



FIREARMS IN SANTA CLARA COUNTY

In 1993 and 1994, over half (58%) of all homicides in Santa Clara County (SCC) were committed using firearms¹. Of assault injuries, 14% were a result of firearms¹. Also in 1993 and 1994, 56% of males committing suicide used a firearm, and 18% of female suicides resulted from a self-inflicted gunshot wound¹.

Handguns are the leading killers of kids in California². In Santa Clara County between 1993 and 1994, 76% of homicides killing people aged 21 years and under were committed using firearms¹. During that same time frame in SCC, firearms were involved in 20% of all homicides and assault hospitalizations, most of which occurred among males aged 15-34¹.

Control measures such as stricter industry regulation, zoning laws banning residential handgun dealers, or policies requiring trigger locks and safety boxes can help reduce fatalities and injuries associated with firearms.

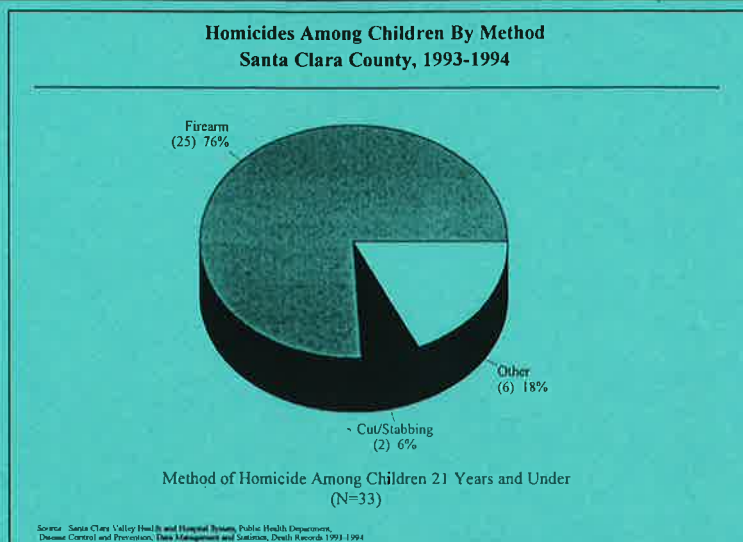
A 1996 telephone survey showed that awareness about handgun-related crime is low in Santa Clara County. It found, however, that once informed of firearm injury and death facts, the majority of Santa Clara County residents vocalized support for gun control legislation³.

FIREARM ACTS

PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Santa Clara County

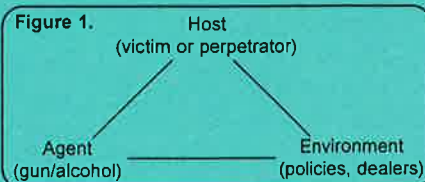
Firearms were responsible for 76% of homicides against children.



The Public Health Approach to Violence Prevention

When people working in public health approach a problem not only do they consider the consequences of an issue, such as deaths due to guns, but they also examine the various causes of a problem, such as joblessness or access to firearms.

This process typically includes three key elements, as shown in Figure 1.



The issues surrounding any of these elements ~ host, agent, environment ~ are interrelated and each element contributes to the greater problem.

Viewing violence within this framework requires that several processes, disciplines and approaches be incorporated to create a cohesive, multidisciplinary prevention plan.

Episode tracking, community data analysis, program planning, development, implementation, and evaluation are critical to a violence prevention effort.

Just as issues are viewed from multiple perspectives, solutions (or interventions) should be designed to address different levels as shown in the graphic below. Some interventions for gun violence could include: community outreach and education, conflict resolution training, parenting training, youth diversion, identification and assessment of potential victims, as well as policies regulating firearm availability and safety.

