

Criminal Use of Handguns in Australia

Levels of illegal ownership

- The number of illegal handguns in Australia is unknown, and difficult to reliably estimate.
- Some indication of illegal ownership among police detainees can be drawn from the Drug Use Monitoring in Australia (DUMA) survey.
- Around 5% (n=279) of detainees interviewed in 2005 and 2006 stated they had owned a handgun in the previous year.
- 94% of those detainees did not have a 'Category H' handgun licence.

Reported methods of acquisition

- 37% of detainees acquired their handgun from a family member or friend, but there is no information about whether the family member or friend was in legal possession of the handgun.
- No detainee admitted acquiring their handgun directly through theft.

Handguns used in homicides

- The majority of firearms used to commit homicide in Australia since 1989–90 were not legally held.
- Of the 150 offenders who used a handgun to commit homicide, 2% used a registered handgun.
- Arguments over money or drugs represented the primary alleged motive for handgun homicides.

Armed robbery

- Handguns were used in 10% or less of armed robberies over the period 2003 to 2005.

Sources of illegal handguns

- Firearms diverted into the criminal community are likely to come from both the legal and illegal markets, but it is difficult to quantify the proportions.
- Illegal firearms sourced via diversion are supplemented by firearms stolen from private dealers and owners, the security industry, police, and the military.

Theft and subsequent use in crime

- Firearms theft data from 1 July 2004 to 30 June 2006 show that 162 handguns were reported stolen, representing 6% of all reported stolen firearms in that period.
- Two of the 162 stolen handguns were subsequently used to commit a crime – a murder and an armed robbery.
- Both handguns had been stolen from security guards – one outside a club and the other outside a bank.

References and further reading

Bricknell, S. (2008). Criminal use of handguns in Australia. Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice No. 361. Australian Institute of Criminology. <http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/tandi2/tandi361.pdf>

Fact Sheet - Firearms Theft in Australia III. <http://www.icwish.org/WiSH%20Fact%20Sheet%20Firearms%20Theft%20in%20Australia%20III.pdf>