



Media Q and A developed for Oscar Pistorius' trial

Part 1: What Reeva and Oscar's story says about gun violence in SA

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Note: This is part 1 of a 2 part Q and A briefing document developed by Gun Free South Africa for Oscar Pistorius' trial (March 2014). To obtain *Part 2: Understanding the gun-related charges against Oscar Pistorius*, please email claire@gfsa.org.za

1. What does Reeva and Oscar's story tell us about gun violence in South Africa?

Guns remain a significant cause of violent death in South Africa. Although South Africa is regarded as having 'very high levels' of violent crime (this includes countries that have homicides rates at 30/100,000 and above, such as Colombia, El Salvador and Jamaica; South Africa's homicide rates is 31.9/100,000), over the last 12 years our homicide rates have halved (66/100,000 in 1998)¹. This reduction is primarily as a result of the significant reduction in gun deaths – from 35 gun deaths a day in 1994 to 18 gun deaths a day in 2009.

SA's high level of inequality and structural violence such as poverty are major drivers of the ongoing high levels of violence in this country.

2. Is the story of Oscar and Reeva unique?

It is both unique and not unique.

Not unique: Apart from being celebrities, Reeva and Oscar's story is not unique: A man legally buys a gun to protect himself and those he loves from a stranger intruder; instead he uses his licensed gun to kill the person he loves; women are most at risk for being shot and killed in their homes by someone they know with a legal gun. 18 people a day are shot and killed in South Africa.

Unique: Most South Africans do not live in gated communities with 24 hour security and with a handgun for self-defence.

¹ Geneva Declaration Secretariat (2011) Global Burden of Armed Violence 2011: Lethal Encounters. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 51-53.



3. Who owns what guns in South Africa?

- Most gun owners are men, both in South Africa and elsewhere in the world.
- The majority of individuals in professions using guns are men – for example in the armed forces, the police or private security².
- The majority of users and abusers of guns globally are men³.

As of August 2011 there were:

- 1.8 million licensed civilian gun owners in South Africa (1,845,032 to be exact⁴), which means that civilian gun owners make up just 3.6% of South Africa's 51.8 million population. In other words, out of a group of 100 people, 4 own guns. This is a drop from 2.4 million gun owners in 1994⁵, or 6 gun owners per 100 people⁶.
- Just over 3 million firearms registered to civilians (3,045,759 to be exact⁷); translating into a ratio of 5.8 guns per 100 people. This is a 14% drop from 1999, when 3.5 million (3,554,336) guns were registered to civilians, which is a ratio of 8.3 firearms for every 100 people⁸.
- The majority of licensed guns are handguns (pistols and revolvers) and the 9mm parabellum pistol is the most commonly licensed firearm in South Africa⁹.

4. Who gets shot and killed in South Africa?

- 6,428 people were shot and killed in 2009 (the most recent year for which data is available), i.e. 18 people are shot and killed a day¹⁰.

² Small Arms Survey (2002) Counting the Human Cost, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p. 79.

³ E. Rothman et al. (2004), 'Batterers' use of guns to threaten intimate partners', Journal of the American Women's Association, Vol 60, Issue 1; World Health Organisation (2002), World Report on Violence and Health, WHO, Geneva.

⁴ The figure of 1,845,302 is calculated by adding the number of new licences granted under the 2000 Firearms Control Act (138,624) as well as licences held under SA's old gun law, the 1969 Arms and Ammunition Act (1,706,408). These figures were taken from an Affidavit that the Minister of Police, Nkosinathi Mthethwa, led in response to the application of TAU SA and AFRIFORUM in the North Gauteng High Court in August 2011 (Ref: 6586/2010/Z51).

