



Guns and Domestic Violence

Bottom Line: When it comes to gun violence against women, the United States is the most dangerous country in the developed world. Domestic violence affects millions of women across the country, and guns in the hands of domestic abusers can turn abuse into murder. Indeed, the presence of a gun in a domestic violence situation makes it five times more likely that the woman will be killed. And the deadly mix of guns and domestic violence is exacerbated by America's weak gun laws: women in the U.S. are 16 times more likely to be shot and killed than are women in other developed nations.

Common sense laws that keep guns out of the hands of domestic abusers—by requiring background checks for all gun sales and ensuring that prohibited abusers relinquish guns in their possession—just make sense. And for victims of domestic abuse, it's a matter of life and death.

Guns and domestic violence are a deadly—and all too common—combination.

- The presence of a gun in a domestic violence situation makes it **five times more likely** that a woman will be killed.¹
- Women in the U.S. are **16 times more likely** to be killed with a gun than women in other high-income countries, making this country the most dangerous in the developed world when it comes to gun violence against women.² Every year American women suffer from **5.3 million incidents of intimate partner violence**.³
- In an average month, **50 American women are shot to death** by intimate partners,⁴ and many more are injured. **Nearly 1 million women alive today have been shot, or shot at,** by an intimate partner.⁵

Abusers use guns to threaten and control their victims, even if they never pull the trigger.

- About **4.5 million American women** alive today have been threatened with a gun by an intimate partner.⁶

Most mass shootings in the U.S. are related to domestic or family violence.

- Everytown's analysis of mass shootings from 2009 to 2016 shows that **in 54 percent of mass shootings, the shooters killed intimate partners** or other family members.⁷

The physical and emotional toll of domestic violence also brings an economic cost.

- Medical, mental health and loss of productivity costs related to domestic violence are estimated at **over \$8 billion each year**.⁸ That figure doesn't even include other costs like legal fees, criminal justice costs, or mental health care for children affected by violence.
- Domestic violence leads to **13.5 million days of lost work** each year.⁹

In many states, gun laws leave victims of domestic abuse unprotected.

- **One in seven unlawful gun buyers stopped by a federal background check is a domestic abuser**.¹⁰ Since its inception in 1998, the federal criminal background check system (NICS) has blocked more than 300,000 gun sales to domestic abusers.¹¹
- However, federal law only requires background checks for gun sales at licensed dealers. While 19 states and Washington D.C. go further and require checks on all handgun sales, in



all other states **abusers can avoid background checks by buying guns from unlicensed sellers** they meet online or at gun shows.

- While federal law prohibits gun possession by certain domestic abusers, it is up to the states to make sure that prohibited domestic abusers actually relinquish their firearms. **Only 15 states require abusers subject to final domestic violence restraining orders to turn in their guns.**¹²

❑ **Background checks and other laws that keep guns out of the hands of domestic abusers save lives.**

- States that require background checks on all handgun sales see **47 percent fewer women shot to death** by intimate partners than states that do not have this requirement.¹³
- Cities in states that restrict access to guns by people subject to domestic violence restraining orders see a **25 percent reduction in intimate partner gun homicides.**¹⁴

¹ Campbell, J. C., Webster, D., Koziol-McLain, J. et al. (2003). Risk factors for femicide in abusive relationships: Results from a multisite case control study. *American journal of public health*, 93(7), 1089-1097.

² Grinshteyn, E., & Hemenway, D. (2016). Violent death rates: the US compared with other high-income OECD countries, 2010. *The American journal of medicine*, 129(3), 266-273.

³ National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. (2003). *Costs of Intimate Partner Violence Against Women in the United States*. Atlanta (GA): Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

⁴ Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Supplementary Homicide Reports, 2010-14*.

⁵ Sorenson, S. B., & Schut, R. A. (2016). Nonfatal Gun Use in Intimate Partner Violence A Systematic Review of the Literature. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 1524838016668589.

⁶ Sorenson, S. B., & Schut, R. A. (2016). Nonfatal Gun Use in Intimate Partner Violence A Systematic Review of the Literature. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 1524838016668589.

⁷ Everytown for Gun Safety. (2017). *Mass Shootings in the United States: 2009-2016*, available at <https://everytownresearch.org/reports/mass-shootings-analysis/>

⁸ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2015). *Intimate Partner Violence: Consequences*, available at <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/consequences.html>.

⁹ National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. (2003). *Costs of Intimate Partner Violence Against Women in the United States*. Atlanta (GA): Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

¹⁰ U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, *NICS Operations Reports, 1998-2013*.

¹¹ Between the inception of the NICS system in 1998 and December 31, 2014, 112,925 gun sales were federally denied due to a misdemeanor crime of domestic violence conviction, and 47,870 gun sales were federally denied due to restraining or protection orders for domestic violence, making a total of 160,795 federal denials related to domestic violence. U.S. Department of Justice, FBI, *NICS Denials: Reasons Why the NICS Section Denies*, Nov. 1, 1998 – Dec. 31, 2014, at <http://1.usa.gov/1k9zURj>. Between 1998 and 2010, state and local agencies issued a total of 945,915 denials, and for agencies that reported reasons for these denials, 13.2 percent were denials for domestic violence reasons — which would represent another 124,861 domestic violence denials. U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Feb. 2013, *Background Checks for Firearms Transfers, 2010–Statistical Tables*, Feb. 2013, at <http://1.usa.gov/Z8vYsa>. Between 2012 and 2014, state and local agencies reportedly issued an additional 18,578 domestic violence related denials. U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Dec. 2014, *Background Checks for Firearms Transfers, 2012–Statistical Tables*, Dec. 2014; U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, June 2016, *Background Checks for Firearms Transfers, 2013-14–Statistical Tables*, June 2016. Thus, overall the background check system has issued an estimated 304,234 denials due to domestic violence-related criteria between 1998 and 2014. This is likely to be an underestimation since it does not include state and local denials data for 2011 and local denials data for 2013.

¹² CA, CO, CT, HI, IA, IL, MA, MD, MN, NC, NH, NY, TN, WA, and WI.

¹³ Everytown for Gun Safety (2017). *Background Checks Reduce Gun Violence and Save Lives*, available at <https://everytownresearch.org/background-checks-reduce-gun-violence-and-save-lives/>.

¹⁴ Zeoli, A. M., & Webster, D. W. (2010). Effects of domestic violence policies, alcohol taxes and police staffing levels on intimate partner homicide in large US cities. *Injury prevention*, 16(2), 90-95.