

Women, Gun Violence and the Home

Intimate partner violence is the most common form of violence in women's lives worldwide. At least one in every three women will be physically abused at least once in their lifetime. Women are more likely to be abused in their own homes than anywhere else, and their abuser is most likely to be a husband, boyfriend or other male relative.

Guns make intimate partner violence more deadly.

When intimate partner violence involves the use of a gun, the risk to a woman's life increases dramatically. A gun increases the chance of death by 12 times compared to other means of violence. In France, which has 30 guns per 100 people, 33% of women killed by their partners are shot. In the US, which has 96 guns per 100 people, this percentage rises to 66%. In South Africa, a woman is shot dead by her current or former partner every six hours. Gun violence is more deadly than other types of violence because gunshots are more likely to inflict severe, life-threatening wounds and because the very presence of a gun reduces the likelihood of a victim escaping or of outsiders intervening to assist them. As one woman victim put it, "You can run away from physical abuse, but you can't run away from bullets."

A gun in the home makes a woman less safe.

Rather than providing protection to women, guns increase the risk of homicide in the home. A gun in the home is much more likely to be used to intimidate or physically injure a family member than to be used against an outside intruder. Women who live with a gun in their home are more likely to be shot and killed than those who do not live with guns. In the US, having a gun in the home increases the overall risk of someone in the household being murdered by 41%. For women, however, the risk of death is tripled. Having a gun in the home also increases the risk of accidents.



For every woman killed or injured by firearms, many more are threatened.

Even when guns are not fired at women directly, they are often used as a tool of intimidation to facilitate rape and other types of physical and psychological violence against women. For example, women all across the world have reported that their partners have used their guns to frighten them into submission, for example by shooting family pets or bringing their guns out for cleaning.

Legally held guns are just as dangerous as illegal ones.

Women are just as or more likely to be killed by a legally-owned firearm than an illegal one. Although law enforcement in most countries focuses on illegal handguns and crime, legal firearms are the primary weapons used in domestic homicides.

Women, Gun Violence and the Home

What can be done?

The policies most likely to reduce the risk to women in their everyday lives are those that focus on how private individuals acquire guns and how they store them. IANSA Women's Network members are lobbying governments to:

- **Treat intimate partner and family violence as a serious crime and protect and support women who report it.**

In many countries, women do not report intimate partner violence either because they are too fearful, they lack access to the police or justice system, or they feel there is little point in reporting crimes which will not be taken seriously. Governments must ensure that their criminal justice systems encourage women to report violence in the home, provide support for them when they do, and treat domestic violence as a serious offence.

- **Disarm perpetrators of intimate partner and family violence.**

All weapons belonging to perpetrators of family violence should be compulsorily seized by the police, as is the case in Australia, New Zealand and in parts of the US. Police should also be given the power to remove weapons from an alleged abuser at the victim's request, as is the case in South Africa.



- **Refuse new guns to perpetrators of intimate partner and family violence.**

States should make it compulsory for anyone who wants to own a gun to obtain a licence, and should refuse licenses to those with a history of violence in the home or community.

- **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. For example, in Belarus guns must be kept in locked boxes, disassembled and unloaded, with the ammunition stored separately. Some women's groups have also proposed a ban on keeping guns in private homes. Instead they would have to be stored in secure storage facilities, for example at an authorised gun club or police station.

- **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 intimate partner and family violence. Police should be trained to respond to such violence sensitively, effectively, and lawfully.

Women and Armed Conflict

Although most armed conflicts are fought primarily by male combatants, women and children increasingly make up the majority of victims affected by violence. Armed groups regularly commit violence against women, including mass rape.

Women play many different roles in the context of armed conflict.



Women are not just victims of armed conflict; they are also survivors, caregivers, leaders and peacemakers. They may participate in conflicts, either against their will or voluntarily, as combatants, nurses, cooks, or sex workers. Women and girls are now recruited as a matter of course by armed groups in many countries.

Women are particularly vulnerable to sexual crimes during armed conflict.

Sexual violence against women during conflict has recently reached epidemic proportions. Sometimes the sexual violence is opportunistic; sometimes it is used as a deliberate military and political tactic. In societies where ethnicity is inherited through the male line, “enemy” women are raped and forced to bear children. Women are kidnapped and used as sexual slaves to service troops, as well as to cook for them and carry their loads from camp to camp. They are also purposely infected with HIV.

Women are disproportionately affected by the social and economic impacts of armed conflict.

During wartime, the responsibilities of women increase when their male relatives are on the battlefield. Women often become the main breadwinners and primary carers when male relatives are killed, injured or disabled by gun violence. Their work is usually unpaid and unacknowledged. Women are disproportionately affected by the damage to health, education and other social services caused by armed violence. Conflict often results in mass movements of the civilian populations as people are forced to flee their homes. Most of the world’s displaced people are women and children, who become particularly vulnerable to starvation and disease. In refugee camps, displaced women must contend with sexual attacks and gun violence as they care for their families.



