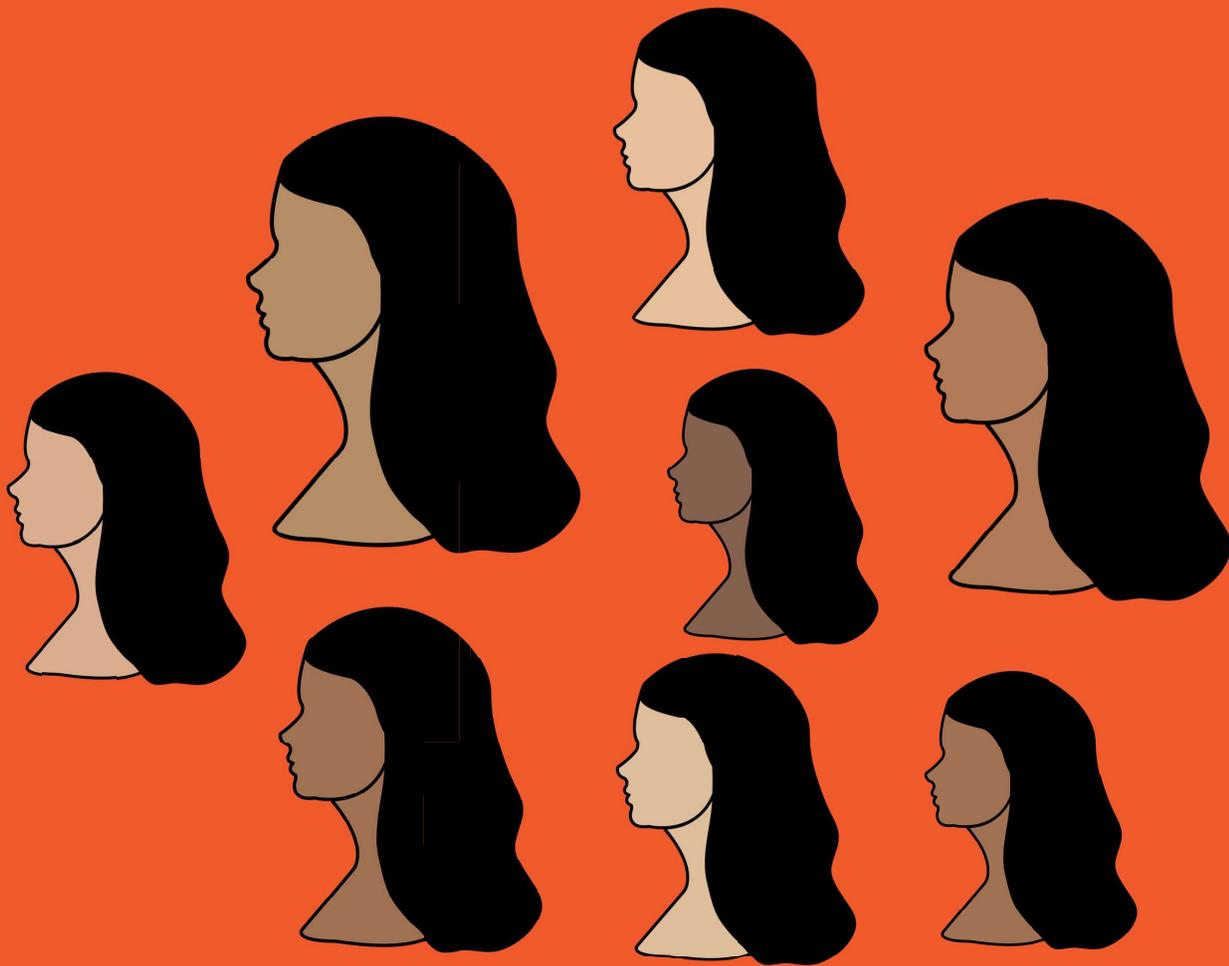


Gender Inequities:

The Erasure of Women's Lives

Through the Absence of Data



A White Paper by

Hope and Heal Fund & Battered Women's Justice Project

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Executive Summary

Firearms make it significantly more likely that intimate partner violence (IPV) will turn deadly. They are involved in over half of intimate partner homicides. For marginalized groups, especially Black and Native American/Alaska Native women, this lethal violence is disproportionately high. Before we can understand and prevent these killings, we need complete, accessible data. Systems like the California Violent Death Reporting System (CaVDRS), the state-specific system of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS), have major gaps in data sharing because county participation in the system is voluntary, and not all counties choose to take part or share information consistently. These gaps skew the public's perception of firearm homicides as "gang" or "street" violence, lead to severe undercounts of homicides associated with intimate partner violence and make it harder for policymakers and other leaders to invest in prevention and intervention strategies.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CALIFORNIA

