

2024 Domestic Violence and Firearms Report

A survey to learn more
about survivor experiences
with firearms and abuse

Report in partnership with
Battered Women's Justice Project



thehotline.org

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FULL

Report

Intimate partner violence remains endemic in the United States. Two in five women (41%) and one in four men (26%) report experiencing at least one impact from intimate partner violence in their lifetime.¹

The frequency and severity of domestic violence can vary significantly; however, the one constant component of domestic violence is one partner's consistent efforts to maintain power and control over the other. This survey confirms that abusive partners often use firearms as a tool with which to exert power and coercive control. Access to a firearm makes it 5x more likely a woman will be killed by her abusive male partner.² In addition to the nearly 70 women each month murdered by their intimate partner with a gun,³ nearly 1 million women alive today report having been nonfatally shot or shot at by an intimate partner⁴ and 4.5 million women report having been threatened with a gun by an intimate partner.⁵ From February through December 2023, the National Domestic Violence Hotline received more than 25,000 calls, chats and texts from people needing support that referenced firearms, a nearly 30% increase from the same period in 2022.

Intimate partner gun violence has impacts felt throughout our communities. A majority of mass shootings in recent years were domestic violence-related.⁶ Intimate partner gun homicides are twice as likely to have at

least one additional victim as those carried out by other means.⁷ A significant portion of homicides of children under the age 13 are related to intimate partner violence.⁸ Responding to domestic violence calls involving firearms are among the most dangerous for law enforcement.⁹ This is a public health issue.

In 2014, The Hotline conducted its first focus survey on abusers' use of firearms in domestic violence. The survey revealed how the presence of a firearm in an abusive relationship intensifies abuse victims' fear and escalates the violence directed towards them, regardless of whether or not the survivor is married, dating, or being stalked by the abusive partner.

During spring 2024, The Hotline and Battered Women's Justice Project (BWJP) conducted an in-depth survey of victims and survivors of gender-based violence to learn about their experiences with firearms-involved gender-based violence, and related experiences seeking protection orders to support their safety. This survey built upon the findings of The Hotline's 2014 survey and explored additional areas. The results show that guns still remain a frequent tool of intimate partner abuse and survivors still face challenges in seeking safety and support.

¹Ruth Leemis, et al., The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2016/2017 Report on Intimate Partner Violence (2022), National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; https://www.cdc.gov/nisvs/documentation/nisvsreportonipv_2022.pdf?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/.

²Jacquelyn Campbell et al., Risk Factors for Femicide in Abusive Relationships: Results from a Multisite Case Control Study, 93 Am. J. Pub. Health 1089, 1092 (2003).

³Everytown analysis of CDC, National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS), 2019.

⁴Susan Sorenson and Rebecca Schut, Nonfatal gun use in intimate partner violence: A systemic review of the literature, 19 Trauma Violence Abuse 4, 431-442 (2018).

⁵Id.

⁶Lisa Geller, et al., The role of domestic violence in fatal mass shootings in the United States, 2014-2019, 8 Inj. Epidemiol, 1, 38 (2021).

⁷Aaron J. Kivisto & Megan Porter, Firearm Use Increases Risk of Multiple Victims in Domestic Homicides, 48 J. AM ACAD. PSYCHIATRY & L. 26, 31 (2020).

⁸Katherine A. Fowler et al., Childhood Firearm Injuries in the United States, 140 PEDIATRICS, 1, 7 (2017).

⁹2023 End-of-Year Preliminary Law Enforcement Fatalities Report, National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund (2024), <https://nleomf.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/2023-EOY-Fatality-Report-FINAL.pdf>.

History of Legal Protections to Address Firearms Risk in Domestic Violence

For nearly 30 years, Congress has recognized the need to limit and/or remove abusive partners' access to firearms in order to protect survivors' lives.

In 1994, Congress added to the federal Gun Control Act of 1968's list of statuses which prohibit someone from being able to purchase or possess firearms and ammunition to include people subject to a qualifying domestic violence protection order.¹⁰

In 1996, Congress added again to the Gun Control Act a federal firearms prohibition for people convicted of certain misdemeanor crimes of domestic violence¹¹, acknowledging during the congressional hearing that "All too often the only difference between a battered woman and a dead woman is the presence of a gun."¹²

In the 2022 Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, Congress expanded the firearm prohibition for people convicted of certain misdemeanor crimes of domestic violence to include qualifying misdemeanor convictions for crimes of dating violence, partially closing the so-called "boyfriend loophole".

In June 2024, the U.S. Surgeon General issued an advisory on the public health crisis of gun violence that included the intersection of gun violence and domestic violence.¹³

These federal laws prohibiting adjudicated abusive partners from accessing guns are enforced, in part, by the 1993 Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act (the Brady Act), which requires a background check conducted by the federal government for the purchase of firearms from a federal firearms licensee. In the nearly 30 years these prohibitors have been in effect they have resulted in the denial of more than 277,000 attempted purchases of firearms to domestic abusers.¹⁴ Furthermore, someone possessing a gun or ammunition when they are prohibited could be prosecuted for a federal crime. In addition to these federal laws, many (but not all) states have similar or more expansive laws that prohibit those who commit domestic violence from having access to guns.¹⁵

While these legal tools exist to help protect survivors from the risk of gun violence by abusive partners, there are many reasons why a survivor may be unable or unwilling to navigate the legal systems through which these

protections are available. There are gaps in these laws and in their implementation and, as a result of resistance or failure to effectuate these protections, sometimes survivors do not experience the sort of protection these laws aim to provide. Further, some states have worked to expand access to guns, limit protective measures like background checks, prohibit enforcement of other states' orders restricting gun access to those deemed dangerous to themselves and the community, and avoid enforcement of federal gun laws. Many of these policies leave survivors vulnerable.

Understanding the experiences of gender-based violence victims and survivors: the spectrum of real threats and danger their abusers subject them to facilitated by a gun, the harms they suffer, and their ability, or inability, to access the justice system's protections is critically important to inform policy and investments in services. Nothing can drive this understanding better than survivors' experiences in their own words.

To learn more about laws that address the intersection of domestic violence and firearms please visit BWJP's National Resource Center on Domestic Violence and Firearms at www.nrcdvh.org.



¹⁰ 18 U.S.C. 922(g)(8).

¹¹ 18 U.S.C. 922(g)(9).

¹² 142 Cong. Rec. 22986 (1996) (statement of Sen. Wellstone).

¹³ "Firearm Violence: A Public Health Crisis in America," U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory (2024), <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/firearm-violence-advisory.pdf>.

¹⁴ "Federal Denials: Reasons Why the NICS Section Denies," Federal Bureau of Investigation, https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/federal_denials.pdf/view.

¹⁵ "State Gun Laws," Giffords Law Center, <https://giffords.org/lawcenter/gun-laws/browse-state-gun-laws/?filter0=>.



ABOUT

This Survey

The purpose of this survey is to understand domestic violence victims/survivors experiences related to their abusive partners' use of firearms.

A team from The Hotline and BWJP came together to develop questions to understand the impact of firearms in abusive relationships and the lived experiences of victims and survivors. The survey contained a mix of multiple choice and open field questions to help respondents provide as much detail, in their own words, about their experiences. For five weeks, these questions were hosted on a digital survey in both English and Spanish with Spanish language responses translated back to English and integrated into the report findings.

To stay centered on what we hoped to learn through this survey, this survey report excludes individuals who did not complete the survey, did not live in the U.S., were under the age of 13, and did not identify as having experienced domestic violence, dating violence, sexual violence/assault, or stalking. Given these parameters, this report analyzes 2,739 respondents.

