



GUN VIOLENCE

Access to weapons is a significant lethality factor in intimate partner violence (IPV).¹ Statistics show that most domestic violence homicides are perpetrated with a firearm.² In addition, an abuser's ability to threaten harm or death to the primary victim, relatives, friends or even suicide, becomes a powerful control and manipulation tactic made more potent with firearms in the home. Firearms cause serious health concerns, not solely from the life-threatening injuries they cause, but additionally from the stress and fear that their mere presence often implies for victims of IPV.

PREVALENCE

- Female IPV victims are **five times more likely to be killed** by their partner if the abuser owns a firearm.¹
- Intimate partner violence involving a firearm is **12 times more likely to result in the victim's death** than assaults involving other weapons or bodily force.²
- **Firearms were responsible for two-thirds of all IPV homicides** involving current and former spouses between 1990 and 2005.³
- On average, **600 women are shot to death by an intimate partner** in the U.S. every year.⁴
- In FY17, **46 people died due to IPV in Maryland**, including 11 completed or attempted murder-suicides. **Firearms were responsible for 67%** of these deaths.⁵
- Mass shootings (in which a shooter selects four or more people indiscriminately) often involve perpetrators with IPV-linked motivation or those who have IPV in their background. **Over half of the mass shootings between January 2019 and July 2015 involved a shooter who killed an intimate partner** or family member.⁶

EFFECTS

The physical health consequences of gun violence are perhaps obvious. Death is a frequent outcome, particularly as the abuser may be resolutely intent on killing the victim and have increased access to him or her. Non-fatal shootings can result in long-term or permanent disability.

Surviving gun violence may bring mental health consequences. Perhaps less apparent are the mental health and stress-related health effects of having been threatened with a gun or in situations in which one fears for his or her life. Depression, anxiety, PTSD and related mental health problems can occur; as can GI conditions, headache and other somatic complaints.



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INTERVENTIONS

- Health care professionals should screen for IPV with all patients. For those who screen positive, further screen for the abuser's access to firearms.
- Educate patients on the risks of access to weapons in abusive relationships.
- Refer to local Domestic Violence Service Provider for support, safety planning, legal assistance and resources.

RESOURCES

Be aware of legal protections available to victims:

- A Protective Order (PO), a type of civil restraining order for intimate partners and family relations, has a mechanism to remove guns from the respondent. Patients can file for a PO with a Court Commissioner.
- An Extreme Risk Protective Order (ERPO) is designed to eliminate a dangerously mentally unstable individual's access to weapons. These civil orders can be filed against anyone in the community, not just abusive partners. The patient would need to contact law enforcement with concerns since officers can make the determination to file. Note: mental health providers may also file if they have safety concerns for someone in treatment.

REFERENCES

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