- Incentivize data sharing and local training to increase participation from all California counties in the CaVDRS system.
- Invest in community-based IPV and firearm violence reduction strategies.
- Invest in culturally relevant IPV victim services.
- Increase the effectiveness of firearm relinquishment laws related to domestic violence restraining orders and court-based compliance processes.
- Fund research on IPV-related firearm homicides, including the coercive effects of firearms in DV situations, prevention and intervention efficacy, and data quality control.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COUNTIES

- Strengthen training for death investigators in law enforcement and medical examiner/coroner offices to correctly identify and document IPV firearm deaths.
- Improve the quality and scope of "circumstances surrounding death" information documented in violent death reports.
- Make individual death reports and disaggregated violent death data available to CaVDRS and incentivize compliance.
- Support and incentivize county domestic violence homicide review teams, as Orange County and some others do.
- Invest in a public health approach to community-based IPV and firearm violence reduction strategies.
- Invest in culturally relevant IPV victim services.



Introduction

Intimate partner violence (IPV) in the United States remains a persistent problem and takes many forms, including physical, sexual, emotional, economic, and technological abuse. Firearms dramatically increase the risk of lethality. Women are more likely to be killed by an intimate partner when a gun is present, and over half of all intimate partner homicides involve firearms. Marginalized groups face disproportionately high rates of fatal and nonfatal gun violence, underscoring a critical gender and racial equity crisis.

Comprehensive, timely data is essential for understanding and preventing intimate partner gun deaths, yet significant gaps persist. The CDC's National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS) and California's CalVDRS offer a great start to violent-death surveillance, but voluntary county participation, inconsistent coroner reporting, and incomplete fields leave large numbers of California's violent deaths undocumented. This data hinders targeted resource allocation, skews public narratives toward urban "street violence," and limits the effectiveness of legal interventions such as firearm relinquishment orders.

Hope and Heal Fund

Hope and Heal Fund is a funder collaborative advancing public health and equity-centered solutions to reduce firearm-related injuries, death, and trauma. Our approach is deeply rooted in community engagement, with data-driven strategies informed by community members, experts, and advocates. We identify and support solutions that address the intersectional root causes and drivers of firearm violence and self-harm through a systems-change lens. Our work focuses on preventing suicide, domestic violence, and community violence, crafting sustainable and equity-centered strategies that go beyond legislative efforts to create meaningful change and lasting impact.

Hope and Heal Fund is dedicated to advancing strategies and piloting innovative solutions to dramatically reduce firearm injuries. Addressing the causes and drivers of firearm violence and self-harm—rather than just the symptoms and aftermath—is central to our systems change philosophy. While public health systems address many critical issues, firearm violence and suicide prevention have been largely overlooked.

Battered Women's Justice Project (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. For more information, visit <https://bwjp.org/our-work/national-center-on-gun-violence-in-relationships/>

Intimate Partner Violence in the United States

Collectively, we have come a long way in the last several generations towards generating conversation about, understanding the dynamics of, and breaking down the structures that enable domestic violence. With this evolution and deeper understanding, the term “domestic violence” has become a broad phrase for intimate partner and familial violence and abuse of all types. We now have more refined language to discuss the dynamics of violence and abuse by intimate partners (i.e., “intimate partner violence”) and other family members (e.g., “family violence,” “child abuse,” “abuse in later life”). This paper explores a particular form of violence and abuse perpetrated by one’s intimate partner—abuse that involves the use, attempted use, or threatened use of a firearm—and its association with homicide rates. This paper will utilize the language “intimate partner violence” and “intimate partner abuse” to reference the range of physical, sexual, emotional, economic, psychological, and technological threats or actions used to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner. The phrase “intimate partner gun violence” will be used to reference the range of threats and actions taken by a person to gain and maintain power and control over an intimate partner through the use, attempted use, or threatened use of a gun, and “intimate partner gun homicide” to reference a person’s killing of an intimate partner by use of a gun. Intimate partners are understood to be people with a relationship of a romantic nature and, within this paper, refers to relationships—whether current or former—including spouses, dating partners, domestic partners, those residing together in an intimate relationship, and those sharing a child in common; and encompasses intimate relationships of the opposite or same sex.