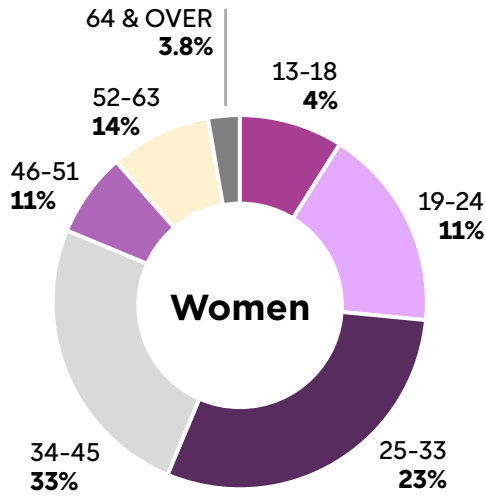
In reporting the findings of the survey data, this report separates gender into three categories – female, male, and transgender and gender

nonconforming (TGNC). Eighty-six percent of respondents identified as female, 7% as male, and 6% identified as genders within the category of transgender and gender nonconforming (TGNC) including transgender female, transgender male, two spirit, or a gender not listed. Rates of female respondents were significantly higher than male and TGNC respondents.

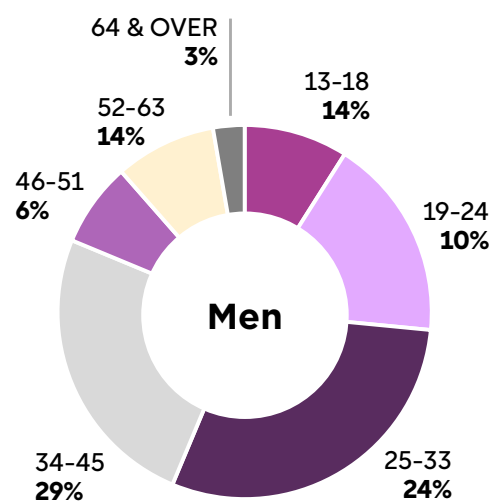
This is a survey about survivor experiences and did not seek to measure the prevalence of any forms of abuse. Because of the imbalance within the respondent population, some differences between gender groups are not statistically significant; however, these findings are meant to reflect the experiences of the victims/survivors who completed the survey. Results in this report are intended to enlighten readers about the lived experiences of survivors and the impact of firearms on their lives. Further research is needed before generalizations about the total populations are appropriate.

DEMOGRAPHICS

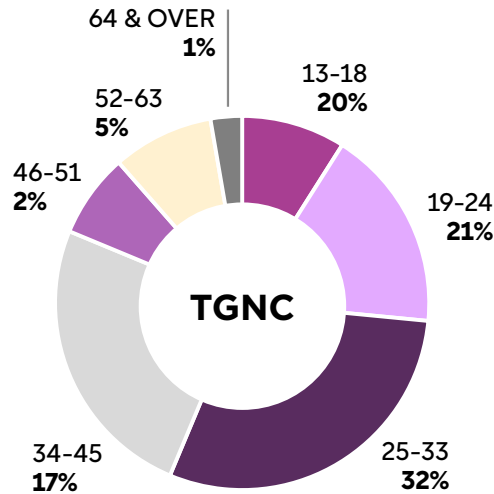
AGE



NOTE: 1% preferred not to answer

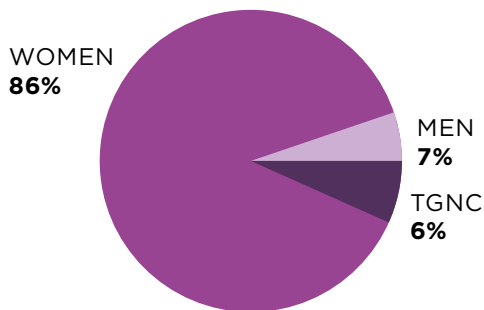


NOTE: 1% preferred not to answer



NOTE: 2% preferred not to answer

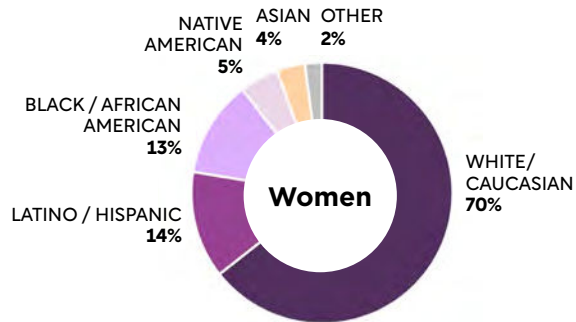
GENDER IDENTITY



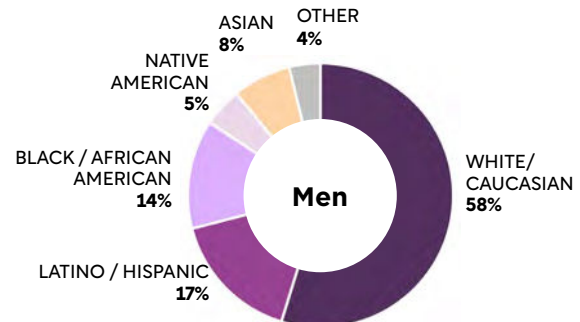
*TGNC includes transgender female, transgender male, two spirit, or a gender not listed.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION	WOMEN	MEN	TGNC
Heterosexual/Straight	71%	65%	10%
Bisexual	13%	11%	19%
Asexual	5%	5%	10%
Pansexual	3%	0%	23%
Lesbian/Gay	2%	14%	10%
Queer	1%	0.5%	15%
Other	1%	0.5%	10%
Prefer not to answer	5%	5%	4%

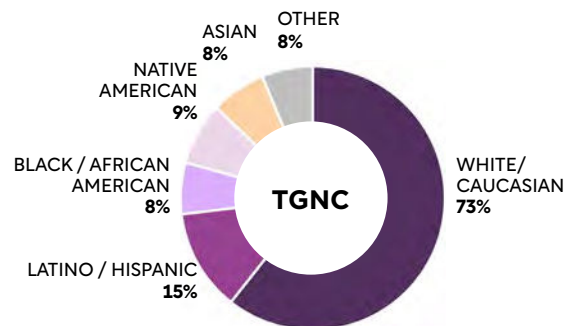
ETHNICITY AND/OR RACE



Other: Arab/Middle Eastern 1%, Pacific Islander, 0.8%, Native Hawaiian 0.4%, Alaska Native 0.1%. 2.1% preferred not to answer



Other: Arab/Middle Eastern 2%, Pacific Islander, 0.5%, Native Hawaiian 1%, Alaska Native 0.5%. 5.5% preferred not to answer



Other: Arab/Middle Eastern 2.9%, Pacific Islander, 2.3%, Native Hawaiian 0.6%, Alaska Native 1.7%. 5.2% preferred not to answer

SURVIVORS WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

	WOMEN	MEN	TGNC
▪ Domestic Violence	86%	71%	61%
▪ Dating Violence	38%	26%	55%
▪ Sexual Violence/Assault	54%	29%	72%
▪ Stalking by a person I have a current/former relationship with	43%	35%	41%
▪ Stalking by a stranger or someone I have never had a relationship with	16%	21%	21%
▪ Average Count of All Victimization Types (domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking)	2.4	1.8	2.6

SECTION 1

Firearm Access

Of respondents who were subjected to gender-based violence

68%



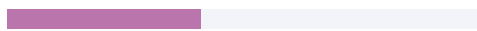
Female respondents had partners with access to firearms

