming	2
Delaware	1
North Dakota	1
Vermont	1
Alaska	1
South Dakota	0

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**NEW VIOLENCE POLICY CENTER STUDY—*DEADLY ODDS*—REVEALS THAT FOR EVERY TIME  
A WOMAN USED A HANDGUN IN 1992 TO KILL A STRANGER IN SELF-DEFENSE, 239  
WOMEN'S LIVES WERE ENDED IN HANDGUN HOMICIDES**

**37 STATES REPORT NO HANDGUN JUSTIFIABLE HOMICIDES BY  
WOMEN FOR THE YEAR**

For every time a woman used a handgun to justifiably kill a stranger in self-defense, 239 female lives were ended in handgun homicides according to the new Violence Policy Center (VPC) study *Deadly Odds*. The VPC analysis of unpublished 1992 Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) data also found that in 1992 37 states reported no instances of handgun justifiable homicides by women, including New York, Georgia, North Carolina, Maryland, and Virginia. The ratio of homicides to justifiable homicides in states that recorded both ranged from Florida's high of 113 to one to Oregon's low of 12 to one. [Charts on back].

The study found that in 1992 the total number of justifiable homicides committed by private citizens was 348. Of these, 45 (13 percent) were committed by women. Handguns were used in 26 (58 percent) of the women's justifiable homicides. That same year 4,993 women were victims of homicide (29 percent were killed by their husbands or boyfriends). Of these, 1,908 involved handguns (38 percent).

Most justifiable homicides involving women do not fit the stereotype of a single women defending herself against a predatory stranger. When women kill in self-defense the attacker is far more likely to be someone known to them. Of the 26 handgun self-defense killings reported to the FBI, 18 (69 percent) involved attackers known to the woman: seven involved acquaintances; five involved husbands; two involved common-law husbands; the remaining single instances involved an ex-husband, a boyfriend, a son, and one unknown relationship. Only eight attackers (31 percent) were classified as strangers.

The Violence Policy Center study comes less than three months after a Justice Department study, *Guns and Crime*, revealed that less than one percent (62,200) of victims of violent crime (male and female) used a firearm of any type (handgun, rifle, or shotgun) in a subjectively defined instance of self-defense. In comparison, the Justice Department study reported, offenders armed with handguns alone committed a record 931,000 violent crimes in 1992.

Violence Policy Center Executive Director Josh Sugarmann states, "These numbers dismantle the myth of the self-defense handgun. Faced with slumping sales in the male market, America's handgun manufacturers—like the cigarette and alcohol manufacturers before them—have set their sights on America's women. Predictably, some members of America's firearms lobby have recently pointed to the murder of Nicole Simpson as one more reason for women to buy handguns. Ignoring the skewed logic behind this argument—that women should stay in a battering situation until they feel compelled to threaten or kill their batterer with a handgun—introducing a firearm into a domestic violence scenario only increases the risk of death and injury for the woman. The firearms industry promises women protection, but is in fact selling them death."

—OVER—

**STATES REPORTING FEMALE HANDGUN HOMICIDES VERSUS  
FEMALE HANDGUN JUSTIFIABLE HOMICIDES  
IN 1992 RANKED BY RATIO**

STATE	NUMBER OF HANDGUN HOMICIDES	NUMBER OF HANDGUN JUSTIFIABLE HOMICIDES	RATIO OF HANDGUN HOMICIDES TO HANDGUN JUSTIFIABLE HOMICIDES
Florida	113	1	113:1
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Texas	189	3	63:1
Pennsylvania	57	1	57:1
California	320	6	53:1
S. Carolina	38	1	38:1
Missouri	35	1	35:1
Louisiana	53	2	27:1
Michigan	74	3	25:1
Oklahoma	20	1	20:1
Washington	38	2	19:1
Tennessee	39	3	13:1
Oregon	12	1	12:1

**STATES REPORTING NO FEMALE JUSTIFIABLE HOMICIDES IN 1992  
RANKED BY NUMBER OF FEMALE HANDGUN HOMICIDE VICTIMS**

STATE	NUMBER OF HANDGUN HOMICIDES REPORTED IN 1992
New York	156
Georgia	72
North Carolina	72
Ohio	59
Maryland	50
Virginia	47
Indiana	40
Arizona	34
Alabama	29
Arkansas	29
Kentucky	26
Colorado	25
Mississippi	23
New Jersey	22
West Virginia	20
District of Columbia	18
Nevada	18
Kansas	17
Wisconsin	15
Minnesota	13
Massachusetts	11
Connecticut	9
New Mexico	8
Nebraska	7
Montana	5
Utah	4
Hawaii	3
New Hampshire	3
Idaho	2
Iowa	2
Rhode Island	2
Wyoming	2
Delaware	1
North Dakota	1
Vermont	1
Alaska	1
South Dakota	0

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