

17 Firearms

Firearms are an unintentional or intentional cause of injury death (WHO 1977, WHO 1996). WHO classifies the cause of unintentional firearms deaths by the type of firearm causing the death. These types include *larger firearms and handguns*. Firearms deaths can also be intentional. A self-inflicted firearm injury that results in death is classified as a suicide and a firearm injury inflicted on one person by another that results in death is classified as an interpersonal violence death. Deaths due to intentional firearm use are covered in earlier chapters (see suicide and interpersonal violence).

Firearm death data from 1986 to 2002 were used to describe the demographic profile of firearms deaths in NSW. Death data during 1998–2002 were used for the majority of the analyses, but trend analyses used death data from 1986 to 2002.

Firearms were the fifteenth leading cause of injury death from 1998–2002 and accounted for less than 1% of all injury deaths (see Table 2). During these years, 35 people died from firearms at an overall rate of 0.1 people/100,000 and 91% were male. Approximately 7 people died each year from 1986 to 2002 as the result of firearms incidents.

Figure 33 shows the yearly trend in death rates for firearms 1986 to 2002. The firearms death rate showed a statistically significant decline between 1986 and 2002. However, when the trend analysis was only conducted over 1993 to 2002, there was no significant increase in death rates.

Figure 32. Yearly trend in death rates for firearms: NSW, 1986–2002

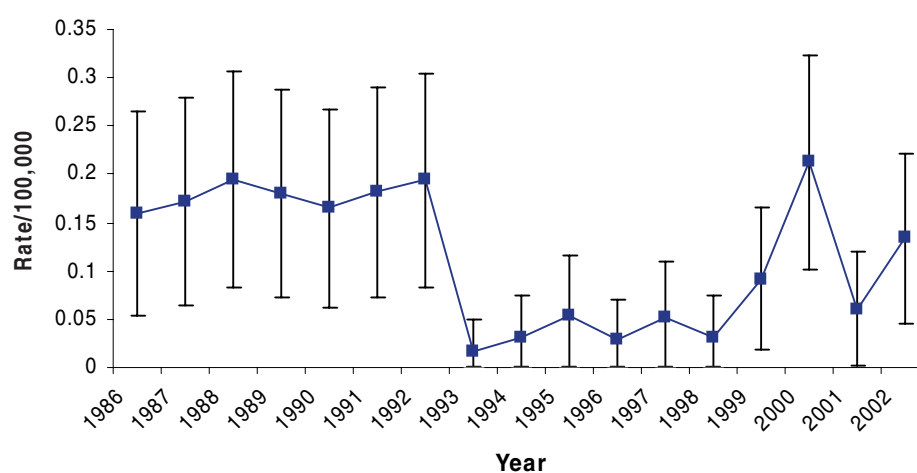


Figure 33 shows the age-specific death rates for firearms between 1998 and 2002. People aged 60–64 years had the highest rate of death due to firearms and accounted for 11% of all firearms deaths. Other high death rates for firearms were seen in people aged 25–29 years and people aged 50–54 years.

Firearms deaths in people aged 25–29 years and people aged 50–54 years accounted for 17% and 14% respectively, of all firearms deaths between 1998 and 2002.