Today, in the United States, intimate partner violence remains endemic, and victimization rates are persistently high. In the most recent data from the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)’s National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, two in five women (41%) and one in four men (26%) reported at least one impact^[1] due to intimate partner violence in their lifetime.^[2]

Intimate partner violence takes many forms, some of which are physical and many of which are not. Most often, physical violence is not the first act of intimate partner violence. Typically, physical violence is preceded by coercive and/or threatening actions, efforts to isolate the victim from support systems, and to strip the victim's autonomy. Common forms of intimate partner violence include:

Physical Violence: Acts of physical force, which may cause physical injury. Includes grabbing, pinching, shoving, slapping, hitting, hair pulling, biting, etc.; denying medical care or forcing alcohol and/or drug use.

Psychological Abuse: Includes causing fear by intimidation and/or threats of physical harm to an intimate partner, self, or others; destruction of pets or property; gaslighting, causing isolation from friends, family and other support systems.

Emotional Abuse: Includes undermining an intimate partner's sense of self-worth (e.g., constant criticism, belittling, name-calling, damaging the partner's relationship with their children or other important family/friends).

Sexual Abuse: Includes coercing/attempting to coerce sexual contact without consent; forcing sex; attacks on sexual parts of the body or treating another in a sexually demeaning manner; forcing the victim to perform sexual acts on/with another person or to perform sexual acts or appear in sexual imagery via the Internet; reproductive coercion such as sabotaging birth control measures by forcing, demanding, or unknowingly causing unprotected sex or destroying or removing access to birth control medication or forcing or coercing an intimate partner to have an abortion or preventing access to abortion care.

Economic Abuse: Includes making/attempting to make an intimate partner financially dependent (e.g., maintaining control over financial resources, withholding access to money, preventing employment); accumulating debt in an intimate partner's name without consent; ruining an intimate partner's credit, rental/housing history, etc.

Exploiting Bias: Includes using an intimate partner's sexual orientation, gender identity, immigration status, religion, disability, or other identity to maintain power and control.



Stalking/Cyberstalking: Involves a pattern of behavior directed at an intimate partner that causes fear and can be carried out in physical spaces as well as technology and online spaces. Includes following an intimate partner to places such as work, the gym, a friend's home, etc.; using technology to track/monitor whereabouts; constant harassment or monitoring via social media, messaging apps, email, etc.

Source: WomensLaw.org

The key to understanding intimate partner violence is viewing the acts and incidents of violence and abuse collectively, considering the full context of the abuse and violence perpetrated within that individual relationship. For example, escalation of abuse is common, which may be gradual or sudden.^[3] A victim of intimate partner violence may be at an increased risk of lethality despite their partner not having yet caused them physical harm. Individual acts of abuse viewed in isolation, rather than viewing the full pattern of behavior of one partner against another, risk missing the dangerousness of the abuse.

As described in this paper, intimate partner violence often involves and is facilitated by the threat of gun violence by an intimate partner. Mere access to a gun exponentially raises the likelihood that intimate partner violence will be deadly for the victimized partner.

Disproportionate Victimization and Impact of Intimate Partner Violence

Women are overwhelmingly the victims of intimate partner homicide. Across the twenty-five-year span of 1996-2020, the 92% of women killed by a man knew their killer, who was their intimate partner 61% of the time.^[4] In 2021, among all homicide victims in the United States, the percentage of female murder victims killed by an intimate partner was five times higher than for male murder victims.^[5] California, in 2020, lost 222 women to homicide committed by a male in a single victim/single offender interaction (a rate of 1.12 per 100,000 women), ranking 35th in the nation and slightly lower than the national average for these types of homicides. This is still too many lives lost to entirely preventable, intentional violence. Preventing and addressing intimate partner violence is a critical aspect of gender equity.

Particular groups of women, namely those from historically marginalized communities, are subjected to intimate partner violence at disproportionate rates. Current data indicates that Black women, American Indian and Alaska Native women, and women who are pregnant and postpartum are being subjected to firearms violence and homicide by their intimate partners at the most alarming rates.

