

rates, particularly in males. While the complexity of factors influencing death rates and crime, particularly over time, makes longitudinal analysis particularly difficult, Criminologist Neil Boyd concluded that:

"In three separate forms of statistical analysis - exploratory, time-series and structural researches have found evidence to suggest that gun control has had an impact on homicides and firearm homicides. The finding that an amendment to criminal law can change behaviour in the direction desired is unusual. We have had many amendments to Canadian criminal law during the past 40 years... In none of these circumstances has it been possible to establish that a change in law can impact behaviour in the direction that the law hopes for or anticipates. With gun control legislation, we have some preliminary evidence - some strong suggestions - that the criminal law is working. And it is working, not by manipulating penalty levels for specific forms of crime, but by putting a regulatory system in place that can limit access to firearms, enhance the safety of firearm use, and, in a more general sense, educate the public with respect to the dangers inherent in widespread availability of these potentially lethal commodities."¹¹

Recommendation 2. The UN and member states should recognize the importance of firearms regulation in preventing violence against women, in promoting justice for victims of crime, in addressing the problem of children and youth as victims and perpetrators of crime, and in re-establishing or strengthening the rule of law in post-conflict peace building projects and should promote coordination and information sharing among relevant initiatives.

International Comparisons

Canada has learned a great deal from the international experience with firearms regulation. Many consider firearms regulation, for example, to be one of the factors accounting for the differences in the rates of gun crime and violence between Canada and the United States.¹² Canada has always had stronger firearms regulation than the United States, particularly with respect to handguns which have been licensed and registered since the 1930's. Ownership of guns has never been regarded as a right and several court rulings have reaffirmed the right of citizens to be protected from guns.¹³ Handgun ownership has been restricted to police, members of gun clubs or collectors. Very few (about 50 in the country) have been given permits to carry handguns for "self-protection". This is only possible if an applicant can prove that their life is in danger and that the police cannot protect them. As a result, Canada has roughly 1 million handguns while the United States has more than 77 million. Although there are other factors affecting murder, suicide and unintentional injury rates, a comparison of data in Canada and the United States suggests that access to handguns may play a role. While the murder rate without guns in the US is roughly equivalent (1.3 times) that of Canada, the murder rate with handguns is 15 times the Canadian rate. On the surface at least, this does not suggest that encouraging widespread arming of civilians results in lower crime and death rates.¹⁴