

Center for Gun Policy and Research

Factsheet: Firearms and Intimate Partner Violence

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), “intimate partner violence” (IPV) is actual or threatened physical or sexual violence or psychological and emotional abuse directed toward a spouse, ex-spouse, current or former boyfriend or girlfriend, or current or former dating partner. Intimate partners may be heterosexual or of the same sex.¹

Scope of the Problem

Twenty-two percent of women and 7% of men report that they have been physically assaulted by an intimate partner in their lifetime. Among female victims of IPV, 4% report having been threatened with a gun by an intimate partner, and 1% sustained firearm injuries in these assaults.^{2, a}

In 2000, there were almost 17,000 homicides in the U.S.³ While men are more likely to be homicide victims, women are over 3 times more likely to be killed by an intimate partner compared to men.⁴

According to federal data collected from police departments,^b in 2000 approximately 40% of female homicide victims ages 15-50 were killed by either a current or former intimate partner.^a In over half (57%) of these cases, the perpetrator used a gun. Among male victims 15-50 years of age, 3% were killed by either a current or former intimate partner. Half of the male intimate partner homicide victims were killed with a gun.⁵

Among female homicide victims, murders by spouses, ex-spouses, and intimate acquaintances were nearly 7 times more prevalent than murders by strangers. In fact, for every female killed by a stranger, four women were murdered by intimate partners using guns.⁶

In one study, 1 in 4 abused pregnant women ages 14–42 reported that their batterer owned or had access to a gun.⁷

^a Note: For these data, “intimate partner” excludes former intimate partners who were never married.

^b Note: For two reasons, it is likely that these figures are lower than the actual prevalence. First, the data represent approximately 85-90% of police department reports, and therefore do not offer a complete measure of homicides. Secondly, many “friends and acquaintances” relationships reported may in fact be current or former intimate partners.

Firearm Access and Intimate Partner Homicide

Compared to homes without guns, the presence of guns in the home is associated with a 3-fold increased homicide risk within the home. The risk increases to 8-fold when the offender is an intimate partner or relative of the victim and is 20 times higher when previous domestic violence exists.⁸

A study of risk factors for violent death of women in the home found that women living in homes with 1 or more guns were more than 3 times more likely to be killed in their homes. The same study concluded that women killed by a spouse, intimate acquaintance, or close relative were 7 times more likely to live in homes with 1 or more guns and 14 times more likely to have a history of prior domestic violence compared to women killed by non-intimate acquaintances.⁹

Family and intimate assaults with firearms are 12 times more likely to result in death than non-firearm assaults. This research suggests that limiting access to guns will result in less lethal family and intimate assaults.¹⁰

A study of women physically abused by current or former intimate partners revealed a 5-fold increased risk of the partner murdering the woman when the partner owned a firearm.¹¹

Homicide risks were found to be 50% higher for female handgun purchasers in California compared with licensed drivers matched by sex, race, and age group.¹² Among the women handgun purchasers who were murdered, 45% were killed by an intimate partner using a gun. In contrast, 20% of all women murdered in California during the study period were killed with a gun by an intimate partner.¹³

Federal Policies to Prevent Batterers' Access to Firearms

Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994

In 1994, Congress expanded the list of people prohibited from purchasing and possessing firearms to include individuals subject to a court order restraining them from "harassing, stalking, or threatening an intimate partner" or "engaging in other conduct that would place an intimate partner in reasonable fear of bodily injury." This restriction applies only to court orders in which the alleged batterer was present (*ex parte* orders do not apply).

Lautenberg Amendment

Under federal law established by the Lautenberg Amendment in 1996^c, an individual convicted of a domestic violence misdemeanor is prohibited from purchasing a firearm.

A recent federal report on the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) found that from 1998- 2001, 14% of the 200,000 denials for gun purchases generated by NICS were the result of domestic violence misdemeanor convictions.

^c Section 658 of Public Law 104-208.

During the same period, the ATF received almost 3,000 referrals to retrieve firearms sold to individuals who were ineligible to purchase firearms due to a domestic violence misdemeanor. These sales—representing 26% of all referrals to retrieve firearms from proscribed users—occurred because authorities did not complete the background check within the maximum time period allowed by federal law (3 days).¹⁴ At least a dozen states have laws allowing law enforcement more than the federal 3-day limit to complete the background check.

State Policies to Prevent Batterers' Access to Firearms

State laws vary with regard to firearms and intimate partner violence. Some states' laws do not address the topic and rely exclusively on federal law; some states enjoy extensive regulatory systems that far exceed federal law; and other states' laws extend slightly beyond federal protections.^d

Most state laws that address guns and intimate partner violence fall into one of three categories:

1. Laws that permit judges to order batterers to surrender their firearms through court protective orders;
2. Laws that allow law enforcement officers to seize guns when responding to domestic violence calls; and
3. Laws that prohibit people with domestic violence offenses from obtaining a permit to carry concealed firearms.

^d A forthcoming publication from The Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Policy and Research provides a detailed catalog of these laws for each of the fifty U.S. states. This new resource will be available in the summer of 2003.

Further Resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Center for Injury Prevention and Control

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/ncipchm.htm>

The National Center for Injury Prevention and Control provides information, data, and other resources related to injury and violence, including firearms and intimate partner violence.

Family Violence Prevention Fund

<http://endabuse.org>

The FVPF is one of the nation's premiere organizations working to prevent domestic violence and prevent more women and children from having their lives devastated by abuse.

Join Together

<http://www.jointogether.org>

A comprehensive resource for substance abuse and gun violence prevention advocates, policymakers, the media, and others. The website includes downloadable information on domestic violence and guns.

Justice Information Center: A Service of the National Criminal Justice Reference Service

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

The National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS) is one of the most extensive sources of information on criminal and juvenile justice. Articles and publications about domestic violence are available through this website. Information about the National Advisory Council on Violence Against Women is also available on this website.

National Coalition Against Domestic Violence

<http://www.ncadv.org>

The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV) is a membership organization dedicated to the empowerment of battered women and their children and to the elimination of personal and societal violence in the lives of women and their children.

National Crime Prevention Council

<http://www.ncpc.org>

A national non-profit committed to the prevention of crime and violence.

National Network to End Domestic Violence:

<http://www.nnedv.org>

The National Network to End Domestic Violence is a membership and advocacy organization of state domestic violence coalitions, allied organizations and supportive individuals.

Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR)

<http://www.psr.org>

A national organization dedicated to the promotion of public policies that protect human health from a variety of threats, including gun violence. Physicians for Social Responsibility provides information on intimate partner violence and gun violence through its Violence Prevention Program.

US Department of Justice, Violence Against Women Office

<http://www.usdoj.gov/vawo/>

The Violence Against Women Office leads a comprehensive national effort to combine tough new federal laws with assistance to states and localities to fight domestic violence and other crimes against women.

References

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- ¹⁴ United States General Accounting Office, *Gun Control: Opportunities to Close Loopholes in the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (GAO 02-720)*, Washington, DC: July 2002.

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THE JOHNS HOPKINS CENTER FOR GUN POLICY AND RESEARCH is dedicated to reducing gun-related injuries and deaths through the application of a public health perspective to the issue of gun violence prevention. Its faculty and affiliated experts have pioneered innovative strategies for reducing gun violence, and achieved a national reputation for high-quality, policy-relevant research. The Center examines the public health effects of guns in society and serves as an objective resource for the media, policy makers, advocacy groups, and attorneys.

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