Black women

More than half of Black women (54%) in the United States report having been subjected to physical violence, contact sexual violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime.^[6] Between 2003-2014, Black women had the highest rate of homicide (4.4 per 100,000 population, compared to 1.5 per 100,000 for non-Hispanic white women). Over half of all these homicides were intimate partner violence-related.^[7]

American Indian and Alaska Native women

More than 55% of Native American/Alaska Native women report having been subjected to physical intimate partner violence in their lifetime. More than 40% report a resulting physical injury and missed days of school/work. Nearly half reported needing to seek victim services. More than two-thirds expressed concern for their safety. The vast majority of Native American/Alaska Native female survivors report violence at the hands of a non-native abuser.^[8] 45% of American Indian/Alaska Native female homicide victims were killed by an intimate partner. Two in five homicides of American Indian/Alaska Native women were committed with a firearm.^[9] Between 2003-2014, American Indian/Alaska Native women were murdered at a rate of 4.3 per 100,000 population (compared with 1.5 per 100,000 population for non-Hispanic white women). More than half of all these homicides were intimate partner violence-related.^[10]

Pregnant and postpartum people

Prevalence rates of intimate partner violence during pregnancy and the postpartum period vary across studies, in part due to what forms of abuse were included in study samples (some included only physical violence while others included a fuller range of abusive conduct).^[11] Despite that variation, it is clear that the pregnancy and postpartum period is a particularly dangerous time for victims of intimate partner violence. One analysis of CDC data from the Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS) found that approximately 6% of those postpartum (within 45 days of live birth) report having been subjected to intimate partner violence by a current partner.^[12] Over two-thirds of people subjected to intimate partner violence during pregnancy had been subjected to intimate partner violence before the pregnancy as well.^[13]

Intimate partner homicide rates of pregnant and postpartum people demonstrate the acute dangerousness of this period. In 2018 and 2019, the homicide rate for those who were pregnant or postpartum (within one year of live birth) was 16% higher than the homicide rate for those who were not pregnant or postpartum at the time they were killed.^[14] In a multistate sample of female pregnancy-associated homicide deaths between 2003 and 2007, nearly half were associated with intimate partner violence, and victims were significantly more likely to be Black.^[15] In another



analysis, approximately 15% of female homicide victims of reproductive age (18-44) were pregnant or within six weeks postpartum when killed.^[16]

Consequences of Intimate Partner Violence

Intimate partner violence victims are not a monolith and experience the consequences of that victimization in myriad ways. Many such impacts are lifelong. Harm caused by intimate partner violence includes physical injuries and resulting disabilities, mental health impacts including high rates of posttraumatic stress disorder and depression, social impacts including isolation from family and other supportive people, housing instability, and legal and custody issues, among myriad other harms.^[17]

Victims and survivors of intimate partner violence, and society as a whole, bear an enormous economic burden as a result of pervasive intimate partner violence. Often, victims of intimate partner violence are prevented from seeking or continuing employment opportunities, are subjected to economic abuse that has a lasting impact, or face discrimination in employment as a result of their status as a survivor. One 2018 study estimated the lifetime cost associated with intimate partner violence victimization to be \$103,767 per female victim and \$23,414 per male victim for a population economic burden of nearly \$3.6 trillion (based on 2014 U.S. dollar value) of which government sources were estimated to pay \$1.3 trillion.^[18] In California, the medical cost associated with violent deaths in 2020 was estimated at over \$46 million and, combined with the value of the lives lost, led to an economic impact on California of more than \$70 billion per year.^[19]

The Need for Culturally-Specific Services

Access to victim services that meet the real needs of survivors of intimate partner violence is essential and should be prioritized as such by every community. Acutely needed are culturally-responsive community services. The disproportionate impact of intimate partner violence among Black and Native American/Alaska Native women can be attributed in large part to historical and structural racism. As identified by the StrongHearts Native Helpline, a national culturally-appropriate confidential service for Native American and Alaska Native survivors of gender-based violence, "Native women have not always been the targets of abuse. Before colonization, abuse and domestic violence were rare in tribal communities."^[20]

As a result of persistent structural racism, marginalized women are less likely to seek the services and intervention of law enforcement, the legal system, or even victim service providers. Disproportionate representation of women of color living in poverty and/or in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods, lacking access to affordable housing and/or a living wage are all

consequences of historical and structural racism and all make these women more vulnerable to the impacts of intimate partner violence. Culturally-specific, empowerment-based victim services are critical to meeting the needs of intimate partner violence victims and survivors of color.^[21] Yet the limited funding available to these victim service providers means there is an unmet need.

