

# ZONTA SAYS NO TO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

## 16 Days of Activism – Day 14

### Guns & Domestic Violence

#### FIREARMS AS TOOLS OF TERROR

Firearms are used to control, terrorize and intimidate victims and survivors of domestic violence. A survey of callers by the National Domestic Violence Hotline found 16% of respondents' abusers had access to firearms. Of those, 10% said the abuser had fired a gun during an argument and 67% believed the abuser was capable of killing her.

#### DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOMICIDE

- In 2013 in the U.S., 941 women were killed by male intimate partners. Most were killed with firearms.
- Women in the U.S. are 11 times more likely to be murdered with a gun than in other high-income nations.
- 1 in 3 female murder victims and 1 in 20 male murder victims are killed by an intimate partner.
- Having a gun in the home increases the risk of intimate partner homicide by at least 500%. In households with a history of domestic violence, the risk increases 2,000%.
- A ten-city study found 1/5 of homicide victims with temporary protective orders are murdered within two days of obtaining the order; 1/3 are murdered within the first month.
- 48.6% of women killed by intimate partners were killed by dating partners.
- 76% of women murdered by intimate partners and 85% of women who survived murder attempts were stalked.
- 44% of mass shootings between 2008 and 2013 involved intimate partners.

#### CURRENT LAW IN MOST STATES

A person who has been convicted of the felony or misdemeanor crime of domestic violence toward a spouse, former spouse, cohabiting intimate partner or a person with whom the offender shares a biological child is prohibited from owning firearms. Likewise, a person under a permanent restraining order is not permitted to own firearms.

#### GAPS IN CURRENT LAW IN MOST STATES

Current law does not prohibit the following people from possessing firearms:

- People convicted of domestic violence against a current or former dating partner.
- People convicted of stalking.
- People under an ex parte (temporary) restraining order.

Many people who are legally prohibited from owning guns are able to purchase them in most states because:

- Local records often do not contain sufficient detail to flag offenders.
- Offenders can purchase firearms at gun shows or from private sellers, thereby bypassing the background check system.

**GUN LAWS and VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

Women in the United States are far more likely to be murdered with guns than they are in any other developed nation.

This violence is directly related to our weak gun laws, and requiring a background check for every gun sale will reduce violence against women and save lives.

**Women in the U.S. are 11 times more likely to be murdered with guns than women in other high-income countries.**

Over 9 in 10 U.S. are killed by intimate partners, and firearms play a key role in many domestic abuse incidents. Over the past 25 years, more than 100,000 women in the U.S. have been murdered with guns that were not other weapons available.

**The presence of a gun in domestic violence situations increases the risk of homicide for women by 500 percent.**

People with a history of domestic violence are more likely to subsequently murder an intimate partner, and firearms significantly increase the risk of homicide for women.

**A majority of mass shootings involve incidents of domestic violence.**

A Mayors Against Illegal Guns analysis of every identified mass shooting between 2009 and 2013 found that in 52 of those 66 incidents (79%), the shooter killed a current or former intimate partner or other family member. In at least 2 of those shootings, the perpetrator had a prior domestic violence charge.

That's why federal law prohibits certain domestic abusers from buying guns.

**54%** of women killed with guns are killed by intimate partners or family members.

**57%** of mass shootings involve domestic violence.

**Background checks have already prevented more than 250,000 GUN SALES TO DOMESTIC ABUSERS...**

When it works properly, the background check system keeps guns out of abusers' hands. Since its inception in 1998, the National Instant Criminal Background Check System has kept thousands from becoming abusers. It's the only federal law that prohibits certain domestic abusers from buying guns.

**...but in 2012, 6.6 MILLION GUNS were exchanged in private transfers without a criminal background check.**

The "private sale loophole" makes it easy for dangerous domestic abusers to avoid background checks and buy guns. Offenders "private sales" — who often sell at gun shows or through an unlicensed online marketplace — are not required by federal law to conduct background checks on potential buyers.

