



Domestic Violence and Firearms

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Domestic Violence and Firearms

The role of firearms in domestic violence-related homicides is enormous and beyond controversy. Firearms are used to commit the vast majority of domestic violence-related homicides against women, and the majority of all homicides committed against women involve an intimate partner. Firearms are frequently used in the intimate partner setting to threaten and control women and children with devastating consequences.

Intimate Partner Homicide and Firearms

Many studies have documented the high correlation between gun ownership and intimate partner homicide. The Bureau of Justice Statistics [has reported](#) that a firearm was used to commit more than two-thirds of intimate partner homicides in which a female spouse or ex-spouse is killed (during the period of 1975 to 2005). A [2012 study](#) by the **Violence Policy Center** (VPC), that examined the 1800 homicides of women by men in 2010, reported that of the 1,669 homicides in which the relationship between the victim and offender could be identified, almost two-thirds (1,017) of the women were killed by an intimate partner (husband, ex-husband, common law husband or boyfriend), and over half of those offenders used firearms to commit the murders (574). The number of females shot and killed by their husbands or intimate partners was “nearly six times higher than the total number (of women) murdered by male strangers using all weapons combined.”

[One study](#) supported by the National Institute of Justice found that: [W]omen who were threatened or assaulted with a gun or other weapon were 20 times more likely than other women to be murdered...When a gun was in the house, an abused woman was 6 times more likely than other abused women to be killed.

Another [study](#) that looked at the relationship between intimate partner homicide and firearms found that gun ownership was the most strongly associated variable, or risk factor, with homicide at the hands of a family member or intimate acquaintance.

Intimate Partner Homicide-Suicides and Firearms

In [a separate study](#) the VPC found that firearms were used in eighty-nine point five percent (89.5%) of murder-suicides. Of those murder-suicides the study found that seventy-two percent (72%) involved an intimate partner, and that females were the victims in ninety-four percent (94%) of those intimate partner murder-suicides. Eight-four percent (84%) of intimate partner murder-suicides occurred in the home. That study concluded:

Firearms allow shooters to act on impulse. Every major murder-suicide study ever conducted has shown that a firearm – with its unmatched combination of high lethality and easy availability – is the weapon most often used to murder the victims, with the offenders then turning the guns on themselves. In this study, access to a gun was the critical component for almost all of the murder-suicides.

Firearms Used to Threaten and Control Intimate Partners

In [another study](#) researchers interviewed female domestic violence shelter residents in California, a third of whom reported the presence of a firearm in their home. Of those women, sixty-five percent (65%) of reported that their abuser used a gun to scare, threaten or harm them. According to the study, “Most battered women thought spousal notification/consultation regarding gun purchase would be useful and that a personalized firearm (“smart gun”) in the home would make things worse.”

Federal and State Responses to Firearms’ Role in Intimate Partner Violence

In recognition of the aggravating role firearms play in domestic violence incidents, Congress passed several laws that restrict domestic violence offenders’ access to and use of firearms. States have also enacted firearm restrictions that apply in domestic violence-related cases. The Battered Women’s Justice Project (BWJP) and the National Center on Protection Order and Full Faith and Credit (NCPOFFC) can provide individuals and organizations with information about both state and federal laws on firearms that apply in the domestic violence context.

Continuing Challenges and Future Directions

Effective enforcement of existing firearms prohibitions, on both the state and federal levels, continues to be an ongoing challenge within the field of domestic violence-related policy. The tools, resources, political will and meaningful state/federal partnerships that are necessary to bring real force to existing firearms protections are lacking in many communities. The U.S. Department of Justice’s Office on Violence Against Women with the National Center on Protection Orders and Full Faith and Credit released a report that highlights best practices and provides guidance to communities seeking effective enforcement of federal and state firearm prohibitions.

Law enforcement, prosecutors, judges and domestic violence advocates in communities throughout the country struggle with effecting enforcement of the reasonable firearm restrictions already in statute. However, continued collaboration, information-sharing and implementation of best practices will mitigate the heightened risk posed by the presence of firearms to women and children.

Important Resources

The Battered Women’s Justice Project and the National Center on Protection Orders and Full Faith and Credit offer information on federal firearm prohibitions related to domestic violence.

For more information about domestic violence and firearms:

Futures Without Violence

http://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/userfiles/file/Children_and_Families/Guns.pdf

John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

<http://www.jhsph.edu/research/centers-and-institutes/johns-hopkins-center-for-gun-policy-and-research/publications/RemovingGunsfromIPVOffenders7Oct09.pdf>

Violence Policy Center

<http://www.vpc.org/>

For information on firearm violence generally:

Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence

<http://www.bradycenter.org/>

Coalition to Stop Gun Violence

<http://www.csgv.org/>

<http://www.csgv.org/new-to-the-issue>