

Nor do guns afford any significant measure of protection. Wendy Cukier told the Committee of a study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, which showed that for every case of a self-protection killing, there are 1.3 cases of accidental shootings, where a family member is killed instead of an intruder; 4.6 criminal homicides, where someone is killed without justification; and 37 suicides involving firearms (11:13).

The Committee heard from Heidi Rathjen, also of Canadians for Gun Control, who spoke on behalf of the students of l'École polytechnique about the events of 6 December 1989, when Marc Lépine shot 27 people within 20 minutes with a semi-automatic, killing 14 young women. This event mobilized many of the students of the Polytechnique to work for more effective gun controls because of their reaction to the devastation caused by this single assailant. The students see gun control as one of many changes needed to prevent such a tragedy from being repeated. The students acknowledge that there were other causes of the massacre, including misogyny and other aspects of Canadian culture, and even though they, like a number of other witnesses, do not believe gun control alone is the solution, they set out to fight one specific factor which had contributed to the tragedy: the availability of guns.

The Committee was disturbed by the information given about the effects of the presence of guns in Canadian communities. Law enforcement authorities do not have access to reliable information about the numbers and locations of most guns, because there is no registration system for non-restricted weapons in Canada. In many respects, guns are too easily acquired; 16-year olds can obtain firearms acquisition certificates without parental knowledge or consent. Accidents with guns kill children as well as adults. Wendy Cukier described an accident in Consort, Alberta, where an eight-year-old was shot in the face and killed with a .44 Magnum while shooting with his stepfather at a gun club. In Wakefield, Québec, recently, another eight-year-old was shot by his friend when they were playing.

Witnesses before this Committee recognized that hunters and target shooters have a real interest in access to guns and therefore in their recommendations made exceptions for these two classes of legitimate gun users. They did not, however, recognize any compelling interest of gun collectors. This Committee agrees that the views of those whose security is undermined by guns should be given greater weight than the views of gun owners. As Wendy Cukier said, "I do not believe owning a gun makes you an expert in violence any more than having a disease makes you a physician" (11:10). The Committee believes that the presence of guns in our communities presents a safety risk to all Canadians, regardless of the non-violent intentions of individual gun-owners.