According to figures supplied by the Central Firearms Registry (CFR) and quoted in this Affidavit, as of August 2011:

- 287,502 fresh applications for new licences were lodged with the CFR between 1 July 2004 and 22 August 2011, of which 138,624 were granted, 94,366 were refused and 13,597 were cancelled.
- There were 1,706,408 firearm owners registered under SA's old gun law (Arms and Ammunition Act, 1969). In a High Court judgment on 26 June 2009, Judge Bill Prinsloo granted the urgent order that all firearm licences approved under the 1969 Arms and Ammunition Act shall be deemed to be lawful and valid, pending the outcome of an application to declare portions of the new Firearms Control Act unconstitutional, even those that a person who had applied for the renewal of their firearm licence under the FCA and was refused may also legally continue to possess such firearms in terms of the previous Act until further notice. Consequently, in our calculations, we are assuming that all these licences are still valid.

⁵ R. Chetty (2000) Firearm Use and Distribution in South Africa. Pretoria: The National Crime Prevention Centre, p.32.

⁶ The figure of 6 gun owners per 100 people is based on the 1999 mid-year population estimate of 43 million in R. Chetty (2000) Firearm Use and Distribution in South Africa. Pretoria: The National Crime Prevention Centre, p.32. The actual ration is 5.6 per 100 people, which has been rounded up to 6.

⁷ The figure of 3,045,759 is based on figures quoted in an Affidavit that the Minister of Police, Nkosinathi Mthethwa led in response to the application of TAU SA and AFRIFORUM in the North Gauteng High Court, in August 2011 (Ref: 6586/2010/Z51).

⁸ This figure is based on the 1999 mid-year population estimate of 43 million in R. Chetty, Firearm Use and Distribution in South Africa (Pretoria: The National Crime Prevention Centre, 2000), p.32.

⁹ R. Chetty (2000) Firearm Use and Distribution in South Africa. Pretoria: The National Crime Prevention Centre, p.37.

¹⁰ The Injury Mortality Survey: A national study of injury mortality levels and causes in South Africa in 2009, which is due for official release in 2014; researchers released this information after Oscar Pistorius shot Reeva Steenkamp on 14 February 2013, following media interest in firearm-related data.



- This is half the number of people shot 10 years ago; in 1998, 12,298 people were shot and killed, averaging 34 people a day¹¹.
- Most gunshot victims are men: 89% of people shot and killed in South Africa are men, and 11% are women.
- Although there has been a significant decrease in South Africa's homicide rate over the last twenty years (from a high of 66/100,000 in 1994 to 31.9/100,000 in 2012)¹² we remain in the top ten of countries regarded as having 'very high' rates of violence (other countries in the top ten include Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Iraq and Jamaica)¹³.

5. Men, women and gun violence

- Men and women are affected in different ways by gun violence, which is referred to as the gendered nature of gun violence.
- Young men across the world between the ages of 15 to 29 are most at risk for being involved in gun violence – they are both the primary perpetrators and the primary victims.
- The homicide rate for men in this age group in South Africa is 184/100,000, compared to the overall homicide rate of 31.9/100,000¹⁴.
- One woman is shot and killed for every nine men in SA¹⁵.
- While women are less likely to be victims of gun violence, guns still play a significant role in violence against women, with women being especially vulnerable in the home.
- Many more women than men are killed, injured or intimidated by firearms in the context of intimate partner violence¹⁶.
- In 1999, 34% of women murdered by their intimate partner were killed with a gun; in 2009 this figure dropped to 17%¹⁷.

Guns and intimate femicide

The findings of the most recent intimate femicide (defined as the killing of a female person by an intimate partner i.e. her current or ex-husband or boyfriend, same sex partner or a rejected would-be lover), study in SA¹⁸ show that the number of women killed by their intimate partner has dropped from 4 women a day in 1999 (translating into one woman being killed every six hours) to 3 women a day (so every 8 hours) in 2009. The reason for this drop in intimate femicide is because of a decline in the number of women that were shot and killed compared to deaths by other means, including stab and blunt injuries (see Table 1 below). The authors attribute this decrease in gun-related deaths to the implementation of the Firearms Control Act (2000).

¹¹ R. Chetty (2000) Firearm Use and Distribution in South Africa. Pretoria: The National Crime Prevention Centre.

