

# FIREARMS AND VIOLENCE IN AUSTRALIAN LIFE

*An Examination of Gun Ownership and Use  
in Australia*

RICHARD HARDING



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were owned, handled guns at a young age, etc. Their conclusion is that the use of firearms for self-destruction 'is a function of the normative patterns of socialisation with firearms, which differ for males and females and between regions of the country'.<sup>10</sup>

Whilst the methodology of their socialization survey is not ideal,<sup>11</sup> their findings receive some support from earlier analysis by Newton and Zimring. These researchers compared 1967 general suicide and gun suicide rates in twenty developed countries, and formed the view that 'cultural factors appear to affect suicide rates far more than the availability and use of firearms'.<sup>12</sup>

It seems, then, that whatever arguments might be made for the limitation or regulation of the private ownership of firearms, suicide patterns do not constitute one of them. That is not to deny that, if slower means of self-destruction are utilized, some individuals might be saved and might not subsequently attempt suicide again. Nor is it to discount the possibility that the presence of a firearm in the home may somehow form part of an individual's psychological causal chain, leading to a suicide attempt. However, these points are peripheral to the main issue. It is not an acceptable basis of law-making to legislate for the whole community so as to save a few people from themselves, even if it could in fact be shown that any particular firearms control would achieve such an effect. Gun suicides are a fact of human existence, indistinguishable in moral or social terms from any other means of suicide.