

Small Arms and Women

Small arms have devastating impacts on women because:

- **Women deal with the consequences of small arms violence on a daily basis**
- **Sexual violence at gunpoint is used as a weapon of war**
- **Legal small arms are just as dangerous to women as illegal guns**

Every year thousands of women are shot, traumatised, intimidated, enslaved, robbed and raped at gunpoint around the world. However, men are more likely to make, sell, buy, own, use or misuse small arms. They are also more likely to be killed or physically injured by them. The damage that women suffer from the availability and misuse of guns is disproportionate to their own role as owners or users. For every woman who is killed or injured by a firearm there are many more who are threatened, both in domestic situations and in war zones.

In conflict and post conflict zones such as Afghanistan, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the former Yugoslavia, sexual violence, used as a weapon of war, occurs at the barrel of a gun. Women and girls as young as ten have been abducted at gunpoint from their homes. While women are often the victims in conflicts they also participate as combatants, and in support roles providing information, food, clothing and shelter, as well as bearing the long-term burden of caring for the sick and injured.

The majority of internally displaced people and refugees are women and children. In refugee camps, which should be a place of safety, many women and girls are routinely gang raped and abused.

With the adult male population greatly diminished, women often become the main provider for their devastated families during and after a conflict. Despite this, women are frequently excluded from post-conflict decision-making, which means that their needs in disarmament and demobilisation processes are not adequately addressed.

In non-conflict zones women are much more likely to be shot by someone they know well, usually a husband or an intimate acquaintance using a legally held weapon. A gun in the home is significantly more likely to be used against a member of that household than against an intruder.

Women have taken leadership roles in organising locally, nationally, regionally and internationally to highlight the dangers of gun violence and to campaign for legislative change. Despite this, women are still underrepresented in decision-making processes. One step forward has been the Security Council's Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, passed in October 2000, which provides a platform for women's voices to be heard in war zones and the aftermath.

Organisations concerned with violence against women are at the forefront of small arms campaigns. The Women's Network of the International Action Network on Small Arms aims to support organisations to mobilise, energise, organise, and resist gun violence in their communities and to ensure that the experiences and views of women are adequately represented in decision-making forums.

** Small arms are weapons that can be carried and used by one or two people, including handguns, assault rifles, machine guns, grenade launchers, anti-tank or anti-aircraft guns and light mortars. Light weapons, ammunition, grenades, landmines, and explosives are also part of this category.*