



## RIGHT-TO-CARRY: DISCREDITED FANTASY?

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### ABSTRACT

Anti-gun activists have stated publicly that a gun in the home is many times more likely to be used against someone else in the home than to be used in self-defense. Affirming or impeaching these statements, the sole content of this paper, may be useful in coming to the better informed decision on household security and personal safety.

DISCLAIMER: The contents of this paper are information, news comparison and analysis only, and do not constitute medical, legal, political, psychological, business, tactical or accounting advice. For advice, the reader is urged to contact the appropriate licensed professional.

## Right-to-Carry: Discredited Fantasy?

Gun control organizations like to argue that any research showing the benefits of RTC laws are invalid. In the spring of 2005, the Minnesota state government debated and subsequently enacted the Minnesota Personal Protection Act. An opinion piece by Heather Martens, who calls herself a “writer and researcher,” stated:

One change is the absence of the argument that more guns reduce crime. This argument, the centerpiece of the 2003 campaign, was thoroughly discredited in 2004 by a National Academy of Sciences review of gun research.<sup>1</sup>

Martens was referencing *Firearms and Violence: A Critical Review*, published in 2005 by the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences. Two quotes from the book are:

- 1 “It is impossible to draw strong conclusions from the existing literature on the causal impact of these laws.”<sup>2</sup>
- 2 “The committee concludes that with the current evidence it is not possible to determine that there is a causal link between the passage of right-to-carry laws and crime rates.”<sup>3</sup>

Language is a curious thing, and it is as important to understand what is not being said as it is to read what has been committed to paper. While the authors cannot determine a causal link with “current evidence,” it acknowledges that it also cannot draw any “strong conclusions” on the impact of these laws.

In order to “thoroughly discredit” RTC laws, the authors could have stated that:

- 1 They are indeed able to draw a strong conclusion on the causal impact of RTC laws, and
- 2 The committee concludes that with the current literature, they determined there is no beneficial causal link between RTC laws and crime rates.

The National Academy of Sciences group also reviewed research papers critical of right-to-carry, which used statistical models showing that violent crime actually increased in RTC states. For example, citing a paper by Duggan, the NAS report notes: “According to Duggan’s estimates, adoption of right-to-carry laws increases the frequencies of rape, robbery, and violent crime as a whole.”<sup>4</sup> Yet the NAS does not support such conclusions, either, since it cannot find “a causal link between the passage of right-to-carry laws and crime rates.” This means that the authors did not conclude that RTC laws increase crime, which is important because it does not support gun control. Therefore, by applying Martens’s criterion, the idea that RTC laws create a public danger are also “thoroughly discredited.”

According to Martens’s standards, the NAS has also “thoroughly discredited” one of the mainstays of the gun control research thesis: the “43 times more likely” claim. In

1986, Kellermann and Reay studied gunshot deaths in King County, Washington. Publishing in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, they concluded: “We noted 43 suicides, criminal homicides, or accidental gunshot deaths involving a gun kept in the home for every case of homicide for self-protection.”<sup>5</sup>

This finding is often cited when gun control organizations promote their policies. For example, two representatives of *Ban Handgun Violence*, in their opinion piece supporting San Francisco’s proposed 2006 firearms ban, stated:

The New England Journal of Medicine found that a handgun in the home makes it 43 times more likely that a friend, family member, or acquaintance will be killed than an intruder.<sup>6</sup>

Here is what the National Research Council of the National Academy of Science had to say about Kellermann’s and Reay’s conclusions:

Kellermann and Reay find that there were nearly 5 times as many homicides and 37 times as many suicides as perpetrators killed in self-defense. They go on to conclude, “The advisability of keeping a firearm in the home for protection must be questioned.”

Although the facts are in no doubt, the conclusions do not seem to follow. Certainly, effective defensive gun use need not ever lead the perpetrator to be wounded or killed. Rather, to assess the benefits of self-defense, one needs to measure crime and injury averted. The particular outcome of an offender is of little relevance.<sup>7</sup>

The NAS authors actually challenged Kellermann’s and Reay’s conclusions, saying they were of “little relevance” because there is no simple, numerical correlation between homicide/suicide and defensive shootings of criminal perpetrators. This is a more emphatic conclusion than what they stated about research into RTC laws and their impact on crime rates.

It is also interesting to note that gun control organizations have an inconsistent standard when deciding what research is valid. In a January 2005 radio interview, when Peter Hamm, Communications Director for the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, was asked to consider that the firearm-related death rate for minors in Texas, a RTC state, was less than California’s, a leader in gun control laws, he called it a “statistical aberration.”<sup>8</sup> Therefore, according to Brady criteria the Kellermann paper, which examines only one metropolitan population—less significant in comparison to the two most populous states in the country—is even more of an irrelevant, statistical aberration.

## Endnotes

Heather Martens, *Gun-permit proposal's back, packing few facts*, May 4, 2005. <http://www.startribune.com/stories/1519/5383773.html>

<sup>2</sup> Charles F. Wellford, John V. Pepper, Carol V. Petrie, et al, *Firearms and Violence: A Critical Review*, National Academy of Sciences, page 121.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, page 150.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, page 129.

<sup>5</sup> Arthur L. Kellerman and Donald T. Reay, *Protection or Peril?: An Analysis of Firearm-Related Deaths in the Home*, 314 New Eng. J. Med. 1557-60 1986, page 1560.

<sup>6</sup> Bill Barnes and Burke Strunsky, *NRA out of S.F.*, San Francisco Bay Guardian.  
[http://www.sfbg.com/39/15/x\\_oped.html](http://www.sfbg.com/39/15/x_oped.html)

<sup>7</sup> Charles F. Wellford, John V. Pepper, Carol V. Petrie, et al, *Firearms and Violence: A Critical Review*, page 118.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Hamm Interview by Cam Edwards, NRA News, January 14, 2005.