51%



Male respondents had partners with access to firearms

48%

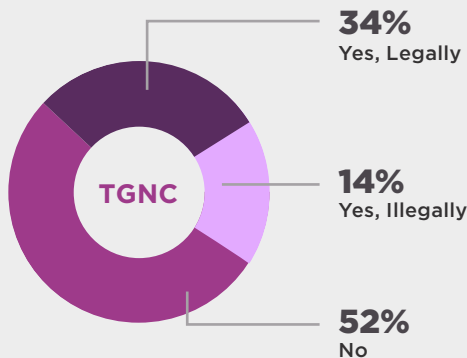
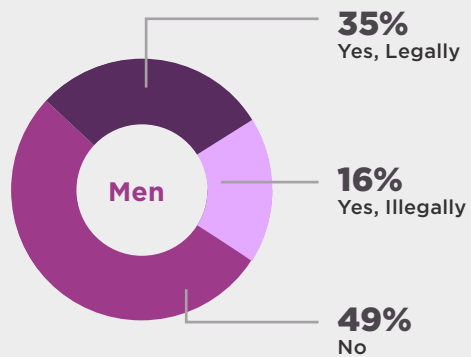
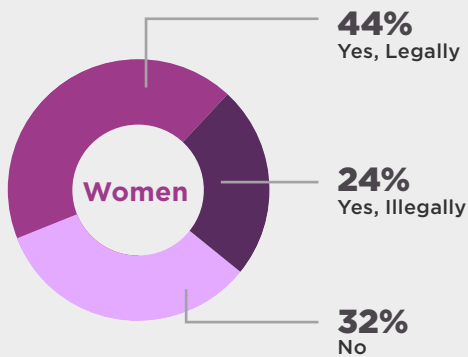


TGNC respondents had partners with access to firearms

“Approx 7 years ago, my husband died by suicide with a firearm. My current partner uses that trauma in ways to manipulate situations with me. My husband was a convicted felon at the time of his suicide and could not possess firearms; yet was able to get one illegally, ultimately using it to end his life. My current partner (also a convicted felon) is not legally able to possess firearms, yet does. He is a convicted felon. Had access due to his father passing away and leaving them to him.”



DOES YOUR PARTNER HAVE ACCESS TO FIREARMS?



More than **1/3 (35%) of the women**, more than a **quarter (28%) of men**, and close to **half (46%) of TGNC** did not know where their partners' firearms were stored.

Of those with partners with gun access, where does your current or former partner keep their firearm?	Women	Men	TGNC
Don't know	35%	28%	46%
Unsecured at home	35%	23%	33%
Safely stored at home	25%	31%	23%
In their car	24%	18%	21%
On them (carried in a concealed way, examples include in a holster under clothing or in a backpack)	23%	27%	22%
On them (carried openly/visibly)	15%	3%	12%
With friends/family	13%	12%	17%

"I do not know if my ex voluntarily gave up all of his firearms. My understanding from the police was that they cuffed him upon arrival and walked around the house with him telling him where the guns were. There were several handguns in my bedroom that I was unaware of. I do not know when he hid them there. They recovered over 50 firearms, ten thousand rounds, and over thirty hunting style knives. They asked me to look carefully around the house and be cautious in case anything was missed. I was relieved that he could not have his firearms back after the restraining order but was concerned because of how easy it is to buy a gun where I lived through a private sale."



OF RESPONDENTS WHO KNEW WHERE THEIR PARTNER/FORMER PARTNER STORED FIREARMS:

25%

Of women reported that the guns were safely stored at home at least some of the time, 38% reported that, at least some of the time, the partners kept the firearms on their person and another 24% had a firearm in their vehicle.

31%

Of men reported guns were safely stored at home, 30% reported that their partners kept the firearm on their person either visibly or concealed.

23%

Of transgender and gender nonconforming survivors reported firearms were safely stored at home, 34% partners kept the firearms on their person, 21% stored in the car.



“[My abuser] often cleaned guns in front of me, left them out in the open even in front of small children.”

“He had them loaded all over the apartment, the bedroom, on the couch, and even in the truck, he made it clear he was ready to use them. After I left I had a panic attack every time I heard a car door because I thought he was coming to shoot me with the rifle in his truck.”

“My spouse has a safe with a firearm inside, and during times of conflict, he has opened the safe and retrieved the firearm to keep on his person. He has not pointed it at any of us or made any verbal threats, it was just the act of taking it out of the safe itself that was very frightening.”





Does your current or former partner work in a job that requires them to carry or use a firearm?

9% of all respondents indicated their current and/or former partners work or worked in a jobs that require them to carry or use firearms.



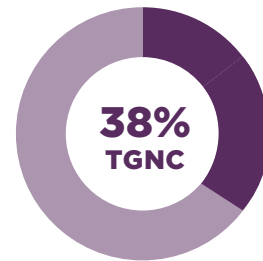
“My abuser worked for a gun shop. He would frequently say on calls with me (while he was driving) that he wanted to “blow [people’s] brains out” because their driving made him mad. He always carried his firearm with him. I was always afraid he would get mad at me and pull out his firearm.

“My ex-husband was a police officer he always had his gun on him, or within arm’s reach, like in our bed etc. It was always used to know it was there and how he could use it.”

“My husband of 19 years was a Correctional Officer and would joke with my [young] children that **“we could kill mom and throw her down a mine shaft, no one would ever know.”**

SECTION 2

Threats and Violence with Firearms



indicated they have been threatened, coerced, stalked, or harmed by firearms

FIREARMS USED TO THREATEN



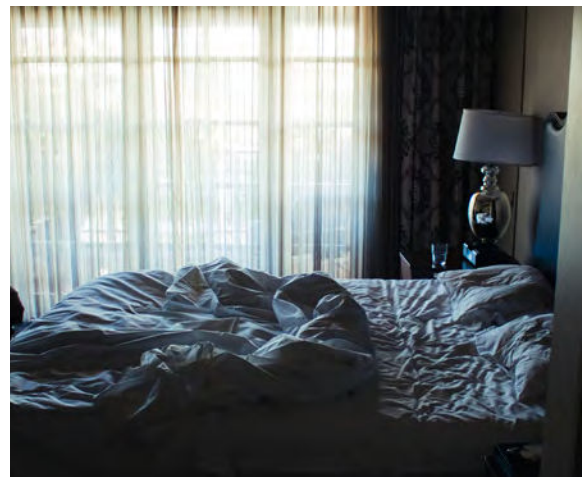
“He would tell me that he would shoot me as needed.”

“He would often mention shooting me and then himself during periods of time in which I considered leaving. The last encounter included a firearm—we had already broken up and he brought out a gun to show me that it had a laser and was much more precise. Wouldn’t put it away when asked and always made sure I knew he had it.”

COERCED

“When I had an argument with my partner, he would point a gun at me and threaten me to obey, and I felt very angry and powerless.”

“[My partner] put a gun on my pillow to attempt to coerce me to have sex.”



STALKED



“My abusive partner was from [another state] originally but we went to college together [here]. He chose to stay [here] to stalk me after we broke up and I was always afraid that it would be very easy for him to get a firearm [here]. My dream is to move somewhere with better firearm laws.”

HARMED



“About 3 yrs ago my boyfriend shot off a round to convince me to stay.”

“Then-husband was angry that I wanted his dogs to stay outside, so he shot two bullets with a pistol in our bedroom, within 2 feet of my head, after trapping me against the wall.”

