

# **The Impact of Australia's 1996 Firearms Legislation: A Research Review with Emphasis on Data Selection, Methodological Issues, and Statistical Outcomes.**

McPhedran, S., & Baker, J. (2008). *Justice Policy Journal*, 5(1).

## **Executive Summary**

### **Background**

- In 1996, Australia introduced firearms legislation that is considered among the strictest in the developed world.
- The 1996 legislative intervention provides a natural experimental design.
- An increasing number of publications have evaluated the impacts of the NFA.
- The conclusions of these studies appear inconsistent, which is not desirable for informing policy.
- The current study sought to establish whether the results of analyses used in the studies point in a consistent direction.

### **Method**

- Four relevant studies were reviewed for their consistency.
- Three examined homicide and suicide (Baker & McPhedran, 2007; Chapman et al 2006; Ozanne-Smith et al 2004), one examined homicide only (Carcach et al 2002).
- Emphasis was placed on comparing statistical outcomes and assessing congruence between those outcomes.

### **Results**

- Each study employed a different data analysis method.
- Despite the disparate statistical approaches, each study has produced remarkably consistent results.
- None of the studies found evidence for an impact of the NFA on firearm homicides.
- Three studies examined firearm suicide and found significant differences in the pre- and post-1996 trends.
- Baker & McPhedran (2007) and Chapman et al (2006) also observed declines in non-firearm suicide.

### **Conclusions**

- Disagreement about the impacts of the NFA cannot be attributed to different statistical outcomes.
- The appearance of inconsistency arises from different conclusions presented in the various studies, rather than from the outcomes of the statistical analyses.
- Additionally, there are instances where the conclusions contradict the actual results presented.
- Interpretive misunderstandings are also present in some cases.
- The decline in non-firearm suicides along with firearm suicides indicates social changes are a likely influence on suicides overall. This is often overlooked.

### **Recommendations**

- Declines in firearm suicides should be contextualised against the declines in non-firearm suicide that became evident from 1997 onwards.
- Given the high proportion of firearm suicides in the total dataset, each 'type' of death should be examined separately to avoid misleading conclusions about trends in firearm-related deaths.
- It appears prudent to give greater consideration to regional variation in firearm and non-firearm suicides.