

2024 DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & FIREARMS

Research Brief

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

Between March and April 2024, the National Domestic Violence Hotline (The Hotline), in partnership with the Battered Women's Justice Project (BWJP) conducted a survey to learn more about the experiences of survivors and victims of gender-based violence related to their abusers' use of firearms as part of their violence and abuse. This research brief analyzes the responses of 2,739 victims and survivors.

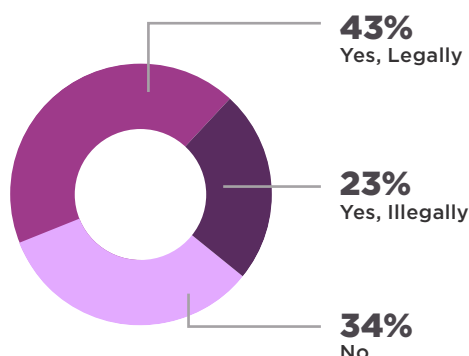
The intersection of firearms and domestic violence has significant implications for the safety and well-being of survivors. The prevalence of domestic violence and gun violence—and the combination of the two—is a public health crisis. The presence of a firearm can increase lethality, reduce safety, and present additional complications in the legal system. Through this survey, we learned more about the ways firearms are used to threaten, control, and harm victims and survivors.

Firearms Access

Of respondents who were subjected to gender-based violence

66% had a partner with access to firearms

DOES YOUR CURRENT OR FORMER PARTNER HAVE OR HAD ACCESS TO FIREARMS?



"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."

More than **1/3 (35%)** of all respondents did not know where their partners’ firearms were stored.

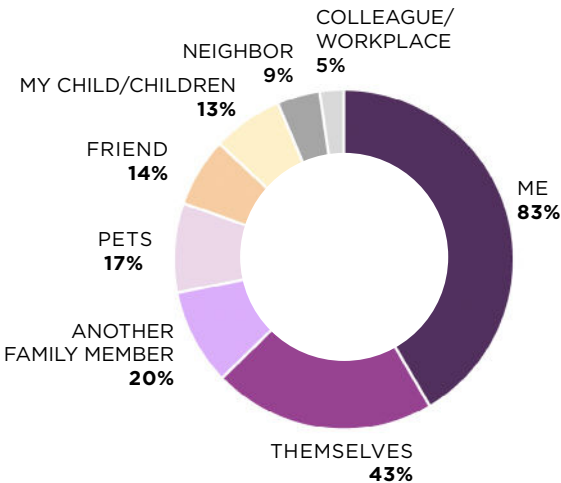
Of those with partners with gun access, where does your current or former partner keep their firearm?*	
Don't know	35%
Unsecured at home	34%
Safely stored at home	25%
In their car	23%
On them (carried in a concealed way, examples include in a holster under clothing or in a backpack)	23%
On them (carried openly/visibly)	14%
With friends/family	14%

Threats and Violence with Firearms

46% Of respondents had been threatened, coerced, stalked, or harmed by firearms

For respondents of this survey, the most common people an abuser threatened was the survivor and themselves (suicide).

WHO (IF ANYONE) HAS YOUR CURRENT OR FORMER PARTNER EVER THREATENED OR COERCED WITH A FIREARM?*



THREATENED PERSONALLY

“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.”

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

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



*Totals represent more than 100% due to multiple items being true in one situation.



“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.”

“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 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.”

Abusers who used firearms did so in a multitude of ways. On average respondents were subjected to 3.2 forms of gun threats.



Other types of threats 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.

Nearly half of the survivors of gender-based violence who participated in the survey indicated that they had also been subjected to gun violence **in their neighborhood/community**.

Barriers to Seeking Help

A current or former partner's access to firearms influenced the majority of survivors' decisions to seek help or continue the relationship.

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

34%

Yes, to leave

27%

Yes, to seek assistance/
support

15%

Yes, to stay



"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."

Survey respondents 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.

SURVIVORS WHOSE PARTNERS HAD ACCESS TO FIREARMS EXPERIENCED A VARIETY OF BARRIERS USING THE LEGAL SYSTEM:

46%

feared retaliation or that a partner would harm them

40%

lacked awareness/didn't know what they could do

34%

feared not being believed

21%

were impacted by the cost of seeking help

Only 5% of survivors did not experience any barriers to using legal options.

Survey data confirms that some survivors are vulnerable to criminalization as a result of their actions to maintain safety or their partner's abusive conduct — 5% of respondents reported having been forced to purchase firearms for a current/former partner.

Seeking and Obtaining Legal Protection

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROTECTION ORDERS (DVPOS)

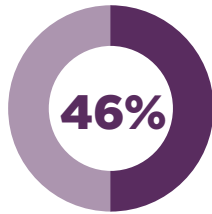


Of respondents had filed for a protection order against their current or former partner

Of those who filed a protection order:

1/3

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



Of respondents were aware their partner had not gotten rid of guns despite a protection order that required it

35% of respondents received information and/or referrals on the protection order process. On average, respondents got assistance by more than one professional before, during, and/or after obtaining a protection order. The most common professional assisting survivors were:

30%

domestic
violence
advocates

30%

law
enforcement

23%

therapists or
mental health
counselors

17%

attorneys

9%

medical
professionals

EXTREME RISK PROTECTION ORDERS (ERPOS)

7% of survey respondents whose current or former partner had access to guns 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.”

SAFETY PLANNING

Approximately half of all survivors who completed the survey reported having **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.

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

Recommendations

- **Increased access to wraparound support services**, including safety planning specifically equipped to address firearm risk
- **Increased access to information and support** regarding legal options for protection against firearm risk
- **Consistent and effective implementation of laws** that disarm abusers including service of protection orders, relinquishment of firearm when prohibited from possessing, compliance with prohibition/relinquishment orders, ensuring background checks have complete information

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