Figure 33. Age-specific death rates for firearms: NSW, 1998–2002

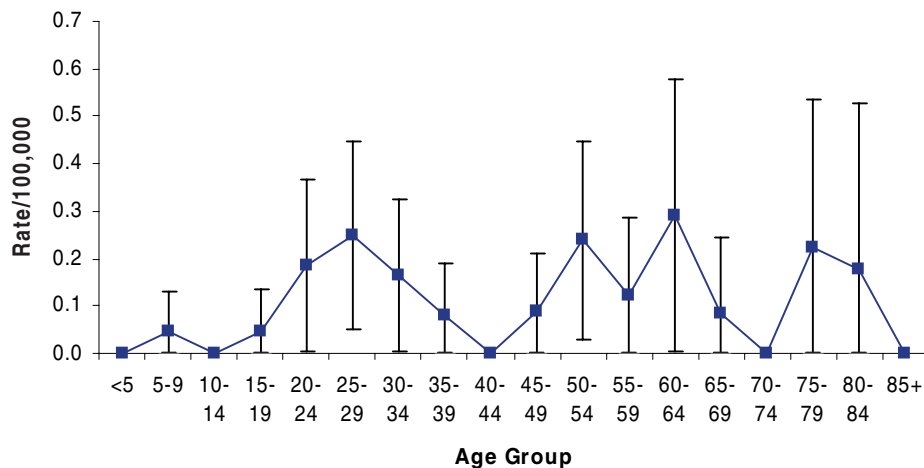


Table 31 shows the number of firearms deaths and death rates by the type of firearm for all persons, males and females, during 1998–2002. *Other and unspecified firearm* and *larger firearms* and *handgun* use were the types of firearms causing all firearms deaths. These two subcategories of firearms accounted for 77% and 23% of all firearms deaths respectively. Males accounted for 89% of all firearms deaths due to other and unspecified firearms and all firearms deaths due to *larger firearms* and *handguns*.

Other and unspecified firearms use was responsible for the majority of male firearms deaths and accounted for 75% of all male firearms deaths. *Other and unspecified firearm* use was also responsible for all female firearms deaths during 1998–2002. There were no female deaths due the use of *larger firearms* or *small handguns*.

Table 32 shows firearms deaths by age group and type of firearms in NSW for 1998–2002. *Other and unspecified firearm* use was the leading cause of firearms death in people age 15+ years. *Larger firearm* use was the second leading cause of cause of firearms death in people aged 15–34 years.

Table 31. Number of firearms deaths and death rates/100,000* by type: NSW, 1998–2002

Type of firearm	All persons		Males		Females		Ratio‡
	N	Rate†	N	Rate† (CI) ††	N	Rate† (CI)	
Other and unspecified	27	0.08	24	0.15 (0.09–0.21)	#	–	–
Larger firearms and handguns	8	0.02	8	0.05 (0.02–0.08)	0	–	–
All firearm	35	0.11	32	0.20 (0.13–0.27)	#	–	–

* Death rates have been age-adjusted using the 2001 Australian census population. † Rate/100,000. ‡ Mortality ratio for male/female. # Cell size less than five cases. †† 95% confidence interval.

SUMMARY

Firearms accounted for approximately 7 deaths each year from 1986 to 2002. Analysis of the trend for firearm death rates showed no statistically significant change between 1986 and 2002, though rates have been generally lower since 1993. Overall, unintentional firearms deaths occurred mainly in people age 15+ years. Age-specific death rates were small due to the distribution of a small number of cases across all age group. People aged 60–64 years had the highest rate of death due to firearms and accounted for 11% of all firearms deaths. Other high death rates for firearms were seen in people aged 25–29 years and people aged 50–54 years. No comparison can be made with previous NSW figures as data for firearms deaths were not examined from 1995 to 1999 by Schmertmann and Williamson (2002).

Other and unspecified firearm and *larger firearm* use led to firearms deaths most often in NSW during 1998–2002. *Other and unspecified firearm* use was the leading cause of firearms death in people age 15+ years. *Larger firearm* use was the second leading cause of cause of firearms death in people aged 15–34 years.

Males accounted for 91% of all firearms deaths in NSW during 1998–2002. They accounted for 89% of all firearms deaths due to *other and unspecified firearms* and all firearms deaths due to *larger firearms* and *handguns*.

Although only a small number of deaths each year are caused unintentionally by firearms, the majority of the deaths are in males aged 15+ years as *other and unspecified firearm* cases. In order to effectively describe the problem of injury deaths caused by unintentional firearm usage, more information is needed regarding the deaths due to *other and unspecified firearm* use.

Future efforts should focus on improvements to the data collection and coding systems so that the number of unintentional firearms deaths coded as *other and unspecified* is greatly reduced. Until these changes can be made, an alternate data source (e.g. coronial data) should be used to investigate the nature of unintentional firearm-related deaths coded as other and unspecified.

Table 32. Firearms deaths* by age group and type of firearm†: NSW, 1998-2002

		Age group									
		<4	5-9	10-14	15-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	Total
1			Larger firearm #		Other and unspecified #	Other and unspecified 6	Other and unspecified #	Other and unspecified 7	Other and unspecified 6	Other and unspecified #	Other and unspecified 27
2					Larger firearm #	Larger firearm #				Handgun #	Larger firearm 6
3					Handgun #	Handgun #					Handgun #

* Numbers represent the number of cases. † See Appendix 4 for type of firearm codes. # Cell size less than five cases