¹² South African Police Services Annual Report, 2012.

¹³ Geneva Declaration Secretariat (2011) Global Burden of Armed Violence 2011: Lethal Encounters. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 51-53.

¹⁴ M. Seedat, A. van Niekerk, R. Jewkes, S. Suffla and K. Ratele (2009) Violence and injuries in South Africa: prioritising an agenda for prevention, *The Lancet* 374 (9694) pps. 1011-1022.

¹⁵ The Injury Mortality Survey: A national study of injury mortality levels and causes in South Africa in 2009, which is due for official release in 2014; researchers released this information after Oscar Pistorius shot Reeva Steenkamp on 14 February 2013, following media interest in firearm-related data.

¹⁶ Small Arms Survey 2013: Everyday Dangers, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.17.

¹⁷ N. Abrahams, S. Mathews, LJ Martin, C. Lombard and R Jewkes (2013) Intimate Partner Femicide in South Africa in 1999 and 2009. *PLoS Med* 10(4): e1001412.doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.1001412.

¹⁸ N. Abrahams, S. Mathews, LJ Martin, C. Lombard and R Jewkes (2013) Intimate Partner Femicide in South Africa in 1999 and 2009. *PLoS Med* 10(4): e1001412.doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.1001412.



	Gun-related	Stab-related	Blunt-related
Intimate 1999	30.6%	33.2%	33.2%
Intimate 2009	17.4% (halved)	31.4% (the same)	29.5% (slight decrease)
Non-intimate 1999	33.6%	34.3%	21.2%
Non intimate 2009	17.1 (halved)	35.5% (the same)	22.4% (the same)

In countries with high levels of gun violence, the risk that intimate partner violence against women will involve guns is higher than elsewhere. Furthermore, gender inequality, society’s tolerance and acceptance of the use of violence against women, and common ideas of masculine identity that embrace firearms possession (supported both by women and men), all combine to create a climate that places women at risk of intimate partner violence involving guns¹⁹.

6. Can we prevent gun violence?

Yes.

Although gun violence is a complex phenomenon, we know enough about the who, what, where and how of gun violence to prevent it.

Both police data on homicides and the injury mortality data captured through the National Injury and Mortality Surveillance System (NIMSS), support a downward trend in gun-related deaths in SA:

- In 2009, 6,428²⁰ people were shot and killed (i.e. 18 people a day), compared to 1998 when 12,298 people were shot and killed, averaging 34 people a day²¹.
- The NIMSS data shows a significant drop in firearm murders compared to non-firearm murders over the last ten years in four of SA’s major cities: Cape Town, from a peak of 49% in 2002 to 33% in 2007; Johannesburg, from 69% in 2001 to 48% in 2007²².
- A year-on-year comparison for the period 2001 to 2005 indicates that there was a consistent decline in firearm homicide rates across five South Africa cities, the equivalent to a 13.6% decrease year-on-year. The strength, timing and consistency in the decline in firearm homicides in South Africa suggest that stricter gun control through South Africa’s Firearms Control Act (2000) accounted for this significant decrease²³.
- The findings of the most recent intimate femicide study in South Africa show that the number of women killed by their intimate partner has dropped from 4 women a day in 1999 to 3 women a day in 2009; the reason for this drop is because of a decline in the number of women that were shot and killed compared to death by other means, including stab and blunt injuries. The authors attribute this decrease in gun-related deaths to the implementation of the Firearms Control Act²⁴.

¹⁹ Small Arms Survey 2013: Everyday Dangers, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press p17.

²⁰ The Injury Mortality Survey: A national study of injury mortality levels and causes in South Africa in 2009, which is due for official release in 2014; researchers released this information after Oscar Pistorius shot Reeva Steenkamp on 14 February 2013, following media interest in firearm-related data.

²¹ R. Chetty (2000) Firearm Use and Distribution in South Africa. Pretoria: The National Crime Prevention Centre.

