



16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDER VIOLENCE
16 DÍAS DE ACTIVISMO CONTRA LA VIOLENCIA DE GÉNERO
16 JOURS D'ACTIVISME CONTRE LA VIOLENCE DE GENRE
25 NOV - 10 DEC <http://16dayscwgl.rutgers.edu>



INFORMATION SHEET #2

This document was authored by the IANSA Women's Network

The Proliferation of Small Arms and their Role in Domestic Violence -

Perhaps most shockingly, the greatest risk of gun violence to women around the world is not on the streets, or the battlefield, but in their own homes. All over the world, in every class, race and caste, in every religion and region, there are men who subject their intimate partners to either physical or psychological violence, or in many cases, both.

Family killings are the only category of homicides where women outnumber men as victims. When a woman is killed in the home, it is her partner or male relative who is most likely to be the murderer, often with a prior record of domestic abuse. Gun violence can be part of the cycle of intimidation and aggression that many women experience from an intimate partner. For every woman killed or physically injured by firearms, many more are threatened. Why are guns so deadly in domestic assaults? One reason is the severity of the wounds caused by bullets, which are highly destructive of human tissue. Another reason is that the presence of a firearm, with its threat of lethality, diminishes a woman's capacity for resistance. The trauma of being threatened by a husband or partner is all the greater when he brandishes a gun and there is a very real danger of being killed. The wife of a US soldier told researchers, "He would say, 'You will do this, or ...,' and he would go to the gun cabinet."

The issue of guns in the home is fundamentally linked to the wider issue of disarmament. Of the nearly 900 million small arms in the world today, more than 75% are in the hands of private individuals - most of them men - and stored in homes. A gun in the home is much more likely to be used to intimidate or physically injure family members than be used against an outside intruder.

This year the 16 Days Campaign is addressing one of the most serious aspects of small arms proliferation: the deaths and injuries caused by guns in the home. For example, in France and South Africa, one in three women killed by their husbands is shot; in the USA this rises to two in three. The home is traditionally considered to be a safe haven, but when a gun is present, the risk of death is multiplied. This is confirmed by a shocking statistic: women are three times more likely to die violently if there is a gun in the house. When considering violent crime, it's natural to focus on the role of illegal small arms. However, most firearms used in domestic homicides are legal. It is also important to consider the misuse of guns by the security sector, including police officers and soldiers, when off-duty.

Gun-related violence in domestic contexts also affects those in post-conflict countries, where guns circulate in the community, and post-conflict stress, limited economic prospects and a reduction in basic services combine to exacerbate the problem of domestic violence.

"While male dominated societies often justify small arms possession through the alleged need to protect vulnerable women, women actually face greater danger of violence when their families and communities are armed."

-Barbara Frey, UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights

Anonymous Account, El Salvador

My husband was very upset because I was not at home; I had gone to the supermarket. When I arrived, I showed him the receipt as evidence, but he ignored me. He started to insult me and offended me with vulgar words. The following day, he was putting his gun in the case. He told me that I was the worst mistake of his life and that he hated me. He left the gun on the table and told me, "Go to bed now, you won't wake tomorrow." I was so scared, my head and stomach were hurting. He carried on telling me he was going to cut off my breast, to make a necklace with my fingers and he would give everything to see me suffer physically and mentally. The gun was still on the table. He took it and threatened me. The fear invaded me so I reported him to the police. Last May, he told me he would kill both of us. I responded that I did not want to die because of our child. He put the gun to his forehead. The lights were down and he carried on threatening me with the gun, saying how much he wanted to kill me. I am really scared. He is very violent and keeps on threatening me very often. I cannot sleep at night because I think I may not wake up anymore. He could torture me. My husband works as a private security officer. His gun is legal. There should be more control. He could kill me any time.

Suggested Actions

The 'Disarm Domestic Violence' Campaign – IANSA Women's Network

This is the first international campaign to address one of the most serious, but least-known, aspects of violence against women – deaths and injuries caused by guns in the home, http://www.iansa-women.org/disarm_dv

- **Lobby to change laws:** Disarm perpetrators of domestic violence. Lobby for gun laws that prohibit ownership by domestic violence offenders, and for domestic violence laws that require the removal of guns. At a minimum, police should be required to consult the spouse or former spouse before approving a gun license application. Australia, Canada, South Africa, and Trinidad and Tobago are among the countries that have harmonized their legal frameworks on gun licensing and domestic violence. Such laws both shape and reflect values, specifically reinforcing values of nonviolence; they can also make a real difference. Canada tightened its gun laws in 1995 and by 2003 the gun murder rate dropped by 15% overall, and by 40% for women.
- **Treat intimate partner and family violence as a serious crime and protect and support women who report it:** Women often do not report intimate partner violence, either because they are too fearful or lack access to the police or the justice system. Governments must ensure that criminal justice systems encourage women to report violence in the home, provide support for them when they do, and penalize the perpetrators.
- **Train law enforcement officials to address armed intimate partner and family violence:** Local law enforcement officers are often the first to respond to, and intervene in, instances of domestic violence. Police should be trained to respond to such violence sensitively, effectively, and lawfully.
- **Require all guns to be stored safely:** Gun owners should be required to store guns securely and to keep the ammunition in a separate place. In Belarus guns must be kept in locked boxes, disassembled and unloaded, with the ammunition stored separately.
- **Call for a strong and effective Arms Trade Treaty:** An Arms Trade Treaty should contain the highest possible, legally-binding standards for the international transfer of conventional weapons, including small arms and ammunition, within its scope. The transfer of arms should be forbidden if there is a substantial risk that they will be used to perpetrate acts of armed violence, especially gender based violence.

Resources

- Family Violence Prevention Fund. "The Facts on Guns and Domestic Violence." http://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/userfiles/file/Children_and_Families/Guns.pdf
- Hemenway, David. (2 February 2011) "Risks and Benefits of a Gun in the Home." *American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine*. <http://ajl.sagepub.com/content/early/2011/02/01/1559827610396294.full.pdf+html>
- IANSA Women's Network. (2009) "Disarm Domestic Violence: Key Initial Findings." <http://www.iansa-women.org/node/238>
- Violence Policy Center. "Facts on Firearms and Domestic Violence." http://www.vpc.org/fact_sht/domviofs.htm

Websites

- Disarm Domestic Violence Campaign: http://www.iansa-women.org/disarm_dv
- Disarm Domestic Violence Campaign Bulletin and Action Kit: <http://www.iansa-women.org/node/244>
- Armed Domestic Violence, Infer Trust: http://www.infertrust.org/armed_domestic_violence.asp
- Guns and Domestic Violence, Gun Policy News: http://www.infertrust.org/armed_domestic_violence.asp