Firearm Deaths in the United States

According to CDC data, approximately 45,000 people in the United States die every year from guns.^[22] In 2024, the U.S. Surgeon General issued an advisory naming gun violence as a public health crisis, citing the steadily rising rates of firearm deaths (including suicide, homicide, unintentional, legal intervention, and undetermined), which reached a three-decade high in 2021.^[23] More than half of firearm deaths in the U.S. are suicides. Firearms are the most common and lethal means of suicide, by far, accounting for nearly 60% of suicides in the U.S., with nearly 90% of suicide attempts by firearm resulting in death.^[24] Homicides account for a large portion of firearm deaths—40%. In 2021, approximately eight in ten murders in the United States involved a firearm.^[25] In the aggregate, firearm deaths are the leading cause of death for children and teens ages 1-17 in the United States—firearms cause more deaths of U.S. children than car crashes, overdoses, or cancers.^[26] This is an acute public health and public safety crisis.

Disproportionate Victimization and Impact of Gun Violence

Similar to domestic violence, gun violence has a disproportionate impact on certain marginalized communities, though the populations most impacted by gun violence as a whole differ from those most impacted by intimate partner violence. With respect to gun homicides, Black men are the victims of more than half of these deaths despite comprising less than 6% of the U.S. population.^[27] Black children and teens have a gun homicide death rate over 18 times higher than their white peers.^[28] But while men are at an elevated risk of gun violence overall, being five times more likely to die by firearm homicide than women, women are much more likely to be subjected to gun violence by an intimate partner.^[29] Even though women do not represent the majority of homicide victims overall, murdered women are more likely to be killed by a firearm than by other means. Over a 25-year period, more than half of all female homicide victims were killed with a firearm.^[30] The percentage of Black female homicide victims killed with a firearm dramatically increased between 2011 and 2020, from 51% to 72%. In 2020, the percentage of Black women murdered was nearly four times the rate of white women.^[31]

Gun violence is widely assumed to be predominantly an urban community issue. Continuing to rely on this assumption leaves us ill-equipped to deal with the issue of gun violence most effectively. One analysis of homicide data found that in 2015, of the more than 13,000 gun homicides in the



U.S., half of those deaths were perpetrated in just 127 cities containing about a quarter of the U.S. population.^[32] Another analysis of urban gun deaths—using data from 35 large U.S. cities—indicated that 66% of the 67,000 gun deaths in these cities between 2010 and 2021 were homicides, with sharp increases between 2019 and 2021.^[33] Community-level factors do increase the likelihood of gun violence. Under-resourced neighborhoods with high concentrations of poverty, lack of economic opportunity, and social mobility are more likely to see high rates of violence, including gun violence.^[34] Due to historical and structural racism, these communities tend to have high concentrations of residents of color.

But while the number of incidents of gun violence might look starkly higher in urban communities, looking at per capita gun homicide rates gives a more accurate picture of the scope of gun violence in rural communities. From 2016 to 2020, 13 of the 20 U.S. counties with the most gun homicides per capita were rural, and the two highest per capita gun homicide rates were rural counties. In 2020, the total per capita firearm death rate for rural communities was 40% higher than for large metropolitan areas.^[35]

California has a firearm death rate, including gun homicide rate, below the national average. Nonetheless, California's gun homicide rate of 4.3 Californians per 100,000 is the 31st highest rate in the U.S. (the national average is 6 per 100,000 people). Between 2014 and 2023, the California gun homicide rate increased by 16%.^[36] In California, Black people are 13 times more likely than white people to die by gun homicide.^[37] Gun violence costs California nearly \$42 billion each year, of which \$1.1 billion is paid by taxpayers.^[38]

The Distinct Form of Violence at the Intersection of Intimate Partner Violence and Gun Violence

In a seminal study of intimate partner femicide, *access* to a firearm emerged among the most dangerous indicators of domestic violence, resulting in victim fatality. When a firearm was accessible, the female victim of intimate partner violence became five times more likely to be killed by her male abusive partner.^[39] Other data reinforce the exponential risk of lethality when firearms are accessible during or used to perpetrate intimate partner violence. More than half of all intimate partner homicides in the U.S. are committed with a firearm.^[40] Incidents of intimate partner violence in which the abuser utilizes a firearm are associated with a dramatic increased risk of lethality. One study found that intimate partner violence incidents involving firearms are 12 times more likely to result in death than incidents of intimate partner violence involving all other weapons or bodily force.^[41] The previously cited 2003 case-control study found that when a firearm was used in the most severe incident of intimate partner violence, the odds of that incident ending in homicide were 41 times that of incidents in which a firearm was not used.^[42] In California, in 2021, more than

9 in 10 intimate partner homicide victims were women, and almost half were murdered with a firearm.^[43]

Notably, intimate partner gun violence is distinguishable from non-intimate partner or community gun violence in the myriad forms guns are used by a person to abuse their intimate partner. Failure to understand the scope of gun-facilitated intimate partner abuse, and the real harms and danger those behaviors present remains an obstacle to reducing intimate partner homicides. In addition to those lives taken, many more victims and survivors are subjected to nonfatal abuses with a firearm by their intimate partner. Nearly one million U.S. women alive today have been nonfatally shot or shot at by an intimate partner.^[44] Another 4.5 million U.S. women have been threatened with a firearm by an intimate partner.

