



The Ultimate Instrument of Power and Control Guns and Domestic Violence

The recent high profile murders of Reeva Steenkamp and Kasandra Perkins at the hands of Oscar Pistorius and Jovan Belcher sear the heart and provide a vivid reminder of the deadly end game of intimate partner violence involving firearms. In Washington State and around the country guns are used on a daily basis to control, coerce and terrorize women in their homes. At times, the result is carnage.

The facts about the always dangerous, sometimes lethal mix of guns and domestic violence:

- Almost one-third of all women murdered in the United States are killed by a current or former partner.¹
- Access to firearms increases the risk of intimate partner homicide more than five times as compared to instances in which there are no weapons. Abusers who possess guns tend to inflict the most severe abuse on their partners.²
- Between 1976 and 2005, more than two-thirds of the spouse and ex-spouse victims in the United States were killed by firearms, and girlfriend victims were killed by guns 56% of the time.³
- In Washington State, abusers used firearms to kill 55% of their victims. In at least 55% of homicides by abusers, the victim had left the abuser or was trying to leave.⁴

¹ Bureau of Justice Statistics cited in *The Facts on Guns and Domestic Violence*, Futures Without Violence.

² *The Facts on Guns and Domestic Violence*, Futures Without Violence; *Risk Factors for Femicide in Abusive Relationships: Results from a Multi-Site Case Control Study*, American Journal of Public Health, 2003.

³ Bureau of Justice Statistics cited in "Rush Limbaugh Dismisses Guns' Role in Domestic Violence Deaths"- Solange Uwimana, Media Matters for America.

⁴ *2011 Domestic Violence Fatalities in Washington State*, Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence.

- Domestic violence misdemeanor convictions and restraining orders were the second most common reason for denials of handgun purchase applications between 1994 and 1998.⁵
- The incidence of non-lethal use of firearms in cases of domestic violence cannot be accurately documented. While there are cases of non-lethal shootings, there are even more incidences of guns used to threaten, control or coerce victims. These situations do not always involve a gun pointed at a victim, and can include such tactics as an abuser carrying either a concealed or visible gun at all times, keeping a gun in sight within rooms the victim frequents, or taking out a gun for cleaning in front of the victim. In the context of ongoing abuse, these actions are subtly, but markedly threatening.
- The effects of firearm-related domestic violence last long beyond the actual incidents. In a study on child witnesses of marital violence, the authors noted that children who observed incidents of domestic violence involving the use or threat of a firearm exhibited higher levels of behavior problems than children who did not.⁶
- The causes of domestic violence are complex, but often include learned behavior through witnessing a parent engage in partner abuse. In this sense, gun violence in the home today will likely have a profound impact on generations to come.

Take the First Step to End Domestic Gun Violence

The time is NOW to educate your family and friends about the role guns play in escalating domestic violence, and to urge your legislators to step up for change. These four initiatives will make life safer for women, children and men in our community:

- **Institute universal background checks for gun purchasers in Washington State.** Federal law requires that only licensed firearm dealers conduct criminal background checks on gun purchasers. While the Domestic Violence Offender Gun Ban already prohibits those convicted of domestic violence or restrained by protection orders from possessing firearms, they can currently purchase guns from unlicensed sellers at gun shows, on the internet, or through other private sales. To remedy this, HB 1588 has been introduced in the Washington State House of Representatives. This legislation would require a background check on the sale of any firearm, other than an antique firearm, when both the seller and purchaser are not licensed as dealers under state law. It also provides that the background check must be conducted by a dealer or local law enforcement agency and include a check of the National Instant Criminal Background Check

⁵ *A National Estimate: Presale Handgun Checks, the Brady Interim Period 1994-98, 1999.*

⁶ *Facts on Firearms and Domestic Violence, Violence Policy Center.*

System. Call your legislators and Governor Inslee today to voice your support for this bill!

- **Support Washington State legislation to align Washington’s firearm restrictions with existing federal law.** Current Washington law provides that courts can order an abuser to surrender firearms in a protection order if there is a finding that the domestic violence perpetrator used or threatened to use a firearm in committing a crime. Although individuals restrained by domestic violence protection orders are already violating federal law by possessing a firearm, law enforcement does not remove firearms from abusers, even when responding to a domestic violence incident. When courts do order the surrender of firearms in a protective order, frequently there is no process in place to remove and store them.⁷
- **Increase federal support for consistent implementation of the Domestic Violence Offender Gun Ban, domestic violence homicide reduction initiatives, lethality assessments and model protocols, and domestic violence services.**⁸ Efforts to develop protocols for removal of guns and ensure consistent enforcement of the Domestic Violence Offender Gun Ban among other initiatives will be strengthened if increased federal investments are made to support them.
- **Fund gun violence research.** On January 16th President Obama lifted a virtual ban on gun research by instructing the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other agencies to conduct more gun violence research. Congress has instituted restrictions on federal funding for gun violence research at the CDC since 1996, and at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) since 2011. The law prohibits research that “advocates or promotes gun control,” and its vague wording has virtually frozen gun research during these years. President Obama’s request for Congress to approve \$10 million for research on violence prevention will likely face strong resistance among advocates for unregulated gun ownership.⁹

Remember, through your outreach and advocacy, YOU can take the first step to end domestic violence!



Revised 2/19/13

⁷ Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence Fact Sheet.

⁸ “NNEDV Applauds Obama Administration’s Proposed Gun Violence Policies,” National Network to End Domestic Violence.

⁹ “President Obama Pledges to Lift Restrictions on Federally Funded Gun Research,” Union of Concerned Scientists, January 16, 2013; “Obama Lifts Ban on Funding Gun Violence Research,” Science Insider.