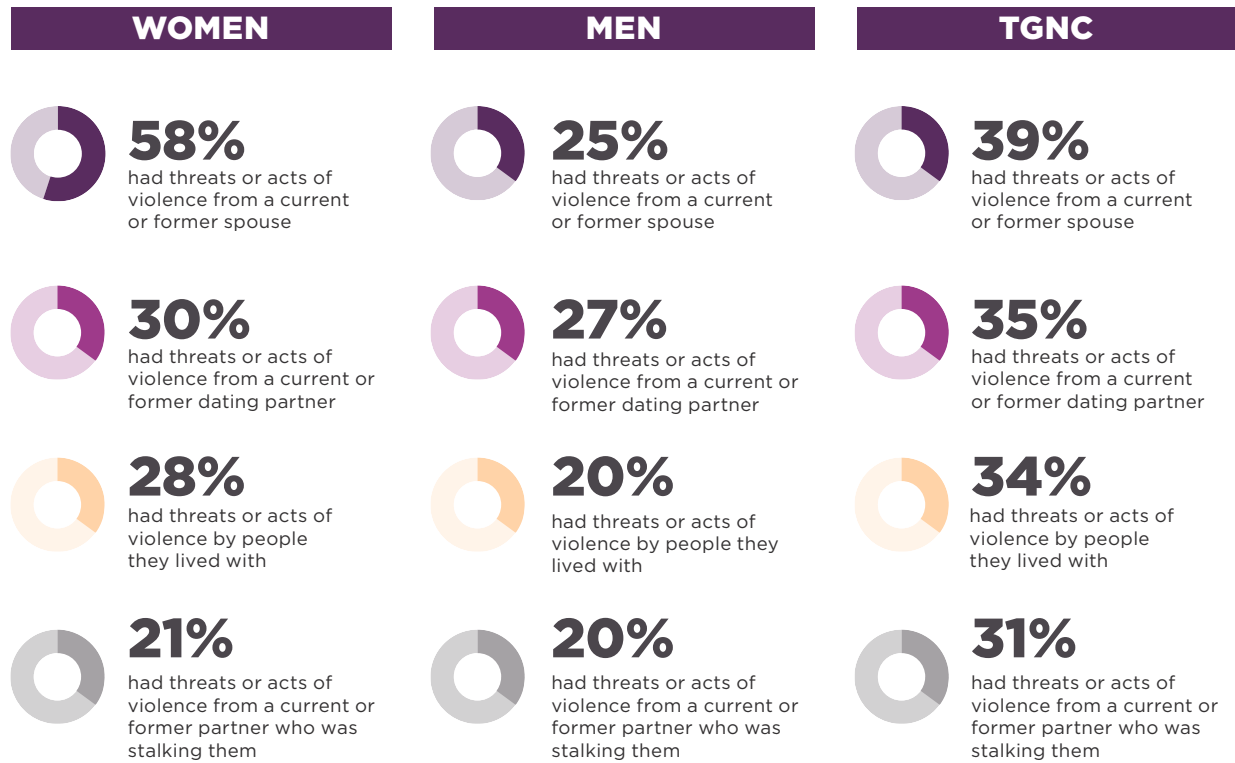
“When I told him I would leave him if he continued verbally abusing me my husband threatened if I tried to leave he’d “put a bullet through my head”. Years later when I told him I wanted a divorce I came into our guest room one night to find him putting bullets in a handgun he kept in his dresser. Challenging him (thinking he was going to take his own life) I demanded he remove the bullets and the gun from our house. He assured me he had. 6 weeks later he used that same gun to shoot me 4 times in front of our children and then take his own life.”

“He was my boyfriend the father of my child. He shot me.”

“One night a month after I first met my ex-boyfriend, my ex-boyfriend raped me with a gun, and I still feel terrified when I recall this scene.”

“My ex-husband put a gun in my mouth while sexually assaulting me and threatened to shoot if I screamed.”

OF SURVIVORS THREATENED WITH FIREARMS:



OF SURVIVORS WHO RESPONDED TO THIS SURVEY

4/5

female survivors were threatened with firearms personally and 2 of 5 abusers threatened to harm themselves with their firearms.

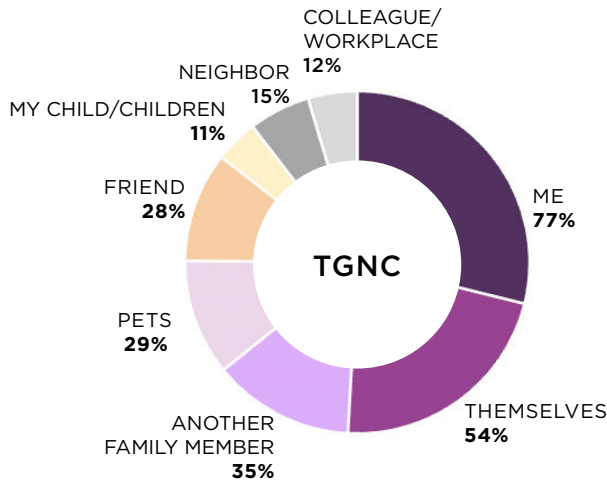
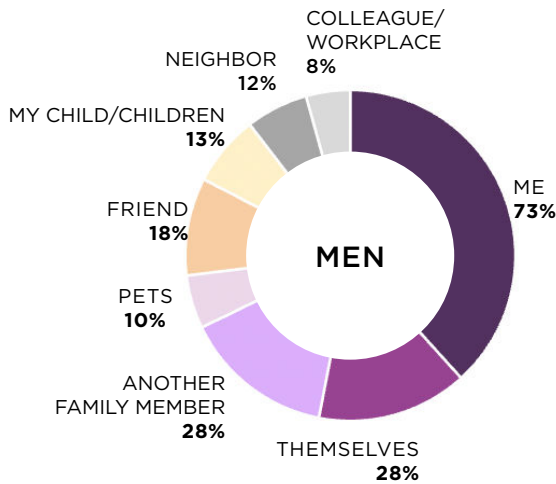
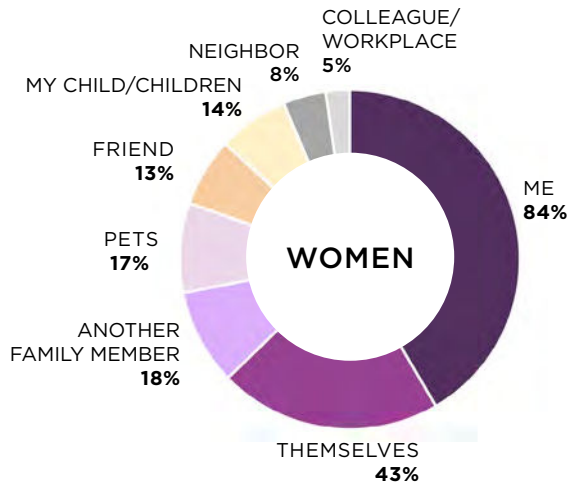
3/4

male survivors were threatened with firearms personally and over 1/4 indicated both that their current or former partner threatened or coerced to harm themselves and another family member.

3/4

transgender and gender nonconforming survivors were threatened with firearms personally. Nearly 3/5 had partners who threatened suicide and 35% had partners who threatened a family member.

WHO HAS YOUR CURRENT OR FORMER PARTNER THREATENED OR COERCED WITH A FIREARM?



THREATENED PERSONALLY

“He would constantly remind me that he has a “ghost gun” that isn’t traceable, and he could get away with something if he wanted to.”

“He would put [the gun] in the bed beside me and I wouldn’t be able to sleep.”

“My ex-husband was financially and emotionally abusive. He had a collection of firearms in the house. He never threatened me with them, but it was an unspoken understanding that he had access to them at any time. It crossed my mind every time he would lose his temper.”



THREATS OF SUICIDE



“Every time we would argue he would then grab his gun and load it and run off to make me scared that he was going to kill himself. He did this in front of my 8 year old daughter. One time he actually went outside and fired the gun off into the air to make me believe that he had actually done it.”

“My abuser tries to get me to contact him by telling me he is going to shoot himself.”

“My ex live-in boyfriend used to threaten to shoot himself and complete suicide any time we argued and any time I tried to leave until I finally realized it wouldn't be my fault if he did. He'd hold the gun to his head and pointed it in my direction a few times.”

“My ex-husband went out to our garage and discharged his weapon to make me think he had shot himself. I called police - too scared to go look out there. They came and found he had fired it into the wall of the garage. He was arrested for discharging a weapon in city limits.”

THREATS TO HARM CHILDREN/FAMILY



“He has told me he would shoot me and then himself; that he would shoot my family members if they came to help. He has left 1 round in the chamber several times and put the gun to his head, threatened to kill himself.”

“My ex tried to stop me from leaving with my children by threatening us with his gun, then turning it on himself. He did not pull the trigger.”

“The ex-boyfriend/friend was heavily intoxicated and would get his gun out waving it around carelessly in front of children threatening to shoot one of us if we didn't do as told. If he didn't like the person he would stick it in our faces until he got his way.”



THREATS TO HARM PETS

“He likes to threaten to shoot my dog, and he has pointed his shotgun at himself a couple of times threatening his own suicide saying it would be my fault.”

“I was held at loaded gunpoint multiple times by my ex. He also shot my dog inside the house to scare me.”



