

NASP's Anti-Gun Agenda: Truths and Half-Truths

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The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and medical journals like *The Journal of the American Medical Association* (JAMA) and *The New England Journal of Medicine* have been heavily criticized for promoting an anti-gun political agenda. (Wheeler, T., *Public Health Gun Control: A Brief History, Parts I-III*, www.drgo.us/?p=266 , www.drgo.us/?p=285 , and www.drgo.us/?p=314 , accessed June 16, 2013.) The continual publication of CDC-funded gun violence studies that suffer from serious methodological flaws are responsible for this anti-gun bias. These flaws include:

- 1) Inventing, selecting and or misrepresenting data to support *a priori* conclusions.
- 2) Omitting data and lack of citing criminological and sociological research into firearm violence and self-defense.
- 3) Simply ignoring or discounting evidence inconsistent with one's political prejudices
- 4) Stating overreaching conclusions and presenting associations and correlations as causation.

As a result of their shoddy scientific methods, the journals and CDC are accused of holding ideologically predetermined conclusions and publishing dubious articles that perpetuate the fiction that guns are an infectious disease and that more guns cause more deaths. The idea that guns are an infectious disease like HIV is ridiculous. Despite a wealth of research there is no credible evidence that an increase in guns causes more deaths in the U.S. (National Research Council. (2005). *Firearms and Violence: A Critical Review*. Committee to Improve Research Information and Data on Firearms. Charles F. Wellford, John V. Pepper, and Carol V. Petrie, editors. Committee on Law and Justice, Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, page 6).

I will provide some examples of how The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) Youth Gun Violence Fact Sheet suffers from the very same methodological flaws and unscrupulous misrepresentation of the gun violence knowledge landscape that the CDC and public health literature are guilty of. For instance, in the section of the NASP fact sheet entitled "Firearm Deaths in the United States (CDC, 2012)" the murder and suicide statistics from a single year (2010) are cherry-picked from a slew of potential statistics and provided out of context without any trend data from the last 30 years.

Of the 1,982 youth (age 10-19) murdered in 2010, 84% were killed by a firearm. However, according to the same WISQARS CDC source the rate of murdered youths aged 10-19 has fallen from 4.64/100K to 3.89/100K from 1999-2010. (These and subsequent WISQARS data are taken

from the WISQARS Fatal Injury Reports page at www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/fatal_injury_reports.html and the WISQARS search page at http://webappa.cdc.gov/sasweb/ncipc/mortrate10_us.html , accessed August 6, 2013.)

Of the 1,659 teens (age 15-19) who committed suicide in 2010, 40% were by firearm. However, according to WISQARS the rate of suicide with a firearm in teens 15-19 has fallen from 4.85/100K to 3.03/100K from 1999-2010.

Of the 1,323 males (age 15-19) who committed suicide in 2010, 45% were by firearm. However, according to WISQARS suicide with a firearm in males 15-19 has fallen from 8.4/100K to 5.32/100K from 1999-2010.

Of the 336 females (age 15-19) who committed suicide in 2010, 20% were by firearm. However, according to WISQARS suicide with a firearm in females 15-19 has fallen from 1.11/100K to 0.62/100K from 1999-2010.

In 2010, across all age groups (and including adults), there were 31,672 individuals killed by firearms (with 61% of these deaths being suicide and 26% homicide). According to WISQARS the rate of all individuals killed by firearms has essentially remained the same between 1999 (10.3/100K)-2010 (10.07/100K).

As we can see, the select reporting of statistics from a single year and age group without providing any trend data prevents the reader from putting things into context. The fact is that according to the same CDC data source cited by NASP, the rates of murder and suicide committed with guns in the reported groups have been in decline or remained constant from 1999-2010.

One example of criminological data omission is the non-reporting of firearm related statistics from the Department of Justice (DOJ). According to the DOJ's Bureau of Justice Statistics (<http://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=tp&tid=31>, accessed August 6, 2013), the number of all firearm related homicides declined 39% between 1993 and 2011 and nonfatal firearm crimes declined 69% during the same period (<http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/fv9311.pdf>, accessed August 6, 2013.). In fact, from 1980-2008 the rate of handgun related homicide dipped to its lowest point in 2008. (<http://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=2221>, <http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/htus8008.pdf>, accessed August 6, 2013.)

Another example would be the omission of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) statistics on firearm related homicides. From 2003-2010 the UNODC reports that the percentage of homicides by firearm in the U.S. hovered around 67% while the rate of homicide by firearm per 100,000 persons declined nearly 16%. (<http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/statistics/crime/global-study-on-homicide-2011.html>, <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/homicide.html>, accessed August 6, 2013.)

In fact, all violent crime rates are in decline. Data from the FBI's 2011 Unified Crime Report (UCR) shows that the violent crime and murder and non-negligent manslaughter rates both fell 50% from 1992-2011 (<http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/crime-in-the-u.s/2011/crime-in-the->

u.s.-2011, <http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/crime-in-the-u.s/2011/crime-in-the-u.s.-2011/tables/table-1>, accessed August 6, 2013.).The Bureau of Justice Statistics also reports that the homicide rate in 2010 had fallen to rates not seen since the mid-1960s. (<http://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=2221>, <http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/htus8008.pdf>, accessed August 6, 2013.)

Furthermore, these statistics suggest that all gun related deaths are equal, which couldn't be further from the truth. There are accidents, suicides and homicides. It's been shown that most homicides are not committed by ordinary, law-abiding people, but are instead related to other criminal activity like drug trafficking and gang behavior. Without data from criminological sources to provide context it can seem that all violent crime, including gun violence, is currently increasing, when in fact it is in decline. This omission of critical information does not lend itself to reasonable, well informed policy decisions.