Some ways in which guns are used to threaten an intimate partner, when viewed as isolated incidents or without context, might appear to others as innocuous. Failing to understand the context of how guns are used by abusers to exert and maintain power and control over their intimate partner is dangerous. For example, cleaning a gun at the kitchen table is a lawful, likely responsible action for a legal, non-abusive gun owner. But when an abuser makes years of threats to harm their partner and then, after an argument, meticulously disassembles, cleans, and reassembles their gun at the kitchen table, it is a threat. For many victims of intimate partner violence, the history and pattern of threats, intimidation, and violence by their partner create a scenario in which threats of imminent harm no longer even need to be verbally communicated.

In a 2024 national survey of more than 2,700 gender-based violence survivors, nearly half of the survivors had been subjected to some form of threat or abuse with a firearm.^[45] The most common forms of threats reported were verbal threats to use the firearm against the survivor, leaving a firearm out to create a feeling of fear, and pointing a firearm at the survivor or someone else, or waving a gun around. Other forms of threats reported by survivors included refusal to safely store a firearm in order to create a feeling of fear, cleaning the gun in the survivor's presence to create a feeling of fear, and making threats to shoot others. Survivors indicated each having been subjected, on average, to more than three forms of gun violence by their intimate partner. Descriptions provided by survivors, including the following, highlight the harm and dangerousness of these threats:

- "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 tell me that he would shoot me as necessary."

- “[My partner] put a gun on my pillow to attempt to coerce me to have sex.”
- “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.’”
- “Would cock loaded gun and point it at me at close range.”
- “He was always 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 and made awful comments about accidental shootings and ‘stupid women’ who just couldn’t behave.”

The Intimate Partner Violence Connection with Firearm Suicide

Many survivors in the 2024 survey reported that their partner had made threats of suicide as a means to exert and maintain power and control over them. Between 1,000 and 1,500 people in the U.S. die in murder-suicides each year—90% involve firearms, and nearly two-thirds involve an intimate partner.^[46] One study in California found that those who had used a firearm to murder an intimate partner were 13 times more likely to die by suicide following the homicide than those who used any other kind of weapon.^[47]

The Community Threat Posed by Intimate Partner Gun Violence

Intimate partner gun violence, though rightly viewed as a danger to the intimate partner victim individually, is also intertwined with community gun violence. An analysis of several years of intimate partner homicide data from 16 U.S. states found that nearly 30% of the homicide incidents resulted in multiple deaths, nearly 50% of those were children or other family members of the abused intimate partner. Roughly 70% of all additional victims were killed with a gun.^[48] One study found that men who murdered an intimate partner were nearly twice as likely to have at least one additional victim when they used a firearm as compared with other means of homicide.^[49] As mentioned, firearm deaths are the number one cause of death for children in the U.S. One study found that 31% of gun homicides of children under the age of 13 were related to intimate partner violence.^[50] Domestic violence is the second most common circumstance precipitating firearm deaths of those 12 and younger.^[51]

Responding to calls involving intimate partner violence is among the most dangerous for first responders. Of the law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty while responding to “domestic disturbance” calls over a 15-year period, 95% were killed with a firearm. More than one in five of the domestic disturbance calls leading to a law enforcement officer’s death also involved the death of an intimate partner, 86% of whom were killed with a firearm.^[52]



Communities are beginning to realize—through data—that the individuals who harm their intimate partners are the same people most dangerous in the broader community. For example, Birmingham, Alabama, undertook crime data analysis, which revealed that more than 70% of community violence homicide offenders had also committed intimate partner violence.^[53] Intimate partner violence and community violence are inextricably linked.