THREATS TO HARM OTHERS



“My abusive partner has shared fantasies about getting a gun, killing me to end my pain, kill himself to end it all, and kill the people working at the apartment complex main office.”

“The firearm threats he did to others were always made directly to me (eg “I will shoot them.”). A friend of mine found out and filed a police report, but it was indirectly made at them. It was the same when he pulled out a gun and almost shot a person in the car next to us. The car didn’t see or know.”

GENERALLY, MORE THAN ONE KIND OF FIREARM THREAT WAS USED BY ABUSERS ACCORDING TO RESPONDENTS OF THE SURVEY

Please describe how a current or former partner used a firearm to threaten or coerce you.	Women	Men	TGNC
Making verbal threats to use a gun to harm me	33%	24%	25%
Leaving a gun out to create a feeling of fear	29%	16%	22%
Pointing a gun (loaded or unloaded) at you or others	24%	12%	20%
Waving a gun around	21%	8%	15%
Pointing a gun at themselves/threatening self-harm	18%	13%	17%
Prohibiting the use of gun safes/storage to create a feeling of fear	13%	7%	12%
Cleaning a gun to create a feeling of fear	11%	8%	11%
Making verbal threats to commit a shooting in the community (e.g. school, work, etc.)	11%	7%	13%
Shooting a gun at or near you or others to create a feeling of fear	10%	9%	8%
Average count of threat types for those threatened	3.3	2.6	3.5



“My ex told me on the day that he left my house in 2022 that he would kill me and make it look like an accident. He said this while holding me over the edge of the landing at the top of the stairs while letting me go and then catching me to simulate my falling down the stairs. As he got in his car, he said, “I will always find you, you will never get away. And I will kill you”. A month later, he told a friend of mine that he had a bullet with my name on it and a gun with no serial number. My friends group told me that it wasn’t true, it was an exaggeration. I still fear for my life and safety.”

“In one instance I had grabbed my purse and was halfway out the door when I heard a click of the gun being loaded and he said, ‘walk out that door and you’ll leave your boys motherless.’ ”

1

The most frequent threat in all gender categories was verbal threats to use a gun to harm.

33%

Women

25%

Men

25%

TGNC

2

The next most common tactic used by current or former partners to threaten or coerce was leaving a gun out to create feelings of fear.

29%

Women

12%

Men

22%

TGNC

3

The third most common threat was an abuser pointing a gun at the victim or others.

24%

Women

16%

Men

20%

TGNC



“My ex-husband would consistently leave loaded and unlocked handguns (approximately 3) in plain sight around our home, but specifically always had one next to his bed on evenings where he would approach me for sexual contact.”

“I slept next to him with his glock pointed at my head.”

“Would cock loaded gun and point it at me close range also leave cocked loaded gun on a table facing me when I was asleep so woke up to gun in my face. He would repeat over, “pull the trigger you know you want to die”.





“There have been several occasions in which we argue and he always gets upset and he hits me... his father has legal and illegal weapons and toy guns that look real and I don’t know which of them he gets but he grabs me and threatens me saying that he is going to kill me...he has even pointed a weapon at me. (Spanish translated to English)”

Other threats experienced include waving a gun around, shooting a gun at or near the victim or others, pointing a gun at themselves, or cleaning the gun to create a feeling of fear.

WAIVING GUN AROUND

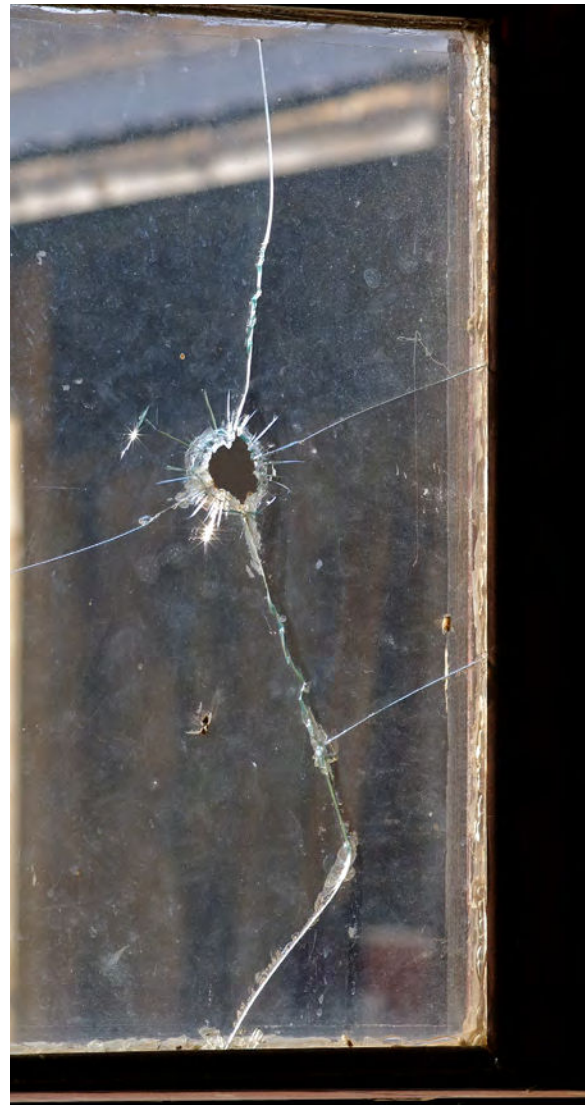


“He was always really jealous, so I knew it would be bad when I got back from a concert with my friend. When I arrived home, he sat on the edge of our bed cleaning his rifle. He pointed it toward me & made awful comments about accidental shootings and “stupid women” who just couldn’t learn to behave. The incident was 21 years ago, and I will never forget.”

POINTING A GUN AT THEMSELVES



“[My] spouse used a shotgun and placed it under his chin. He forced me to answer questions and if I didn’t answer he would use a tune saying ‘My finger is on the trigger’.”



CLEANING THE GUN



“Cleaning the guns while we are arguing and leaving them out on the dining table for days.”

“In combination with frequent threats of gun violence, frequent mention of his belief that he could successfully kill people and get away with hiding the bodies without consequences, and making me watch him clean his firearms and making me help him package and store his ammunition, My abuser used to come home from work, upon his first step through the door, he would pick up a children’s toy nerf gun and shoot me directly in my nipple with frightening accuracy on a daily basis for several months at the start of our relationship.”

Notably, **substance/alcohol use/abuse by the abusive partner** played a role in survivors experiences.

**Intimate partner violence is a choice by the abusive partner. While substance/alcohol use is never the cause of intimate partner violence, it can play a role in exacerbating incidents of abuse as described by numerous survey respondents in their own words.*



“My abuser would get blacked out drunk and handle firearms.

Depending on his mood, it was either to show them off or to threaten to use them on himself.”

“I had a former partner use a firearm to scare me by putting the unloaded gun to my head and ask me have I ever had a gun to my head. I don’t think he knew it was unloaded because I was the one to unload it and he was very drunk.”

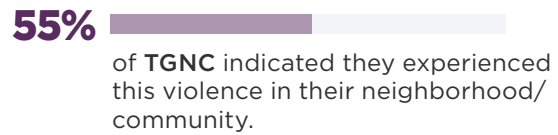
“My ex-husband used a covert or veiled threat. He got drunk one night and told me he had hidden a gun at our home, but he would not tell me where it was. Because he was drunk and telling me, I felt very uneasy and could not get this off my mind. I was already safety planning to leave, and this situation prompted me to leave with a month of my ex-husband telling me he had that gun hidden.”

HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED FIREARM VIOLENCE IN YOUR COMMUNITY OR NEIGHBORHOOD THAT WAS CAUSED BY SOMEONE OTHER THAN YOUR FORMER OR CURRENT PARTNER?



Nearly **half of the survivors of gender-based violence** who participated in the survey indicated that they had also been **subjected to gun violence by someone other than an intimate partner.**

When asked where they experienced this firearm violence:



SECTION 3

Barriers to Seeking Help



Has a current or former partner's access to firearms influenced your decision to seek help or continue the relationship?

