

Fact Sheet: Firearms Related Domestic Violence Homicides

One in four women will experience a form of domestic violence at some point in their lives. Women are overwhelmingly impacted by domestic violence, irrespective of socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, religious affiliation and sex. While domestic violence is often dismissed as a private matter, the repercussions are tantamount to a public health epidemic: 15.5 million children in the U.S. live in homes in which they have been exposed to or experienced violence. Studies indicate that women in abusive relationships have significantly higher rates of developing health issues, such as strokes and heart attacks. And, in cases where firearms are involved, the lethality risk for the victim and her family skyrockets.

YWCA USA Position

Since the successful reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) in 2013, YWCA USA remains committed to addressing violence against women and girls through a renewed focus on domestic violence-related homicide reduction. The YWCA urges Congress to pass legislation that addresses the prevalence of firearms related domestic violence homicides by closing key loopholes that endanger the lives of millions of women and families in communities across the country.

YWCA USA firmly believes that enforcing current federal laws related to searching and seizing firearms from individuals charged with sexual and domestic violence offenses and addressing several key loopholes will significantly reduce lethality risks for millions of women seeking protection from their abusers. For instance, expanding the definition of 'intimate partner' to include current and former dating partners is a more accurate because it illustrates that perpetrators are not only limited spouses but can also include boyfriends or partners. Prohibiting convicted stalkers from purchasing or possessing firearms is critical because studies have shown that more often than not, stalkers also commit physical and sexual violence. Finally, granting domestic violence victims with temporary protective orders the same protections as those with permanent orders will save countless lives as the time a woman leaves an abusive relationship is the most dangerous for her.

Facts

- **If you're a woman living in the United States, you are 11 times more likely to die from gun violence than in any other developed nation in the world.** ^[1]
While crime rates in the U.S. have consistently dropped over the past several decades, rates of domestic violence continue to remain high.
- **Guns are the deadly weapon of choice for most perpetrators of domestic violence.** In a nationwide study conducted by the Violence Policy Center (VPC), 52 percent of female homicides by men were committed with the use of a gun,

followed by knives (22%), bodily force (13%), and blunt objects (6%).^[2]

- **Intimate partner homicides account for nearly half of all women killed each year in the United States.** In fact, 55 percent of all women killed by guns are murdered by a current or former partner.^[3]
- **While all people in all communities, irrespective of race, religion, sex, and national origin, experience crime, how it is experienced and perpetrated varies greatly based on gender.** According to VPC, of all women murdered by men, 93% are killed by someone they know.^[4] This is starkly different from how men experience crime and violence, often at the hands of strangers.
- **And, if you're a woman of color, the lethality risk is increased.** African American women are 2.3 times more likely than white women to be shot and killed by an intimate partner.^[5]
- **Perpetrators with access to firearms are five to eight times more likely to kill their partners than those without firearms.**^[6] In fact, the mere presence of a gun in a domestic violence situation increases the risk of homicide for women by five times.
- **While federal law mandates seizure of weapons upon the issuance of a protective order, most states do not adequately comply or follow up on attempts to seize weapons. The failure of states to seize weapons puts domestic violence victims at increased risk of homicide.** The implementation of state laws that restrict access to firearms, increase police staffing to address intimate partner violence, and allow warrantless arrests for perpetrators in violation of issued protective orders have been proven to be effective in decreasing domestic violence-related homicides where firearms are present by 19%, according to a 2010 UC Davis Violence Prevention Research Program study.^[7]
- **32 states have implemented the Lethality Assessment Program (LAP) in at least one jurisdiction within the state to help identify high-risk domestic violence cases to prevent homicides.**^[8] The LAP is a best practice in ensuring that high-risk cases are more easily identifiable. However, there continues to be a lack of understanding on the part of many courts and law enforcement agencies across the country about the immediate need to remove all firearms to ensure the victim's safety.
- **On the state level, many jurisdictions do not implement laws that require confiscating firearms in cases of domestic violence.** Law enforcement agencies have cited a lack of storage space as a reason for not seizing firearms, and other times a lack of human resources capacity due to downsizing that has resulted in smaller or non-existent domestic violence units.^[9]
- **Federal legislation outlines that all weapons should be seized when a protective order has been issued, but most states do not take the steps necessary to confiscate firearms.** In a 2012 report, it was found that prosecutors nationwide filed fewer than 50 cases mandating the surrender of firearms by intimate partners subject to full protective orders.^[10]
- **Dating partners must be included when defining 'intimate partner' in the case of domestic violence.** Nearly 50% of all intimate partner homicides were committed by a current or former dating partner. Between 1976 and 2005, dating partners were

responsible for 35 percent of intimate partner homicides, and the share of intimate partner homicides committed annually by current dating partners has been on the rise. It's critical to expand the definition of who constitutes an 'intimate partner' to include current and former partners.

- **Current federal laws do not prohibit convicted stalkers from purchasing and/or possessing guns. Stalking is a serious crime, and we must treat it as such.** 81% of women stalked by a current or former partner have been physically assaulted by that partner, and 31% report being sexually assaulted. ^[11] Because stalkers have such high incident rates of committing both physical and sexual assault, they must not be permitted to purchase or possess firearms.

[1] Everytown For Gun Safety. Domestic Violence. Retrieved from <http://everytown.org/issue/domestic-violence/>

[2] Violence Policy Center. (September 2014). When Men Murder Women: An Analysis of 2012 Homicide Data. Retrieved from <http://www.vpc.org/studies/wmmw2014.pdf>

[3] Gerney, A. and Parsons, C. (June 2014). Women Under the Gun: How Gun Violence Affects Women and 4 Policy Solutions to Better Protect Them. Retrieved from <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/guns-crime/report/2014/06/18/91998/women-under-the-gun/>

[4] Violence Policy Center. (September 2014). When Men Murder Women: An Analysis of 2012 Homicide Data. Retrieved from <http://www.vpc.org/studies/wmmw2014.pdf>

[5] Violence Policy Center. (September 2014). When Men Murder Women: An Analysis of 2012 Homicide Data. Retrieved from <http://www.vpc.org/studies/wmmw2014.pdf>

[6] Wintemute, G. and Frattoroli, S. (December 2013). Identifying Armed Respondents to Domestic Violence Restraining Orders and Recovering Their Firearms: Process Evaluation of an Initiative in California. Retrieved from

<http://www.ucdmc.ucdavis.edu/vprp/publications/wintemute%20et%20al%20identifying%20armed%20respondents.pdf>

[7] Vittes, K., Webster, D., Frattaroli, S. Claire, B. and Wintemute, G. (August 2013) Removing Guns From Batterers Findings From A Pilot Study of Domestic Violence Restraining Order Recipients in California. Retrieved from

<https://www.ucdmc.ucdavis.edu/vprp/publications/vittes%20removing%20guns%20from%20batterers%20print%20version.pdf>

[8] Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence. Lethality Assessment Program: Nationally. Retrieved from <http://mnadv.org/lethality/lap-nationally/>

[9] WomensLaw.org. State Gun Laws. Retrieved from http://www.womenslaw.org/laws_state_type.php?id=293&state_code=ND&open_id=736

[10] Lou, M. (March 2013). New York Times. In Some States, Gun Rights Trump Orders of Protection. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/18/us/facing-protective-orders-and-allowed-to-keep-guns.html?pagewanted=2&r=2&ref=michaelluo>

[11] Stalking Resource Center. (August 2012) Stalking Fact Sheet. Retrieved from http://www.victimsofcrime.org/docs/src/stalking-fact-sheet_english.pdf?sfvrsn=4