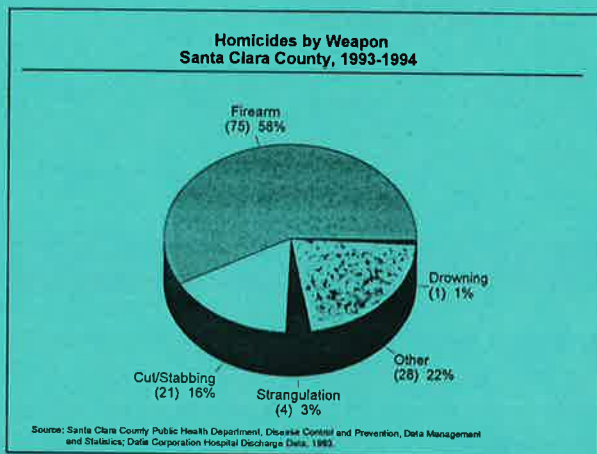
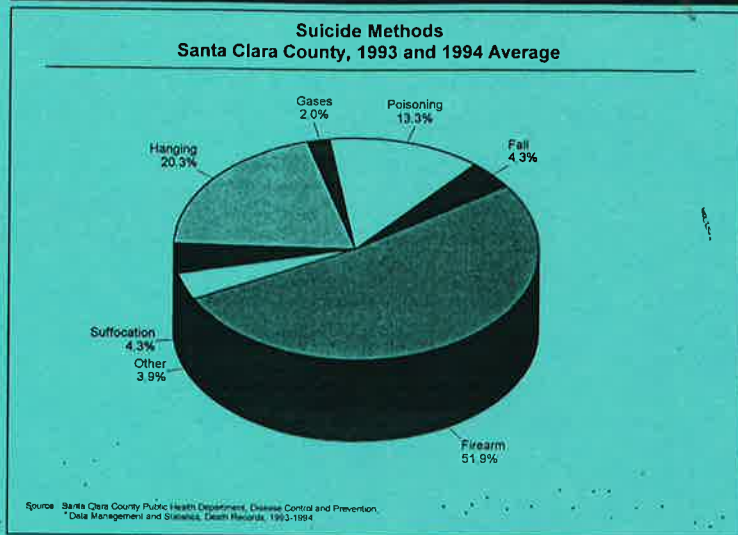
The Spectrum of Prevention
Influencing policy & legislation
Changing organizational practices
Fostering coalitions & networks
Educating providers
Promoting community education
Strengthening individual knowledge & skills

Suicides & Firearms

Relative to other means, the rate of success in suicide attempts is much higher when firearms are used⁴. Overall, firearms are used in over half of all suicides in the county¹. By gender, guns are used by over half of all males, 56%, committing suicide, and guns account for 4% of self inflicted injury hospitalization in males¹. Among females, 18% of female suicides are due to gun shots¹. Gun shot wounds account for 0.4% of all self inflicted hospitalizations among females¹.

Much debate surrounds the question whether limiting access to handguns would prevent some suicides. Studies among juvenile populations, however, have shown that decreased availability through more restrictive gun control laws is associated with a reduced suicide rate among youth¹⁵.

Over half of all suicides were committed with a gun.

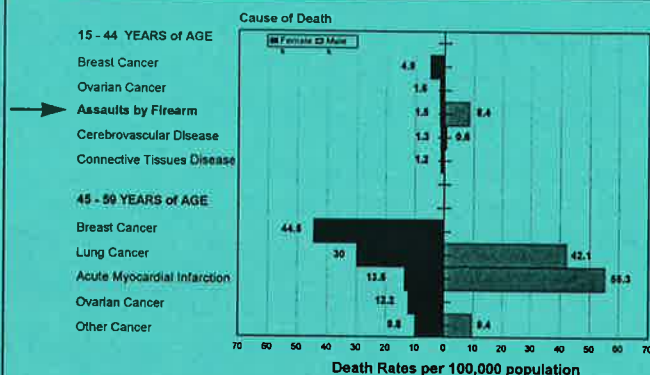


58% of all homicides in Santa Clara County were carried out with a firearm.

36% of all California homicide crimes were precipitated by an argument.



Top Five Causes of Death in Females by Age, as Compared to Males Santa Clara County, 1992-1994



FIREARMS: Targeting Women

Firearm assaults are the third leading killer of Santa Clara County females aged 15 to 44 years¹. Firearms kill women in this age group more frequently than do motor vehicle crashes (see chart)¹.

Data show that the greatest threat to a woman comes from the people and guns within her own home⁵. More women (28%) in California are killed by their current or former partner than by strangers (14%)¹⁷.