34%
Women

27%
Men

43%
TGNC

Yes, to leave

28%
Women

19%
Men

27%
TGNC

Yes, to seek assistance/support

15%
Women

8%
Men

18%
TGNC

Yes, to stay

31%
Women

44%
Men

30%
TGNC

No

LEAVING



“My husband threatens me with a gun a lot. He tells me he is gonna kill me then himself if I leave.”

“I was told if I tried to leave, he'd kill me. The last time I tried, he pulled a gun on me and pointed it at me, and then said that the only way I was going to leave was in a box.”

SEEK ASSISTANCE/SUPPORT



“In February 2023, my ex-husband put a shotgun to my head during an outburst of anger while accusing me of infidelity (I was never unfaithful, but this was a claim he constantly made). I saw my life flash before my eyes and saw the faces of my children, which gave me the strength to hit him in the groin and disarm him. This wasn’t the first time he had put a gun to my head, but I am doing everything in my power to make it the last. Thanks to a new law that put a mandatory restraining order in place in any DV situation, I was able to get out and away from him and get help. He still has access to our children and joint custody. A law recently passed in our state and I’m hoping that it will change his custody, but I’m not holding my breath. The law has let myself and other victims of abuse down time and time again.”

“During agitation exasperated by drug and alcohol abuse, my former husband got in my face and yelled threats of harm and self-harm while brandishing a 9mm handgun. This was while his 80-year-old grandmother (it was her house we were living in) and our 2-year-old daughter were in the room, and I was pregnant. Once we calmed him down he climbed to the top of a tv antenna attached to the house and threatened to jump off. This episode happened in 1986 and was only one of many frightening experiences I went through as a young mom. It took me 3 more years of terror, fear and abuse before I was able to figure out how to leave and never look back, with help from the authorities.”

15%

of females

8%

of males

18%

of tgnc

reported that this access to firearms influenced them to stay with their partner



“My ex-husband told me I could leave him. As I got up to head

out of the room, he simply said you won’t make it to the door. I heard the gun click. He grabbed me and fired it out in our bedroom between my feet. There was a hole in our floor. I stayed for months after that because I knew he would end my life if I ever tried to leave him again”

Men reported a higher likelihood of being aware of laws in their state that can prohibit an abusive partner from accessing firearms when compared to women and transgender and gender nonconforming survivors who responded to this survey.

Were/are you aware of any laws in your state that can prohibit an abusive partner from having firearms

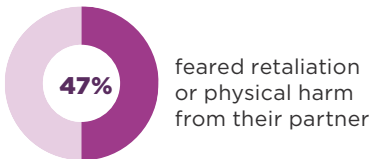


Of those who experienced gun threats, were you aware of any laws that can prohibit an abusive partner from having a firearm?

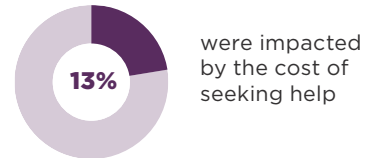
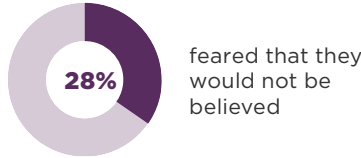


Survivors experienced a variety of barriers in using legal options to stop a partner from having or getting firearms. On average, all survivors whose partners had access to firearms experienced more than one barrier to using legal options to prohibit the abuser from accessing or obtaining firearms.

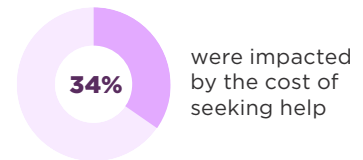
FOR FEMALE SURVIVORS, BEYOND A LACK OF KNOWLEDGE OF THEIR LEGAL OPTIONS:



FOR MALE SURVIVORS, BEYOND A LACK OF KNOWLEDGE OF THEIR LEGAL OPTIONS:



FOR TGNC SURVIVORS, BEYOND A LACK OF KNOWLEDGE OF THEIR LEGAL OPTIONS:



VERY FEW SURVIVORS DID NOT EXPERIENCE ANY BARRIERS TO USING LEGAL OPTIONS:




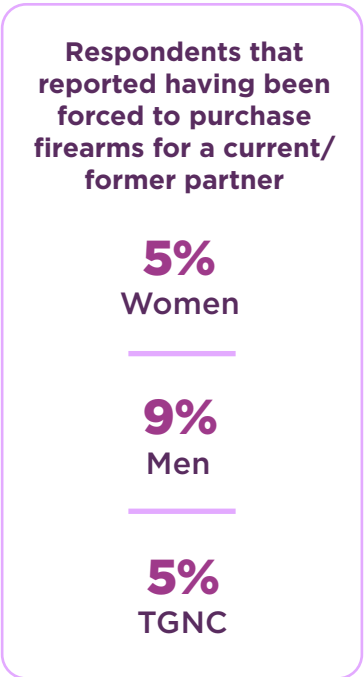
Of those with partners who had access to guns, what (if any) barriers have you experienced to using legal options to prohibit a current or former partner from having or obtaining firearms?	Women	Men	TGNC
Fear of retaliation or that partner would harm me	47%	28%	51%
Lack of awareness/Didn't know what I could do	40%	30%	51%
Fear of not being believed	34%	28%	46%
Cost	21%	13%	34%
Transportation	9%	11%	18%
Cannot take time off work	6%	5%	12%
Lack of childcare	7%	10%	6%
Immigration status	2%	5%	4%
Language access	1%	8%	7%
I didn't experience any barriers	5%	8%	2%
Average barrier count	1.7	1.3	2.3

SOME SURVIVORS ARE VULNERABLE TO CRIMINALIZATION AS A RESULT OF THEIR ACTIONS TO MAINTAIN SAFETY OR THEIR PARTNER'S ABUSIVE CONDUCT.

“My ex did not make me buy a gun, but he did make me add him to a utility bill so he could register the gun he bought, which also gave him access to that bill for a while.”

“He had me get all firearms in my name. Then he would take them and move them and then when he “couldn't find them” tell me that “they were my guns and if I couldn't keep track of them that I would be in trouble for it”

“I have been forcibly taken to a gun store to purchase a firearm. I fought back. I did not purchase the firearm. I did, however, receive weeks of verbal, and financial abuse due to this.”

SECTION 4

Seeking and Obtaining Legal Protection

There are some tools in our civil justice system that can provide protection for survivors. **Domestic Violence Protection Orders (DVPOs) and Extreme Risk Protection Orders (ERPOs) are two types of civil court orders.** DVPOs are court orders issued to protect survivors of family or intimate partner violence and require the person subject to the order to do or not do certain actions, such as staying away from the survivor. DVPOs can provide a wide range of protections and can be tailored to the risk presented to the individual survivor. In certain circumstances DVPOs can prohibit an abuser subject to the order from accessing guns and can require abusers to relinquish guns to which they already have access. ERPOs are court orders issued specifically to prohibit the person subject to the order from accessing firearms based on a demonstrated risk that the person subject to the order may harm themselves or someone else.¹⁶



“He was possessive, jealous. I left. He said come back or he was going to hurt the people that helped me out. Said he was coming to get me and he was not coming alone. I knew he meant he was coming with guns. So, I went back and my friend called the police and had a wellness check done. After they left, he took the gun and put it to his head and proceeded to act like he was going to pull the trigger. Unknown to me it was unloaded...he pulled the trigger.. freaked me out...bad head games. When he went to work I called my friend, I got the hell out. I went to the police and filed for restraining order. They arrested him, took his guns. We went to court, I never saw him again.”

“I made sure he didn’t have any [guns] in the apartment as I made a plan to leave, but I know he had previous access and his family was definitely mixed in with a bad crowd. In the process of getting my protective order it was revealed in court that he was trying to become a peace officer and the order had stopped him. He had NEVER shown interest in law enforcement before so I knew he was only doing it to get access to firearms and to find me. The protective order says no firearms except those that were already peace officers and that terrified me. Not just for myself because luckily, I got my protective order in time, but I know there are many out there who aren’t as lucky.”