Family violence increases during and after conflict.

The brutalising effects of armed conflict do not disappear with the end of conflict. The return of combatants, many traumatised and brutalised by the conflict, can bring violence directly into the home. If men bring weapons home with them, the danger to women increases.

Women and Armed Conflict

What can be done?

IANSA Women's Network members are lobbying governments to:

- **Enforce arms embargoes to prevent the flow of arms into conflict zones where they contribute to violence against women.**
- **Ensure that armed forces abide by the laws of war and respect women's human rights.**



Military authorities should publicly condemn violence against women and ensure that their forces abide by the laws of war. They can do this by placing women's human rights at the heart of training programmes. They should also suspend any armed forces suspected of involvement in violence against women and bring them to justice. Combatants should be made aware that they have a duty to refuse orders to commit violence against women or other human rights abuses.

- **Bring those suspected of violence against women to justice.**

States should ensure that perpetrators of violence against women are brought to justice through their own courts or through international tribunals and the International Criminal Court.

- **Implement Security Council Resolution 1325 to fully involve women in peacemaking processes.**



In conflicts around the world, women have organized themselves at the grassroots level to promote peace. Despite this, they are frequently excluded from formal peace negotiations and peacebuilding initiatives. Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security calls for women's equal participation and full involvement in all efforts to maintain and promote peace and security, including Disarmament, Demobilisation and

Reintegration (DDR) programmes. However, much needs to be done if the principles of Resolution 1325 are to become a reality.

- **Ensure that Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programs take into account the different needs of female and male ex-combatants.**

Point 13 of Security Council Resolution 1325 requires States to take into account the needs of female and male ex-combatants and their dependants when designing DDR programs.

The IANSA Women's Network

The IANSA Women's Network supports organisations working on women and violence prevention to combat gun violence in their communities and support the global campaign to reduce the proliferation and misuse of small arms. It aims to connect organisations, provide information and resources, raise public awareness, and build a united and dynamic movement of women resisting gun violence around the world. To date, the Women's Network has over 250 members from every region in the world.

Why We Need a Women's Network

- **Guns affect women and men differently.**

The proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons contributes to inequality between women and men and to gender-based violence in countries all over the world, whether war affected or at peace.



While the vast majority of those who use and are killed or injured by small arms and light weapons are men, women are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence at the barrel of a gun. Intimate partner violence is more likely to be lethal when a firearm is present in the home, increasing the risk of death by 12 times compared to other means of violence. For this reason, guns that are legally owned are just as dangerous to women as those that are illegally held. Guns also affect women and girls when they are not directly in the firing line. They are disproportionately

affected by the damage to health, education and other social services caused by armed violence. Women often become the main breadwinners and primary carers when male relatives are killed, injured or disabled by gun violence. Displacement due to violent conflict leaves them particularly vulnerable to starvation and disease as they struggle to fend for their families.

- **Women have taken a leading role in gun control efforts all over the world.**

Women have taken leadership roles in peacebuilding work, violence prevention and education about gun violence all over the world. Members of the IANSA Women's Network work are actively engaged in disarmament initiatives; ending gun violence in the home; awareness-raising about the problems of small arms availability and misuse; monitoring and evaluation of weapons disposal programmes, and in formulating long-term strategies to combat this global crisis.



The IANSA Women's Network

- **Women are still underrepresented in small arms policy and practice.**



Recognition of gender considerations for the effective implementation of small arms control policy remains weak within the UN small arms process. Cultural norms linking masculinity and violence must be challenged in the international policy arena and at home. Women's efforts to combat armed violence are often marginalised and receive little support. Women's resources, including their understanding and analysis of the problem, conflict-resolution expertise, influence in the home, networking for peace and voting power are critical for making a long term impact on reducing

gun violence. The Women's Network seeks to ensure that 54% of the world's population is seen as a priority as well as a resource for tackling the problem in all its complexity.

Women's Network Bulletin and Web Portal

The Women's Network publishes a quarterly Bulletin, *Women at Work: Preventing Gun Violence*, in English, Spanish and French, containing profiles of member NGOs, articles on women, gender and small arms, and listings of news, resources and events of interest to Network members. The Network portal is a key information source on women and guns. Accessible via the IANSA website at www.iansa.org/women, the Portal is available in English, Spanish and French and contains web versions of the Network Bulletin, plus news, campaign updates, reports, and fact sheets on women and small arms.



How to get involved

The IANSA Women's Network is supporting and connecting organisations working on women and gun violence so they can organise effectively at local, national, regional and global levels. We are seeking the involvement of all organisations interested in working to reduce the impact of gun violence on women. **To find out more , write to women@iansa.org.**



