

# Gun Violence: A Threat to Women and Families

MARCH 2018

Gun violence in the United States is a public health crisis. Guns pose a grave and imminent threat to the safety and well-being of countless women and families. On average, 50 women in this country are shot and killed by intimate partners each month, and one in four deaths in a mass shooting is a child.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the trauma associated with gun violence takes a lasting physical and emotional toll on victims and their families.

The United States leads the world in private gun ownership, despite evidence that the presence of firearms increases the likelihood of homicide and suicide. In fact, every year, guns kill almost 30,000 people and injure another 60,000.<sup>2</sup> Between 2009 and 2016, there were 156 mass shootings<sup>3</sup> in this country – more than half (54 percent) were related to domestic or family violence.<sup>4</sup>

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## Gun violence threatens women's health and security.

The United States is the most dangerous country in the developed world for gun violence against women. Women here are 16 times more likely to be killed with a gun than women in other high-income countries.

In many cases, intimate partner violence escalates to homicide when guns are present.<sup>5</sup> The majority of mass shootings are aimed at partners or family members, and take place in private homes.<sup>6</sup> In many cases, warning signs include threats and acts of violence, as well as violations of protective orders.<sup>7</sup>

Intimate partner violence coupled with guns pose significant risks to the health and well-being of women.

- ▶ Women are five times more likely to be killed during an intimate violence situation when a gun is present.<sup>8</sup>
- ▶ Roughly 4.5 million women report that an intimate partner has threatened them with a gun.<sup>9</sup>

One in seven unlawful gun buyers thwarted by the federal background check system is a domestic abuser.<sup>10</sup> Although the federal background check system is flawed, without it, the number of women harmed by gun violence would be even higher.

## Gun violence is a leading cause of children's deaths.

Firearms are the third leading cause of death for children in the United States.<sup>11</sup> Every year, 1,300 children die from gunshot wounds and another 6,000 children are treated for gun-related injuries.<sup>12</sup> Children often are killed as bystanders in mass shootings or domestic assaults or homicides.<sup>13</sup>

- ▶ Twenty-five percent of victims of mass shootings are children.<sup>14</sup>
- ▶ Forty percent of victims in domestic violence mass shootings are children.<sup>15</sup>

Access to guns plays a significant role in children's deaths. Children are often curious about guns. They touch and play with them, even when instructed not to and often because they believe – incorrectly – that they are unloaded or in safety mode.<sup>16</sup> Access to guns also means that impulsive acts like suicide are more likely to be fatal.<sup>17</sup>

- ▶ In 16 percent of younger children's firearm deaths, guns were mistaken for toys.<sup>18</sup>
- ▶ More than half of school shooters who are minors obtained the gun from home.<sup>19</sup>

## Gun violence causes disproportionate harm to communities of color.

Many communities of color, and Black communities in particular, are plagued by gun violence. The majority of gun violence victims are people of color.<sup>20</sup> Gun violence plays a significant role in disrupting Black family stability, and Black children's exposure to gun violence stymies the potential human capital of Black communities.

- ▶ Black, Latino and American Indian children are more likely to be killed by firearms than white children.<sup>21</sup>
- ▶ From 2012 to 2014, almost 10 times more Black children were killed by firearms each year than white children.<sup>22</sup>
- ▶ Black children are twice as likely to be unintentionally killed by firearms as white children.<sup>23</sup>

## Policymakers should move swiftly to enact comprehensive gun safety legislation.

Gun violence is a public health emergency and should be treated as such. Methods and diligence used to address crises like clean drinking water and opioid use disorders should be applied to stemming gun violence. Policymakers need to act quickly and decisively to protect women and families from this epidemic.

- ▶ Comprehensive policies should address factors that lead to intimate partner gun violence, gun violence in communities of color, mass shootings and other types of gun violence.
- ▶ Without incorporating mental illness or disability into discussions, policymakers should pursue common-sense approaches to ending gun violence. For example, they should fund robust public health research on gun violence and support programs

targeted at violence prevention, de-escalation and harnessing community power to effectively manage interpersonal conflict without the use of firearms.

- ▶ Policymakers should strengthen policies that reduce access to guns, such as expanded, meaningful background checks; gun buy-back programs; and restrictions on civilian access to military-grade weapons, large capacity magazines and firearms designed for rapid killing. Policies that limit access to guns are successful.<sup>24</sup> For example, there is a 25 percent reduction in intimate partner gun deaths in cities that restrict and enforce prohibition of guns for those under domestic violence protective orders.<sup>25</sup>

Gun violence is a real crisis in this country that is causing grave and lasting harm to countless families and communities. The status quo is simply unsustainable. The time for solutions is now.

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<sup>1</sup> Everytown for Gun Safety. (2017 March). *Mass Shootings in the United States: 2009-2016*. Retrieved 15 March 2018, from [https://everytownresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Analysis\\_of\\_Mass\\_Shooting\\_062117.pdf](https://everytownresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Analysis_of_Mass_Shooting_062117.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Weinberger, S.E., Hoyt, D.B., Lawrence, H.C., Levin, S., Henley, D.E., Alden, E.R., . . . Hubbard, W.C. (2015). Firearm-related injury and death in the United States: a call to action from 8 health professional organizations and the American Bar Association. *Annals of internal medicine*, 162(7), 513-516. Retrieved 15 March 2018, from <http://annals.org/aim/fullarticle/2151828/firearm-related-injury-death-united-states-call-action-from-8>

<sup>3</sup> Mass shooting is defined as a shooting where four or more people are shot and killed, not including the shooter.

<sup>4</sup> Everytown for Gun Safety. (2017 October). *Guns and Domestic Violence*. Retrieved 15 March 2018, from <https://everytownresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Guns-and-Domestic-Violence-10.11.17.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Intimate partner violence is defined as “the infliction of physical, sexual, or psychological harm by a current or former partner or spouse.” National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Preventing Intimate Partner Violence Across the Lifespan: A Technical Package of Programs, Policies, and Practices*. Retrieved 15 March 2018 from <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/ipv-technicalpackages.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> See note 1, p. 7.

<sup>7</sup> See note 1, p. 7; see note 1, p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> See note 4.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Fowler, K.A., Dahlberg, L.L., Haileyesus, T., & Annett, J.L. (2015). Firearm injuries in the United States. *Preventive Medicine*, 79, 5-14. Retrieved 15 March 2018, from <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2017/06/15/peds.2016-3486>

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> See note 11, p.5.

<sup>14</sup> See note 1, p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Everytown for Gun Safety. (2015 April). *Analysis of School Shootings*. Retrieved 15 March 2018, from <https://everytownresearch.org/documents/2015/04/analysis-of-school-shootings.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> See note 11, p. 8.

<sup>18</sup> See note 11, p. 6.

<sup>19</sup> See note 1, pg. 2.

<sup>20</sup> Everytown for Gun Safety. (2016, June). *Strategies for Reducing Gun Violence in American Cities*. Retrieved 22 March 2018, from <https://everytownresearch.org/documents/2016/06/strategies-reducing-gun-violence-american-cities.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> See note 4.

<sup>22</sup> See note 11, p.4.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> See note 1, p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> See note 1, p. 4.

The National Partnership for Women & Families is a nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy group dedicated to promoting fairness in the workplace, reproductive health and rights, access to quality health care and policies that help women and men meet the dual demands of work and family. More information is available at [NationalPartnership.org](http://NationalPartnership.org).

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