¹⁶ ERPOs are currently only available in 21 states and Washington, D.C. and not all ERPO laws permit family members or intimate partners to petition for this type of order. See the National Center for Protection Orders and Full Faith and Credit at [BWJP ERPO Toolkit](#) for a list of these state laws.

39%

of **female** respondents had filed for a protection order against their current or former partner

22%

of **male** respondents had filed for a protection order against their current or former partner

20%

of **TGNC** respondents had filed for a protection order against their current or former partner

Among those who received a protection order which prohibited their current or former partner from having guns

- **40% of female survivors didn't know** if their current or former partner no longer had firearms while 46% knew they hadn't gotten rid of them.
- **34% of male survivors didn't know** if their current or former partner no longer had firearms and 39% knew they didn't get rid of them, however the percent of abusers who turned in their firearms was much higher in this group (27%).
- **32% transgender/gender nonconforming survivors didn't know** if their partner turned in their firearm and 53% knew that they did not.



“He showed me his gun in his car. He told me he sometimes felt like killing people. He told me he had held the gun to his head for hours. When I finally broke free I had to get a protection order for my own safety which stopped him having guns for a year.”



Of those who filed a protection order:

1/3

of **all respondents** said they did not know if the protection order prohibited their current or former partner from accessing firearms

OF THOSE WHO FILED FOR A DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROTECTION ORDER (DVPO)

The protection order/restraining order was served on your current or former partner: **YES**



The order prohibited your current or former partner from having firearms:

	WOMEN	MEN	TGNC
DON'T KNOW	31%	32%	35%
YES	43%	48%	41%
NO	26%	21%	24%

Your current or former partner turned in or got rid of their firearms:

DON'T KNOW	41%	34%	32%
NO	46%	39%	53%
YES	14%	27%	15%

FIREARM REMOVAL/RELINQUISHMENT FAILURES



“I have 2 permanent restraining orders against the father of my children. One is criminal, one is civil. Both good through 2099. He was supposed to surrender weapons per the orders but he never did. My father and I took one of his guns and tried to give it to the sheriff but he refused to take it. The sheriff came to a call at my parents house during my grandmother’s 88th birthday party. He sat outside my parents house within the 500 foot radius. He kept calling and texting me during the party threatening to shoot and kill me if I didn’t hand over our children. Sheriff had an opportunity to catch him and charge him but didn’t and then wouldn’t remove his weapons. It’s almost like they just wanted me dead so they didn’t have to deal with me anymore.”

“When you have a [Protection from Abuse order (PFA)] in my state they can’t own/buy/carry a gun for a year while on probation, but there is no place to store their firearms. They need a [place for] safe storage instead of letting their friends keep their firearms for them until the year is up or having to store them in your home where the perpetrators know where they are.”

“When I was at court to obtain a [restraining order (RO)] an officer tipped my ex off to what I was doing and he went to our home (he wasn’t supposed to) to remove over a dozen firearms. He told my mom to not tell me a thing and “keep this between them”. He then lied to the cops, lied to the criminal court claiming he didn’t own any and that he sold the ONE he had. Yet in family court he admitted to removing over a dozen firearms.”

FOR FEMALE RESPONDENTS, it was much more likely that they were aware that an abuser had turned in or gotten rid of their gun if the protection order prohibited the abuser from having a firearm

24% of female survivors were aware

3% of female survivors were unaware

OF FEMALE SURVIVORS WHO HAD FILED A DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROTECTION ORDER AGAINST A CURRENT OR FORMER PARTNER

44% reported that their partner made verbal threats to harm them with a gun

37% reported their partner pointed a loaded gun at them or others

31% reported that their partner left their gun out to create a feeling of fear

15% reported they had been shot at by their current or former partner

The more types of threats with a gun a survivor was subjected to by their current or former partner, the more likely they were to file for a protection order.

EXTREME RISK PROTECTION ORDER (ERPO)

OF THE SURVIVORS WHOSE CURRENT OR FORMER PARTNER HAD ACCESS TO GUNS

8%
women

13%
men

15%
tgnc

respondents had filed for an **extreme risk protection order** against their current or former partner

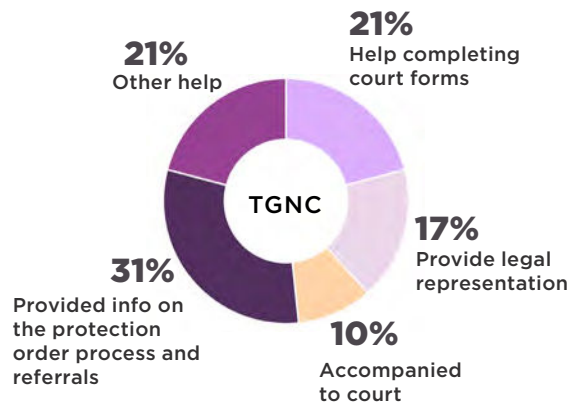
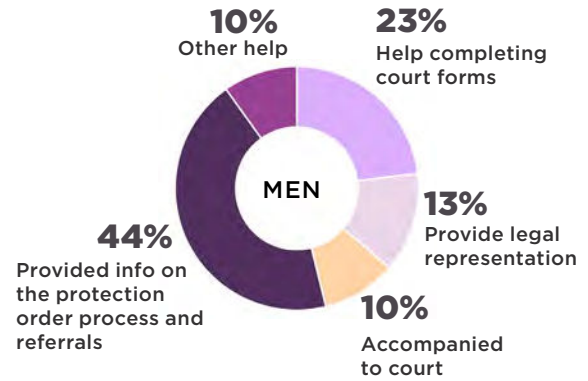
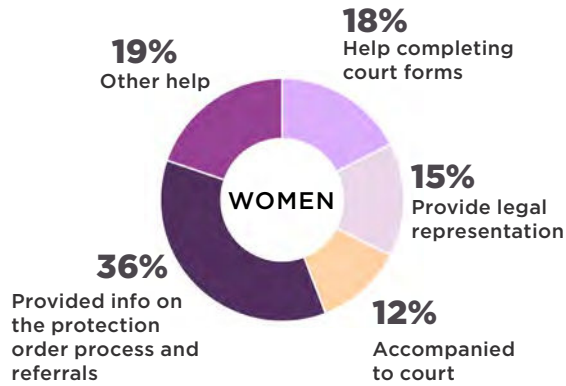
However, **among female survivors** who had been subjected to threats with a gun by their current or former partner, **nearly 10% had filed for an extreme risk protection order** against their current or former partner.

“I wish ERPO’s, and red flag laws in general existed when I was being terrorized by my ex. If a tool like that was available back then I would’ve been very glad to have a more serious legal way to keep him from accessing his guns to threaten me.”



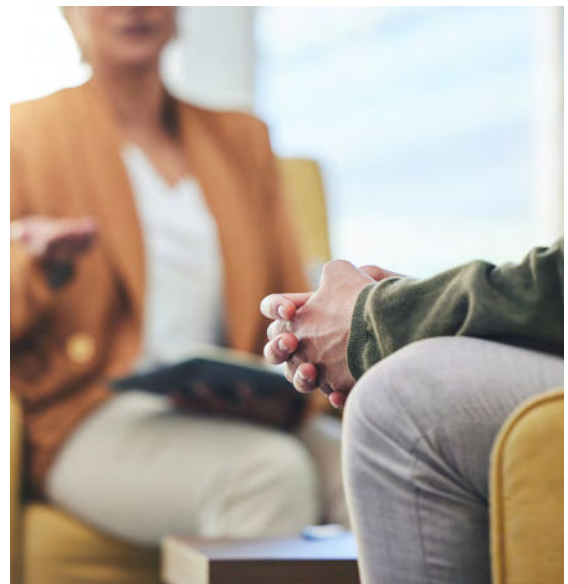
PROTECTION ORDERS

During the process of obtaining or trying to obtain a DVPO, survivors sought help in multiple ways.