The Intimate Partner Violence Connection to Mass Shootings

Though mass shootings account for a small number of gun violence incidents overall, there is a significant documented association between intimate partner violence and mass shootings. One analysis observed that in more than two-thirds of mass shootings, the perpetrator killed at least one intimate partner or family member or had a history of domestic violence.^[54]

Disproportionate Victimization and Impact of Intimate Partner Gun Violence

Racial disparities among intimate partner gun homicide victims persist but are distinct from the populations disproportionately impacted by gun violence broadly. Like victimization rates of intimate partner violence generally, Black and Native American/Alaska Native women are murdered by an intimate partner with a gun at exceedingly disproportionate rates. According to an analysis of CDC data from 2021, Black women are four times more likely than white women to be fatally shot by an intimate partner, and American Indian/Alaska Native women are two times more likely than white women to be fatally shot by an intimate partner.^[55]

As discussed above, rates of intimate partner homicide are high during the pregnancy and postpartum period. In fact, pregnant or postpartum women are twice as likely to be murdered as to die of common obstetric causes. The overwhelming majority of pregnancy-associated homicides—80%—are committed with a firearm.^[56] The threat of intimate partner homicide for Black women who are pregnant is more than eight times higher than that of nonpregnant Black women, and firearms are involved in a majority of pregnancy-associated homicides committed against Black women.^[57]

Legal Interventions To Address Intimate Partner Gun Violence in Federal and California Law

Increased societal awareness of pervasive rates of intimate partner violence and its lethality has led to the enactment of some policies aimed at reducing intimate partner homicide by recognizing the role firearms play. In the mid-1990s, Congress passed two laws to prohibit those who committed



certain domestic violence misdemeanor crimes (felony convictions of any kind also prohibit someone from accessing firearms), or have an active qualifying domestic violence protection order from accessing firearms and ammunition. Both of these federal laws have repeatedly been upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court, with the protection order prohibitor most recently upheld in June 2024 in *U.S. v. Rahimi*.^[58]

These federal laws do not, however, apply in every situation of intimate partner violence. For example, these domestic violence-related firearm prohibitions apply only when the parties to the protection order or involved in the criminal offense have a certain relationship to one another. With respect to the protection order prohibitor, the restrained person must be the current or former spouse of the protected person, have a child in common with the protected person, have cohabited with the protected person, or the protected person is the child of either party. Despite evidence that more than half of all intimate partner homicides are committed by dating partners, this relationship is still not included in the federal protection order prohibitor.^[59] The misdemeanor conviction prohibitor, applies when the defendant is the current or former spouse, parent or guardian of the victim, is or has cohabited with the victim as a spouse, parent or guardian of the victim, shares a child in common with the victim, is similarly situated to a spouse, parent or guardian of the victim, or is or recently has been in a dating relationship with the victim (closing the gap that persists in the protection order prohibitor). But it applies only to convictions for misdemeanor offenses that include as an element the use or attempted use of physical force or the threatened use of a deadly weapon.^[60]

Many state laws mirror, or expand upon, these federal protections. California has among the most protective domestic-violence-related firearms laws, expanding upon federal law in terms of the applicable misdemeanor convictions and applicable intimate relationships that activate a prohibition on possession and purchase of firearms.^[61]

Implementation of Existing Policies

Key to the implementation of these legal protections is ensuring that people who become prohibited from possessing guns as a result of an intimate partner adjudication are actually dispossessed of any guns already in their possession. While federal law does not speak specifically to a procedure for dispossession, California law does. Particularized procedures are prescribed in California state law regarding the timeframe and manner by which a person prohibited from possessing firearms due to domestic violence must relinquish firearms in their possession.^[62] However, firearm relinquishment processes are not, in practice self-executing—they require multidisciplinary justice system coordination. Indeed, gaps in implementation persist in



communities across the country and within California, leaving victims of intimate partner violence vulnerable.^[63] Timely and complete entry of records associated with someone's prohibited status is also essential to these legal protections meeting their intended purpose. If records making clear someone is prohibited from purchasing a firearm are not visible to the people performing federally required background checks for firearm purchases, those purchases will be permitted, again leaving intimate partner violence victims in extreme danger.

Concurrent with the implementation of legal protections disarming domestic abusers, survivors of intimate partner violence must have access to notification when circumstances critical to their safety occur. For example, victims should receive notification of an order for their abuser to relinquish guns and the parameters of that order. They should receive notification of either compliance or non-compliance with a relinquishment order. They should receive notification of any attempt by their abuser to purchase a gun. Each of those moments presents an opportunity for the survivor to reassess their safety and revisit their safety plan.

