

THE USE OF LICENSED FIREARMS IN HOMICIDE - ENGLAND AND WALES

Note by the Home Office Research and Statistics Directorate

1. Research evidence previously offered to Lord Cullen's inquiry noted that there were no statistics available for England and Wales which covered the use of firearms in crime by firearm certificate holders (Mayhew, paragraph 26¹). A special exercise has now been carried out to find out whether the guns used in homicide were licensed or not.

2. The Home Office asked police forces for the available information on all homicides with a firearm which took place in England and Wales between 1992 and 1994, a total of 196 offences. During this period 2,086 homicides were initially recorded by the police; homicides in which firearms were used make up 9 per cent of the total.

3. Police forces provided relevant information on 152 offences. For 14 per cent of these homicides, the firearms were legally held by the perpetrator of the offence on a firearm or shot gun certificate or by a member of the armed forces. Only one offence involved the use of a firearm held legally by someone else in the household. It was not possible to obtain any information on whether the firearms were legally held in 44 homicides. If none of these were legally held, the overall proportion of homicides involving firearms in which a legally held weapon was used reduces to 11 per cent.

Table 1 Use of legally held firearms in homicide (England and Wales 1992 - 1994)

Total number of homicides in which the firearm was legally held by suspect		Percentage
(a)	22	14
Total number of homicides in which the firearm was not legally held by suspect	130	86
(b)*		
Total (a) + (b)	152	100
Information not supplied on whether firearm legally held	44	

Note * One of these firearms was legally held by another person in the suspect's household.

4. In five per cent of homicides in which the weapons were not legally held by a suspect the weapons were believed to have been stolen, (seven out of 130). If these were all legally held by their original owners, then at least 30 of the firearms used in homicide over this period were legally held by someone, either

the suspect, another member of their household, or an original owner from whom the firearm had been stolen. This amounts to 20 per cent of the 152 offences for which it was determined whether the firearms were legally held or not. For 88 of these offences, however, the police reported that they did not know whether the firearms had been stolen or not.

5. One weapon (used in two homicides) was known to have been previously deactivated.

6. Offences can be classified on the basis of apparent motive. Table 2 shows that during 1992 - 94 no firearms are known to have been used by a person holding a valid firearms certificate in a homicide which was to do with organised crime or drugs, Nearly one in three firearms used in 'domestic' homicides were legally held, however.

Table 2 Firearms homicide - circumstances of offence by whether firearms legally held (England and Wales 1992-94)

Circumstances of homicide	Firearm legally held	Not legally held
Organised crime, drugs related, contract killing etc	NIL	43
Domestic	18	42
Robbery or gain	NIL	12
Arguments, jealousy, revenge	1	13
Other	3	20
Total	22	130

7. Table 3 shows that two thirds of the firearms used in homicides connected with organised crime and drugs were handguns, whilst nearly seventy per cent of those used in domestic homicide were shot guns.

8. Where handguns were used in domestic homicides, six of the 15 were legally held by the suspect. Where shot guns were used, 12 of the 41 were legally held by the suspect (plus one offence in which the suspect used the victim's own legally held firearm).

Table 3 Firearms homicide - circumstances of offence by type of firearm (England and Wales 1992-94)

Circumstances of homicide	Handguns	Shot guns	Other (and weapon type not known)	Total
Organised crime, drugs related, contract killing etc	40	15	4	59
Domestic	15	41	4	60
Robbery or gain	8	5	2	15
Arguments, jealousy, revenge	6	10	NIL	16
Other (and not known)	10	14	22	46
Total	79	85	32	196

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Note 1 Cullen Inquiry: A reply to comments on the Research Note in the Government evidence (Annex G), Pat Mayhew, Crime and Criminal Justice Unit, Research and Statistics Directorate, Home Office, July 1996