Nationally, between 1976-1987, more than twice as many American women were shot and killed by their husbands or boyfriends as were murdered by strangers using guns, knives or any other means⁵. More women are killed by their husbands than men are killed by their wives⁵.

Firearm Manufacture & Sales

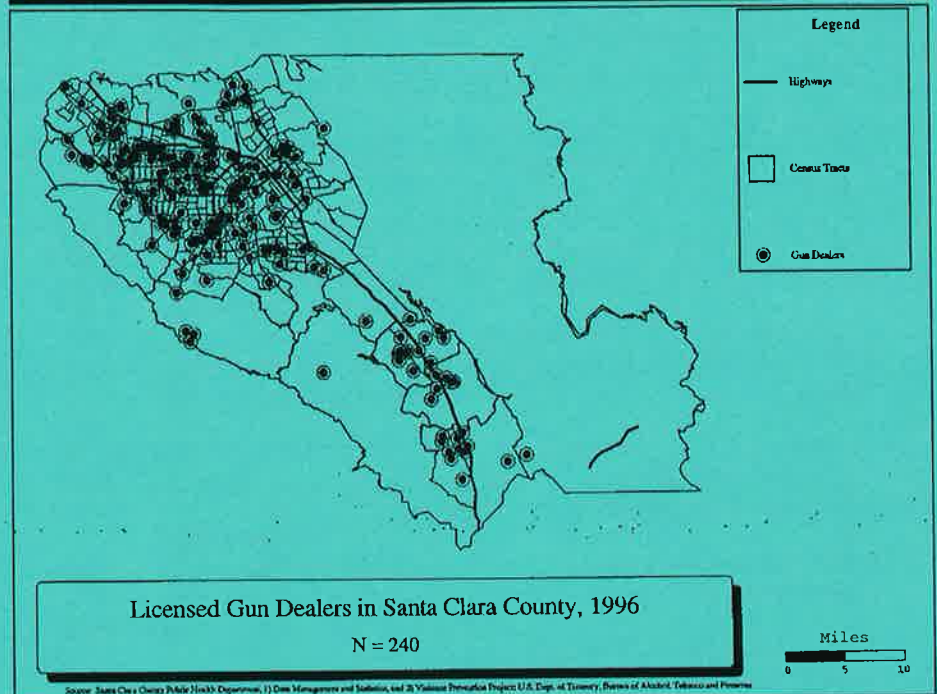
Guns are subject to fewer safety regulations than cars, baby cribs, or teddy bears ~ toy guns are even more strictly regulated than real guns⁶. American-made guns are not subject to federal safety standards¹². Although technology has been available for over 50 years to make guns child-resistant, incorporation of such safety devices has been resisted by the industry due, in part, to concern about costs⁴.

In 1994, 13,478 handguns were legally sold in Santa Clara County ~ that is more than 36 guns purchased each day, or 1.5 guns per hour⁷. Easy availability of handguns is one factor abetting violent acts such as homicides, assaults, and suicides.

In Santa Clara County, 240 dealers are licensed to sell guns⁸. This compares to 53 high schools, 29 libraries, and 55 McDonalds¹¹. Some dealers sell guns out of their homes,

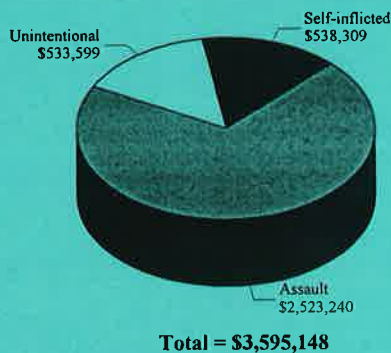
leading to concern about proximity of residential firearm dealers to sensitive sites such as schools or day care centers. Recent legislation, which increased dealer license fees and mandated background checks, has led to a decreased number of gun dealers in Santa Clara County ~ in a three month period during 1996 the number of dealers decreased by 26%⁹.

Santa Clara County is home to 240 licensed gun dealers.



Estimated annual weapons stolen in California: 100,000⁹

Hospitalization Costs of Firearm Injuries by Intent
Santa Clara County, 1993



Source: Santa Clara County Public Health Department, Disease Control and Prevention, Data Management and Statistics; Data Corporation Hospital Discharge Data, 1993.