31% WOMEN **40%** MEN **28%** TGNC
 respondents received information and/or referrals on the protection order process

On average, survivors got assistance by more than one professional before, during, and/or after obtaining a protection order. The most common professional assisting survivors were domestic violence advocates, law enforcement, therapists or mental health counselors, and attorneys.



OF THOSE WHO TRIED TO OBTAIN A PROTECTIVE ORDER, WHAT (IF ANY) PROFESSIONAL DID YOU SPEAK WITH TO ASSIST BEFORE/DURING/AFTER OBTAINING OR TRYING TO OBTAIN A PROTECTION ORDER?

	WOMEN	MEN	TGNC
▪ Domestic Violence Advocate	53%	27%	63%
▪ Law Enforcement	52%	48%	54%
▪ Attorney/Lawyer	31%	34%	34%
▪ Therapist/Mental Health Professional/Social Worker	30%	43%	54%
▪ Medical Professional	13%	23%	26%
▪ Other	4%	5%	3%
▪ AVERAGE COUNT OF PROFESSIONALS	1.8	1.8	2.3

WAS ASSISTANCE HELPFUL?*

59% female respondents reported assistance was helpful

61% male respondents reported assistance was helpful

63% tgnc respondents reported assistance was helpful

28% female respondents reported assistance was **not** helpful

21% male respondents reported assistance was **not** helpful

37% tgnc respondents reported assistance was **not** helpful

13% of female respondents and 19% of male respondents reported as not applicable

SAFETY PLANNING

Among all the survivor respondents, **female survivors were more likely to have had no help safety planning before, during, or after obtaining a protection order.**

Of those who did have help with safety planning, domestic violence advocates and friends and family were most common. Male and TGNC survivors were more likely to have had access to safety planning with male survivors slightly more likely to use law enforcement and transgender and gender nonconforming survivors more likely to use friends and family as a support.

Among the survivor respondents who reported having been threatened with a firearm, they were even less likely than survivors who did not report having been threatened by firearms to have had help safety planning before, during, or after obtaining a protection order.

* This survey asked about experiences navigating the civil justice system for domestic violence protection orders and extreme risk protection orders. The sort of assistance a survivor may seek to support navigating these processes differs from the sort of assistance a survivor may seek when reporting a crime or navigating the criminal justice system. For this reason, reported assistance seeking and/or satisfaction in this survey may differ from that of surveys of survivor experiences in the criminal justice system.

OF RESPONDENTS WHO HAD BEEN THREATENED WITH A FIREARM: Who (if anyone) helped you with safety planning about the risk of firearms before/during/after obtaining or trying to obtain a protection order?	Women	Men	TGNC
No One	51%	43%	33%
Domestic Violence Advocate	18%	24%	22%
Friend/ Family	16%	7%	29%
Law enforcement	8%	19%	8%
National Domestic Violence Hotline	8%	12%	8%
Attorney/Lawyer	6%	10%	8%
Other domestic violence or crisis hotline	5%	17%	10%
Medical professional	4%	14%	8%
Average count of help	0.7	1	0.9

“I wish I could have chosen more than one option under how the attorney, advocate, and medical professional helped me. They all have played a pivotal role in providing me support in a very upsetting and scary situation.”




SECTION 5

Recommendations

The threats and violence to which victims and survivors are subjected to by their abusers are real and terrifying. This survey demonstrates the ways that abusive partners use guns to coerce and threaten in order to maintain control. This reality makes the need for increased funding for access to wraparound support services, including victim advocacy and legal services, even more critical. The findings in this report underscore the urgent need for increased capacity for support services to assist with safety planning specific to the risk of intimate partner gun violence.

The legal system is often utilized as a critical component of survivor safety, but many survivors navigate the civil protection order system without support or understanding of their rights. With legal and advocacy support, survivors have a greater chance of understanding the protections and limitations of the court. This assistance also helps them receive the information needed to establish the threat to their safety. The harm to survivors does not end with the issuance of a protection order or a conviction, and they spend much of their lives recovering from trauma. Abusive partners may also move on to harms others. Ongoing supportive services such as mental health and social work are important for many survivors to address the psychological, emotional, and economic long-term consequences of intimate partner violence and intervention and preventions to stop the cycle of violence.

While federal and state laws that prohibit domestic abusers from accessing guns and ammunition are critical – they are not self-executing. Robust and effective implementation requires a coordinated community response. Courts, law enforcement, prosecutors and attorneys, victim advocates, probation, and other community stakeholders all play a role in developing policies and protocols that ensure those who are prohibited from accessing firearms cannot and do not continue to access them. This includes, among others, ensuring issued protection orders are served and maintained in state and federal databases, reliable processes exist for prohibited persons to relinquish firearms in their control, and ensure compliance with orders for relinquishment of firearms.

It is critically important that survivors have access to all information relevant to their safety so that they can continually make the best decisions for themselves and their families. This includes being notified if and when their abuser, from whom they have a protection order or who has been convicted for a crime of domestic violence, attempts to purchase a gun or fails to comply with an order to turn their guns in. Laws requiring this victim notification and policies consistently implementing it are an important improvement to increase survivor safety.



ABOUT

The Hotline

The Hotline is the only national 24-hour domestic violence hotline providing compassionate support, life-saving resources, and personalized safety planning via phone, online chat, and text.

To date we have answered more than 7 million calls, chats, and texts from people impacted by relationship abuse in the United States. The Hotline is a frontline resource for survivors, often the first source to validate that abuse is being experienced, and a trusted provider of resources, referrals, and safety planning. Central to The Hotline is our highly trained advocate staff, who provide high-quality, trauma-informed education, validation, and connection to services that empower survivors to make life-changing decisions with dignity and respect. Our services are free and confidential.

To respond to the unique needs of teens and young adults, The Hotline launched **love is respect**, a national resource to disrupt and prevent unhealthy relationships and dating abuse by empowering young people through inclusive and equitable education, support, and resources. love is respect is focused on providing 24/7 information, support, and advocacy to young people between the ages of 13 and 26.



7+ million calls, chats, and texts from people impacted by relationship abuse answered



Free and confidential services 24/7

As the nation's largest direct-service provider to those impacted by domestic violence, The Hotline is one of the leading collectors of real-life survivor experiences, data, and trends. We advocate for survivor-centered policies and legislation using knowledge and data informed by speaking with hundreds of thousands of survivors each year. In coalition with other leaders in the field, we ensure that survivors are represented when policymakers discuss matters that affect their safety and support.

To learn more about our organization and services, visit **thehotline.org**



ABOUT

BWJP

The Battered Women’s Justice Project (BWJP) is a collection of national policy and practice centers at the intersection of gender-based violence and legal systems. BWJP’s mission is to promote change within the civil and criminal legal systems to enhance their effectiveness in providing safety, security, and justice for survivors of gender-based violence, their families, and communities. BWJP provides educational activities, including training, technical assistance, and consultation to advocates, nonprofit service providers, community leaders, and systems professionals.

BWJP’s National Center on Gun Violence in Relationships works to prevent domestic violence related assaults and homicides involving firearms. **The National Resource Center on Domestic Violence and Firearms**, a federally funded initiative, is a critical project within the National Center on Gun Violence in Relationships.

BWJP’s National Center on Protection Orders and Full Faith and Credit is the nation’s preeminent resource on the issuance, service, and enforcement of protection orders for survivors of domestic and dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking.

We acknowledge, and extend our gratitude to T.K. Logan, Ph.D. for her advisement and data analysis which enabled this report and to Colleen Gill, Legal Intern, for her contributions to the development of this report.

Learn more about
[National Center on Gun Violence in Relationships](#)

Learn more about
[National Center on Protection Orders and Full Faith and Credit](#)

www.bwjp.org

This survey and report was supported by Grant No. # 90EV0528-03-00 awarded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The viewpoints contained in this document are solely the responsibility of the author(s) and do not represent the official views or policies of the department and do not in any way constitute an endorsement by the Department of Health and Human Services.