THE INTERSECTION OF GUNS AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN VIRGINIA

Overview

Nearly 1 million women alive today have been shot or shot at by an intimate partner, and about 4.5 million women -1 in 27- have had an intimate partner threaten them with a gun. When an abusive partner has access to a firearm, the risk the other partner will die increases more than five-fold. Nationally, half of all intimate partner homicides (IPH) are by firearm. In Virginia, on average, 62% of IPH are by firearm.

Domestic violence homicide by firearm is a uniquely American problem: American women are 21 times more likely to be killed with a gun than women in other high-income countries, and nearly 92% of all women killed by guns in high-income countries were American.

Laws that reduce abusers’ access to firearms are associated with reductions in intimate partner homicide. Virginia law must be strengthened to protect victims of domestic violence.

Family and Intimate Partner Homicide in Virginia

Family and intimate partner (FIP) homicide includes intimate partner homicide (IPH), victims killed by family members (related biologically, by marriage, or by other legal arrangements), those caught in the crossfire of an intimate partner violence or familial incident, those killed in an incident directly related to an intimate partner or familial conflict, such as children or law-enforcement officers, and individuals killed by a caregiver.

In 2015, there were 124 homicides related to FIP violence in Virginia, and 56.5% (n=70) were committed with a firearm. Each week, more than 1 Virginian is shot and killed as a result of a FIP homicide.

In 2015, the most recent year in which data is available, nearly one in three homicides in Virginia was related to FIP violence.

Intimate Partner Homicide in Virginia

Forty-five and a half percent of IPH victims were killed by a current dating partner, while 40.7% of IPH victims were killed by current spouses.

Intimate Partner Homicide Disproportionately Impacts Women

In 2015, there were 55 intimate partner homicides (IPH) in Virginia. Women make up half of Virginia’s population but nearly three-quarters of IPH victims. In 2015, nearly 66% of IPH victims were killed with firearms.

Family and Intimate Partner Violence Disproportionately Impacts Communities of Color

- Individuals in communities of color in Virginia make up less than one-third of Virginia’s population but half of the Commonwealth’s FIP homicide victims.
- The highest death rate for FIP homicide victims is among Black Virginians.
- In 2015, Black Virginians died by IPH at a rate 2.4 times higher than White Virginians. In 2015, Black women died by IPH at a rate 1.8 times higher than White women.
Policy Recommendations

Virginia law should:

- Prohibit people convicted of misdemeanor crimes of domestic violence and violent misdemeanors from purchasing and possessing firearms.
- Prohibit people subject to all domestic violence protective orders from purchasing and possessing firearms.
- Prohibit abusive dating partners from purchasing and possessing firearms.
- Remove guns from domestic abusers.

**BOTTOM LINE:** Guns and domestic violence are a lethal combination. Virginia law must be strengthened to protect victims and survivors of domestic violence.

Resources

To learn more about:

- Virginia law related to domestic violence and firearms, visit: [https://www.disarmdv.org/state/virginia/](https://www.disarmdv.org/state/virginia/)

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2 United States Census. *American FactFinder.*
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
8 In Virginia, Intimate Partner Homicide is defined as: A homicide in which the victim was killed by one of the following: spouse (married or separated) or former spouse; current or former boyfriend, girlfriend or same-sex partner; or current or former dating partner. This case type could include homicides in which only one of the parties had pursued or perceived a relationship with the other, as in some stalking cases.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
12 United States Census. *Quick Facts.*