**In states that require a background check for every handgun sale, 38 percent fewer women are shot to death by intimate partners.**

**REQUIRING A BACKGROUND CHECK FOR EVERY GUN SALE WILL SAVE WOMEN'S LIVES.**

**DEMAND ACTION TO END GUN VIOLENCE**

## INVISIBLE WAYS GUNS ARE USED

By [Melissa Jeltsen](#)

Nicole Beverly, a clinical social worker living in Ypsilanti, Michigan, hadn't given her husband's gun much thought until the night he pressed it against her head. Before that, her husband, a former police officer, had never threatened her with his firearm. It sat in a box in their bedroom closet, almost forgotten. Over the years, she said, he had abused her in other ways: calling her names, shoving her to the ground, throwing objects in her direction, but the gun never made an appearance. Once it did, everything changed. From then on, Beverly couldn't stop thinking about the weapon, she said. She was acutely aware of its exact location in the house at any given time, in terror of when it might be brandished next. But he didn't have to take it out again. He only needed to mention it and Beverly would shrink. He frequently threatened to kill her, she said, telling her he knew exactly where to shoot to paralyze her. He told her he would disfigure her face, and that she would never see it coming.

It took five months after the incident for her to gather the courage to leave. And when she did she took the gun. "I didn't feel safe leaving the relationship knowing he had it in his possession because he was threatening me with it on a regular basis," Beverly told *The Huffington Post*. "Once it was introduced into the equation, it became a tool of intimidation and fear." While the gun in her home was never used to injure her in a way that was physically observable, living in constant fear took a steep toll on her mental health and made it far more difficult for her to leave. Beverly represents countless women who've found themselves in similar positions where a firearm becomes a symbolic weapon of mass destruction in their relationships — even when the trigger is never pulled.

A new study published in the *Journal of Women's Health* by Susan B. Sorenson, a researcher at the University of Pennsylvania, is now shedding light on the psychological impact of gun use in abusive relationships. Working with the police department in Philadelphia, Sorenson examined 35,000 domestic violence incidents that occurred in the city in 2013, the most recent year in which complete data was available. She studied the role of guns in domestic incidents, and looked at what effect they had on victims. In the incidents during which an external physical weapon was used, one-third involved guns. When a gun was present, it was rarely fired, Sorenson said. More commonly, 69% of the time, it was used to threaten or coerce the intimate partner, much like Beverly described her husband doing to her. Guns were only fired 10 percent of the time. Though victims who had a gun used against them were less likely to have visible injuries compared to victims who reported the use of other weapons, like knives or bats, they were far more likely to experience high levels of fear. That chronic fear can be extremely detrimental to a person's physical and mental health, said Julian Ford, a professor of psychiatry at the University of Connecticut School of Medicine and Law. If a person does not feel safe inside their own home and believes they could be injured or killed at any time, they will go into a survival state, he said, describing it as being in a constant "fight or flight" mode — but having nowhere to go. "It is enormously hard on the person psychologically and on the body physically," he said.

Experiencing trauma of this kind can make a person more susceptible to medical illnesses, as well as a wide range of emotional and behavioral difficulties including depression, anxiety and sleep problems. "The full range of life is affected because the person cannot really let down their guard," Ford said. A person living in constant fear is more likely to be controlled by it, and subsequently their abusive partner. That overwhelming fear could reduce a victim's willingness to leave or end the relationship, Sorenson said, thus promoting chronic abuse. "You don't necessarily need to hit a woman to get her to do what you want," Sorenson said. That's the concept of "coercive control," a pattern of ongoing behavior used to dominate a partner, she added. It can include psychological, verbal abuse and stalking, and aims to isolate the victim. Firearms can play a big role in helping an abuser to maintain control over his partner.

For Beverly, the mere presence of the gun created feelings of helplessness. "Any reference to it would make me comply," Beverly said. "I knew if he was going to kill me that would be the most likely way he would do it." She said she feared her husband would try and kill her the moment she left. It took months to create a plan with her mother in which she believed she could leave safely, without being shot or worse. Beverly had good reason to be afraid. Most victims who are killed by intimate partners are murdered while attempting to leave, Sorenson said. Her findings illustrate just how powerful firearms are in trapping women in abusive relationships. Women are far less likely to fight back when a gun is present, she said, and are more likely to do what the abuser says to stay safe.

Sorenson's findings show the real need to remove guns from abusers. Domestic violence victims are five times more likely to be killed if their abuser has access to a gun, according to one study. And they frequently are -- every 16 hours, a woman in the U.S. is killed by an intimate partner wielding a gun. Under federal law it's illegal for convicted domestic abusers to own or purchase firearms. But in practice, many states lack enforcement mechanisms to separate abusers from the guns they already own. It's been 8 years since Beverly left her husband. She's still living in Michigan, and her ex-husband is currently in prison on aggravated stalking charges. She said she is still terrified of him and what could happen if he gets out on parole.

**DEMAND CHANGE NOW. SAY NO TO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**