Guns and Violence Against Women

A Summary of Key Challenges and Solutions

By Marissa Edmund  January 28, 2022

Gun violence in the United States is a public health crisis. Every day, more than 100 people are killed with a firearm, more than 200 are nonfatally injured, and more than 1,000 are threatened with a gun.¹ There are many forms of gun violence, each affecting communities differently, and women in particular are uniquely affected.

More than 11,000 women in the United States were killed with a gun between 2015 and 2019, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.² While men suffer even higher rates of gun violence, women are often targeted for violence because of their sex and are frequently victims of people they know well. Every month, an average of 57 women are killed with a firearm by an intimate partner.³

The impact of gun violence against women goes beyond fatal encounters. A 2016 study found that nearly 1 million women alive at that time had been shot by an intimate partner, and 4.5 million women had been threatened with a firearm.⁴ Firearms have long been used as a tool of power and control to instill fear and inflict abuse on women—with women of color, people in the LGBTQ community, and women with disabilities being disproportionately affected.⁵

This summary examines five key challenges and solutions around firearms and gender-based violence in the United States.

5 key challenges around firearms and gender-based violence

1. **Guns used in an intimate partner context:** A significant portion of firearm violence against women occurs in an intimate partner context, with a disproportionate impact on women of color. Firearms are used in intimate partner violence more than any other weapon.⁶ According to data from the FBI’s supplemental homicide reports, from 2010 to 2019, more than 50 percent of homicides of women perpetrated by an intimate partner involved the use of a gun.⁷
2. **Gender-based violence perpetrated by strangers and acquaintances**: Gender-based violence by nonintimate partners, particularly targeting women of color, reveals the harmful consequences of easy access to firearms by misogynistic and racist individuals. In March 2021, a gunman entered three spas in Atlanta and the surrounding area and fatally shot eight people. Seven of the victims were women, and six were Asian women. In the past year, the group Stop AAPI Hate has compiled 6,600 reported incidents of discrimination or violence against the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community.

3. **Transgender women targeted by gun-related hate crimes**: Transgender women, particularly trans women of color, experience disproportionate effects from gun-related hate crimes. In 2021, at least 45 transgender or gender-nonconforming people—most of whom were Black or transgender women of color—were shot or killed by other violent means. Between 2017 and 2019, 74 percent of homicides of transgender people involved a gun.

4. **The harmful effects of COVID-19 on gun violence against women**: Intersecting crises, including the economic recession resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, have led to spikes in gun violence against women. Early estimates found that there was an 8 percent increase in reports of domestic violence during the months immediately following stay-at-home orders in early 2020. Simultaneously, the United States saw record-high levels of gun sales, which potentially puts people in domestic violence situations at even greater risk.

5. **Political actors block gun reform and promote dangerous narratives**: Gun lobbyists and manufactures promote gender-stereotyped narratives to promote widespread gun ownership despite empirical evidence that demonstrates how dangerous the weapons really are. The presence of a gun during a domestic violence situation increases the likelihood that a death will occur by 400 percent, no matter who owns the firearm.

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**Effective policy solutions**

- **Disarm domestic abusers**: Close loopholes in legislation that allow dangerous people to access firearms.
- **Close the gender wage gap**: Fair and equitable pay allows survivors to leave abusive relationships and provide for their families.
- **Address online hate speech**: Misogynist and racist individuals commune in online forums that result in dangerous situations in real life.
- **Reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act with key improvements**: Each reauthorization creates an opportunity to enhance protections for survivors of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual violence, and stalking.
Endnotes


7 Center for American Progress analysis of Kaplan, “Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Data.”


9 Ibid.


