

# Reducing Male Suicide Rates with Gun Ownership Laws

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## Introduction

- The majority of gun deaths in the U.S. is from suicides, not homicides or mass shootings (Alban et al., 2018)
- Approx. 22,000 Americans die every year from firearm suicides, and men account for 86% of firearm suicide victims (CDC, 2017)
- It is a significant public health crisis and is getting worse—firearm suicide rate has increased by 19% over the past decade (CDC, 2017).
- Firearms are the most lethal method of suicide with a 91% fatality rate (Miller, Azrael, & Hemenway, 2004).
- Residents of U.S. states with high rates of gun ownership are 4x more likely to die by firearm suicide than in states with low rates of gun ownership (Miller, Lippman, Azrael, & Hemenway, 2007).

## Research Question

Do states with restrictive gun ownership laws have significantly lower adult male firearm suicide rates compared to states with unrestrictive gun ownership laws?

## Methods

The following databases were used to search:

- PsycINFO
- Academic Search Complete
- SocINDEX
- Google Scholar

**SEARCH terms:** 75 results

- Firearm suicide AND prevention AND
- Gun restrictions OR gun legislation OR gun ownership

**INCLUSION CRITERIA:** peer reviewed journals and articles published 2003-2018. These criteria narrowed down the results to 51 articles.

**GOOGLE SCHOLAR search:** 20 results

- Firearm suicide OR gun legislation OR
- Gun ownership OR gun control
- Included articles published 2010-2018

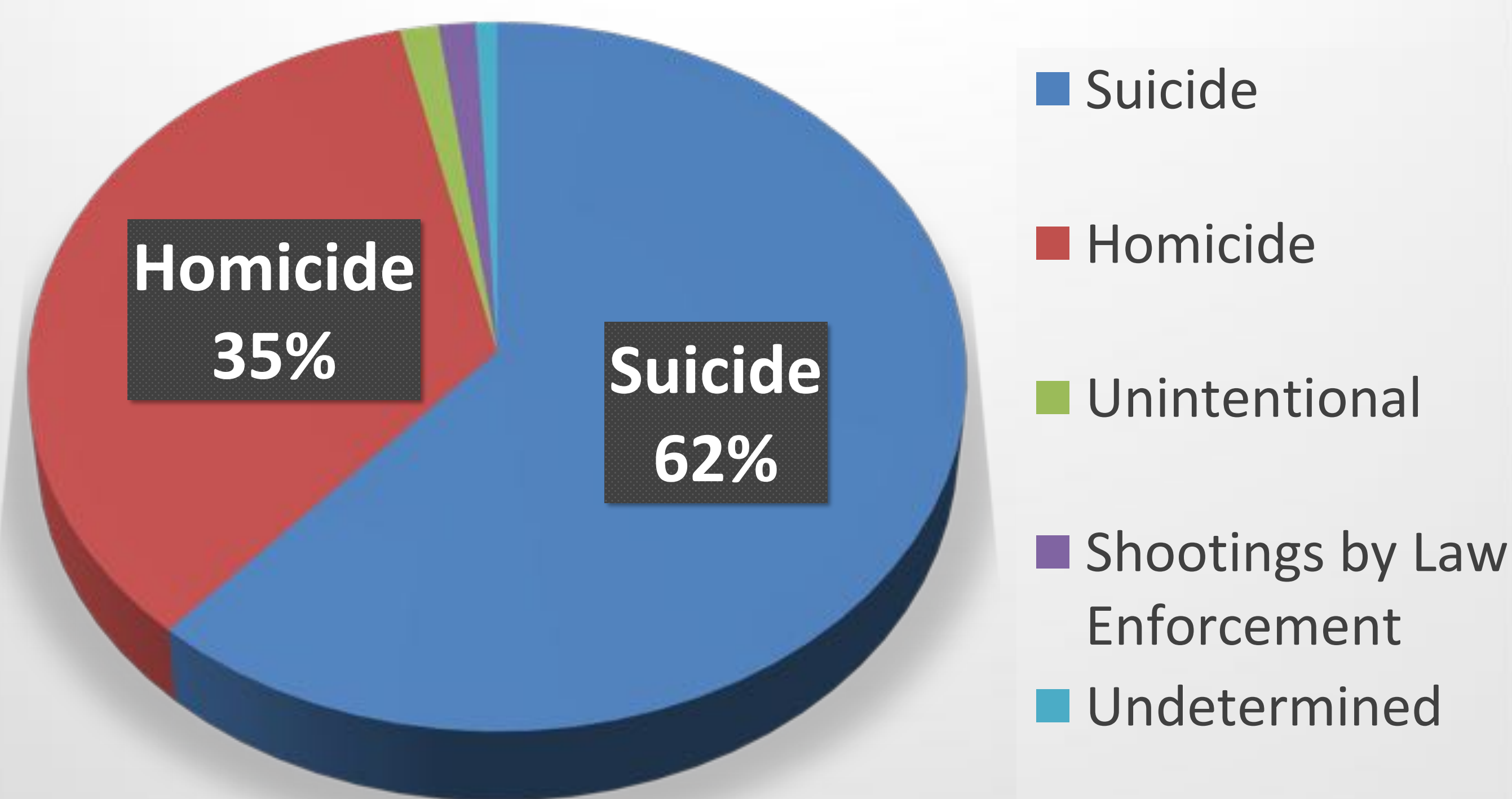
Eight articles were chosen based on access to full text articles and relevance to state gun ownership laws and firearm suicides.

## Recommended Policies

**RESTRICTIVE GUN OWNERSHIP LAWS**  
Permit to Purchase  
Mandatory Waiting Periods  
Background Checks

- Restrictive gun laws are laws that make it more difficult to obtain firearms.
- Permit to Purchase (PTP) laws, which requires one to obtain a permit and pass background check before purchasing a firearm, have evidence of reducing gun suicides significantly (Crifasi, Meyers, Vernick, & Webster, 2015).
- Mandatory waiting periods create a buffer for impulsive suicidal thoughts and delay access to a firearm (Anestis, Anestis, & Butterworth, 2017).
- Background checks that specifically check for mental illness, misdemeanors, and fugitive status correlate with reduction in firearm suicide deaths (Sen & Panjamapirom, 2012).

## Gun deaths by Intent



(CDC, 2017)

## Other Practices Considered

- Safe gun storage practices
- Temporary firearm access restrictions for at-risk individuals
- Gun safety awareness and education
- Smart gun technology that limits access to the owner or permitted users (such as fingerprint recognition) (Mann & Michel, 2016)

The above practices restrict access for people who already own firearms and may not be as effective as it relies on individual discretion and enforcement as opposed to blanket rules for everyone.

Firearm suicide attempts were more likely to occur in states with unrestrictive gun laws (Alban et al., 2018).

## Conclusion & Summary of Rationale

- Evidence across eight quantitative studies suggests that restrictive state firearm legislation in the form of background checks, mandatory waiting periods, or PTP laws are clearly associated with lower firearm suicide rates including male suicide rates.
- PTP laws in Connecticut resulted in 15% reduction in firearm suicide rate while Missouri's repeal of PTP laws yielded a 16% increase in firearm suicide rate (Crifasi, Meyers, Vernick, & Webster, 2015).
- Data on statewide suicide rates were provided by the CDC, and data on state gun legislation were provided by The Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence or the Bureau of Justice Statistics
- However, firearm legislation on the federal level may not be feasible in the US due to Second Amendment rights and strong advocacy of gun rights groups (Mann & Michel, 2016).