Costs of Firearms to Society

Not only do guns inflict emotional and physical terror on victims, but firearm-related deaths and injuries cost California taxpayers over \$176 million dollars annually¹⁶.

The average cost of a gunshot wound requiring hospitalization is \$33,000¹⁰. Of this cost, 80% is borne by taxpayers^{4,10,14}. These are simply direct costs, and do not take into account lost years of productivity, reduced quality of life, or emotional burdens firearms inflict on families and communities. When those costs are factored in, the estimated cost per survivor of a gunshot wound due to assault was \$260,000¹⁰.

In Santa Clara County the costs of violent injuries totalled \$13,679,360 in 1993¹³. Of that sum, direct hospitalization costs for firearm-related injuries in SCC

reached \$3.6 million¹³. These figures, however, do not include the cost of emergency room (ER) or trauma center (TC) care, therefore costs for those patients treated for a gunshot wound in the ER or TC, but not admitted to the hospital, are not included in these sums. Most of these costs fall to public funds^{4,10,14}.

Sources for pages 1-3.

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Arresting Facts about Firearms

SANTA CLARA COUNTY

- A gun is purchased every 1.5 hours¹.
- Firearm assaults are the third leading killer of Santa Clara County females aged 15 to 44 years².
- Overall, firearms are used in over half of all suicides in the county².
- In 1993 and 1994, over half (58%) of all homicides were committed using firearms².
- Between 1993-1994, 76% of youth (<21 years) homicides were committed using firearms².
- Hospitalization costs for firearm injuries totaled \$3.6 million².
- There are 240 gun dealers in the county, many of whom sell guns from their homes³.



CALIFORNIA

- Firearms have surpassed motor vehicle crashes and diseases as the number one killer in the age group of 15-24 years old⁴.
- Carrying a concealed handgun can be a misdemeanor or a felony. However, carrying a knife or other less fatal weapon is punishable as a felony.
- The leading contributing circumstance for homicides is argument⁵.
- Firearm injuries cost California taxpayers over \$177 million annually^{6, 18}.

UNITED STATES

- A gun in the home is 43 times more likely to kill a family member or friend than it is to be used in self-defense⁷.
- Three times more people are murdered during arguments than robberies⁸.
- An estimated 30% of all unintentional shootings could be prevented by the presence of two safety features: trigger locks and loading indicators⁹.
- Few guns have trigger locks and loading indicators because no law requires them¹⁰.

- Most children unintentionally kill themselves or other children while playing with a gun they found in their home or the home of a family member or friend¹¹.
- Over half of all handgun owners keep their guns loaded at least some of the time¹². In one study, 53% of gun owners surveyed did not keep their guns locked up¹³.
- In 1992, about 78% of murder victims were killed by someone they knew⁸.
- Suicide is the 3rd leading cause of death for adolescents and young adults in the US, after car crashes and homicides¹⁴. In 1990, 3,165 youths aged 15-24 killed themselves with guns. Guns are now used in about 60% of all teenage suicides¹⁵.
- More firearm murders occurred in two years, than deaths in the 9 year Vietnam War¹⁶.
- The average medical cost of a gunshot wound is \$33,000. Eighty percent of those costs are borne by taxpayers¹⁷.

What you can do to prevent further firearm injuries and deaths...

- **Write, telephone, fax or e-mail** your local, state, and national representatives to let them know your concerns about the toll firearms take on your community.
- **Express your views to your elected official on the following:**
 - ban sales of handguns from residential dealers
 - advocate for stricter regulation of the firearm industry
 - ban the sale of Saturday Night Specials in your area
 - require back ground checks on people working for gun dealers
 - require trigger locks

- **If you are a parent or teacher:** Sensitize yourself and your children or students to violent images in the media. Explain to them that although TV doesn't show the consequences, guns do cause pain, death, and disability. Remind your children/students that what they see on television or in movies is not real life.

- **If you are a gun owner:**
 - get a trigger lock and loading indicator
 - store ammunition separately from the firearm
 - take a gun safety course

For more information contact:
Violence Prevention Program
Santa Clara County
Public Health Department
1-408-885-4202

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