One number never tells the whole story in any field of research, and regardless of conclusions reached, shoddy scientific methods like the selective reporting of statistics, ignoring of contrary data and exclusion of reputable data sources like the FBI UCR and publications by academic criminologists are symptomatic of bias and uncritical thinking. While evident throughout the NASP Youth Gun Violence Fact Sheet, these disturbing practices are not at all confined to gun violence research and in fact are appearing at an alarming rate in many disparate fields of supposed scientific inquiry. Several instances of pseudoscience masquerading as robust science are diligently explored and debunked in *Unscientific America*, *Denying Science*, *Denialism*, and *Fool Me Twice*.

Publications like the NASP Fact Sheet paint a very biased picture of gun related violence that prevents various stakeholders and policy makers from making well-informed decisions. Far from being a fact sheet, the report is actually a half-truths sheet intended to lead the reader to a predetermined conclusion that there is an insidious assault on public health perpetuated by the guns themselves.

What we really need is a knowledge sheet so that the public can be properly informed, educated and empowered to make sound policy decisions. A good start would be the suggested reading list at the end of this article. No scientific organization can claim to make a valid statement about firearms without incorporating what we already know from the mountain of firearm research that already exists.

Selected Bibliography

1) Wright, James D. and Rossi, Peter H. *Armed and Considered Dangerous: A Survey of Felons and Their Firearms*, Aldine de Gruyter, Hawthorne NY 1986. This 247-page hardbound book was the analysis of extensive data collected from over 2,000 convicted felons in American state prisons. Funded by the National Institute of Justice, this massive and comprehensive study found numerous truths about violent criminals that fly in the face of gun control advocates:

a) Felons prefer large, well-made handguns as tools of their trade, not "Saturday Night Specials" or rifles of any kind. (page 180)

b) The people most likely to be deterred from getting a handgun by gun bans are not criminals, but poor people who have decided they need a gun to protect themselves against the criminals. (page 238)

2) Lizotte, Alan A. "The Costs of Using Gun Control to Reduce Homicide," *Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine*, vol. 62 no. 5 (June 1986), pp. 539-49. Criminologist Dr. Lizotte, now the dean of the School of Criminal Justice, University at Albany (SUNY), brings before a scientific panel the novel idea that, like any policy, gun control has costs.

3) Kleck, Gary *Point Blank: Guns and Violence in America*, Aldine de Gruyter, Hawthorne NY 1991. This 512-page book won the 1993 Michael J. Hindelang award of the American Society of Criminology. It offers analysis of the relationships between gun ownership, violent crime, and self-defense. His findings show that the average killer has a long history of criminal conduct, contrary to fashionable public health notions that anyone with a gun is a potential killer. He further found that most successful defensive gun uses are never reported to the police, the so-called "police chief's fallacy."

4) Kates, Don B., Schaffer, Henry E., Lattimer, John K., Murray, George B., and Cassem, Edwin W. "Guns and Public Health: Epidemic of Violence or Pandemic of Propaganda?" *Tennessee Law Review* vol. 62 no. 3 (Spring 1995). A criminologist, a genetics and biomathematics professor, a Columbia Medical School professor, and two Harvard Medical School professors of psychiatry analyze the public health literature on firearms. They find numerous examples of bias, prejudice against gun owners, and just plain ignorance among prominent public health gun researchers.

4) Kleck, Gary and Gertz, Marc "Armed Resistance to Crime: The Prevalence and Nature of Self-Defense With a Gun," *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* vol. 86 no. 1 (Fall 1995). These two authors report the results of their large national telephone survey investigating defensive use of firearms. They found that "each year in the U.S. there are about 2.2 to 2.5 million DGUs [defensive gun uses] of all types by civilians against humans, with about 1.5 to 1.9 million of the incidents involving use of handguns." (page 164)

5) Lott, John R. and Mustard, David B. "Crime, Deterrence, and Right-to-Carry Concealed Handguns," *Journal of Legal Studies* vol. XXVI no. 1 (January 1997), University of Chicago Press. These authors studied violent crime trends over 15 years using county-level data from all 3,054 counties in the United States. They found that when state concealed handgun laws went into effect, murders, rapes, and aggravated assaults subsequently decreased.

6) Lott, John R. *More Guns, Less Crime: Understanding Crime and Gun Control Laws*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1998. This landmark book, based on Lott's research referenced in the 1997 *Journal of Legal Studies* article, is now in its third edition, with analysis of new data.

7) Wellford, Charles F., Pepper, John V., and Petrie, Carol V., editors. *Firearms and Violence: A Critical Review*, Committee to Improve Research Information and Data on Firearms, Committee on Law and Justice, Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education, National

Research Council, The National Academies Press, Washington, DC (2005). This National Academies of Science committee of leading scholars in criminology reviewed all the existing research on homicide, suicide, and firearms. They found that the existing research studies “do not credibly demonstrate a causal relationship between the ownership of firearms and the causes or prevention of criminal violence or suicide.” Their review was published in this 328-page book.

8) Mauser, Gary A., “Evaluating Canada’s 1995 Firearm Legislation,” *Journal on Firearms and Public Policy* vol. 17 (Fall 2005), Center for the Study of Firearms and Public Policy of the Second Amendment Foundation, Bellevue, Washington. Professor Mauser (Institute for Urban Canadian Research Studies at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, British Columbia) examines Canada’s controversial and costly 1995 Firearms Act. This unpopular law vastly exceeded initial dollar cost estimates and has never been definitively shown to have reduced crime. The part of the law requiring registration of long guns (rifles and shotguns) encountered such widespread resistance that it was finally repealed in 2012.

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