²² Drawn from the National Injury Mortality Surveillance System, A profile of fatal injuries in South Africa. 8th Annual Report (Cape Town: Medical Research Council and University of South Africa Crime, Violence and Injury Lead Programme, 2007).

²³ R. Matzopoulos, ML. Thompson, J. Myers (2014) Firearm and Nonfirearm Homicide in 5 South African Cities; A Retrospective Population-Based study, American Journal of Public Health: Research and Practice; e1-e6.

²⁴ N. Abrahams, S. Mathews, LJ Martin, C. Lombard and R Jewkes (2013) Intimate Partner Femicide in South Africa in 1999 and 2009. PLoS Med 10(4): e1001412.doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.1001412.



7. Can the law prevent gun violence?

Yes.

The reductions in gun deaths in SA including the decrease in gun-related intimate femicides are examples of how strong gun laws can help prevent gun violence.

One of the main aims of the Firearms Control Act (2000) is to regulate who owns what gun for which purpose.

8. Are guns effective in self defence?

Oscar shot Reeva with a gun he had bought for self-defence. While buying a gun to protect yourself, your loved ones and your property from 'stranger danger' may make you feel safe, it doesn't make you safe. Research in South Africa shows you are four times more likely to have your gun stolen from you than to use it in self-defence²⁵. This is supported by international evidence which shows that owners of handguns are significantly more often victims of contact crimes (murder, assaults, robbery); and households that own guns run higher risks of seeing their members being criminally victimised - either by household members or by outsiders who are not put off by the presence of a gun²⁶.

In this same study, it was found that gun-ownership may also be a proxy for a high-risk lifestyle (this can include reckless driving; drunk driving; alcohol or substance abuse).

Owning a gun is not a protective factor: rather it is a risk factor for suicide, accidental death and injury, and murder.

Loss and theft of guns also pose a risk factor: if a gun is stolen it can be used again and again to commit crimes in the future. This process, where a legal gun is stolen from a licensed gun owner and becomes part of the unregulated pool of illegal guns in South Africa, is called diversion.

On average 19,500 firearms are reported lost by or stolen from civilians each year, which is 1,625 guns a month or 53 guns a day - see Table 2 (which lists the latest information available for civilian loss and theft, since the police stopped reporting this information in 2007)²⁷.

²⁵ A. Altbeker, et al (2000) Are South Africans Responsible Firearm Owners? Evidence from 1,000 Dockets. Research commissioned by Gun Free South Africa and funded by Open Society Foundation for South Africa; A. Altbeker (1999) Guns and Public Safety: Gun Crime and Self-Defence in Alexandra and Bramley. Research commissioned by Gun Free South Africa and funded by Open Society Foundation South Africa; C. Branas, et al (2009) Investigating the Link between Gun Possession and Gun Assault. American Journal of Public Health: November 2009, Vol. 99, No. 11, pp. 2034-2040.

²⁶ J. van Kesteren (2014), 'Revisiting the gun ownership and violence link: A Multilevel Analysis of Victimization Survey Data', British Journal of Criminology, 54, pps. 53-72.

²⁷ Source: SAPS Annual Reports (<http://www.saps.gov.za>) cited in: G. Lamb (2008) 'Under the gun': An assessment of firearm crime and violence in South Africa, Report compiled for the Office of the President, Pretoria, South Africa by the Institute for Security Studies.



Year	Number of Guns lost/ stolen a year	Number of guns lost/ stolen a month	Number of guns lost/ stolen a day
1994/95	14,158	1180	39
1995/96	15,045	1254	41
1996/97	18,619	1552	51
1997/98	29,009	2417	79
1998/99	22,563	1880	62
1999/00	22,740	1895	62
2000/01	21,996	1833	60
2001/02	21,892	1824	60
2002/03	21,641	1803	60
2003/04	20,427	1702	56
2004/05	15,837	1320	43
2005/06	14,842	1237	41
2006/07	14,682	1224	40
Total	253,451		
Average	19,496 guns a year	1,625 guns a month	53 guns a day

Ends