The Efficacy of Existing Legal Interventions at Reducing Intimate Partner Homicide

These legal interventions, when implemented, have a demonstrated association with a reduction in intimate partner homicides. An analysis of data from 45 U.S. states over 33 years demonstrated that domestic violence protection orders that require relinquishment of guns are associated with a 12% reduction in intimate partner homicide. Laws that prohibit access to guns for those convicted of violent misdemeanors, regardless of the relationship between the victim and offender—like California—are associated with a 23% reduction in intimate partner homicides.^[64] Among states in which state firearm prohibition laws cover abusive dating partners, there is a 16% reduction in intimate partner homicides by gun.^[65] Additionally, the federal background check system, as of late 2024, has stopped more than 80,000 firearm purchases by people subject to active domestic violence protection orders and more than 198,000 purchases by people with domestic violence misdemeanor convictions.^[66]

However, when looking at these protective effects by race, the reductions in intimate partner homicides from these legal interventions applied only to white victims, and no protective effect was seen for Black victims.^[67] An additional limitation of these available protections is that all require the survivor to engage with the justice system. For myriad reasons, it is not a viable option for many survivors to engage the criminal and/or civil justice system. Communities that have been overpoliced and subjected to mass incarceration lack trust in the criminal justice system to respond without furthering harm. Immigrant survivors often fear that any level of engagement with the justice system will raise suspicion as to their immigration status, and often this very fear is exploited

by their abusers to maintain power and control. When courts, law enforcement, and/or available local victim services lack sufficient access to language interpretation and translation services and accommodations for survivors with disabilities that meet a local community's needs, those survivors are effectively shut out of the justice system's response. These are just some of the persistent justifications of the need for intervention options in addition to the justice system and the need to expand funding and access for culturally-specific survivor supports and services.

The Need for Alternative Interventions

The two limitations noted above—that a criminal/civil justice system response is not a viable option for many survivors and that the justice-system based intervention framework has not yet been implemented in a way that reduces the disproportionate harm to communities of color—indicate the need for additional mechanisms to address and reduce the risk of firearm harm in the intimate partner violence context. Alternative approaches to gun violence reduction generally have existed for decades, but have grown significantly with increased investments in recent years. Data indicating the success of approaches such as community violence intervention models in reducing firearm homicides^[68], coupled with data indicating the connection between domestic violence and community violence^[69] along with a widespread acknowledgement of the harm in relying on the criminal justice system as the sole responsive system to domestic violence has sparked more and more conversation about alternative responses to domestic violence generally and specifically to reducing intimate partner gun violence and homicides.

Data is the critical common denominator. It is from data that we gained an accurate picture of intimate partner homicides—a picture that emerged with guns at the forefront and with distinct communities disproportionately impacted. It is data revealing that domestic violence threads through violent crime across our communities that brought previously siloed fields to joint discussions. It is data that will help us reduce this violence. Yet persistent gaps in accessible data hinder our progress.

The Critical Role of Complete and Accessible Data

To gain further understanding of the effectiveness of existing policy, gaps in policy, and identification of opportunities to provide life-saving services to victims and survivors of intimate partner violence at risk of harm by firearms and the resources to provide those services, we must have access to complete data surrounding intimate partner violence deaths.

The National Violence Death Reporting System

The National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS) is a national database of state-based data collected by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). NVDRS collects state information about violent deaths including homicides, suicides, and deaths of undetermined intent, cause by law enforcement in the line of duty (legal intervention), and unintentional firearm deaths through records including death certificates, law enforcement reports, media narratives, and more than 600 unique data elements from unique sources. All 50 U.S. states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico submit data into NVDRS.^[70] In 2021, 46 states had statewide data, while California had data from 31 of 58 counties.^[71] NVDRS, publicly accessible as anonymized data, is the only such source of information for understanding aggregate trends in violent deaths, including those attributed to firearm violence and/or intimate partner violence.

The impact of access to this data is wide-ranging. Researchers have performed at least dozens of peer-reviewed studies providing insight into a multitude of perspectives regarding violent deaths in the U.S., including intimate partner and firearm homicides.^[72] State participation [JB1] [CR2] in NVDRS has led to the shifting of resources to prevention and intervention strategies targeting the reality of violent deaths in a particular community.

For example, having data relating to circumstances surrounding violent deaths led to Massachusetts' observation that there was an increase in deaths associated with being struck by a train in the state. As such, resources were allocated to install signage promoting the national suicide prevention line and improving physical barriers around train tracks. A decrease in suicide deaths on commuter railways has reportedly already been observed in the following years' data.^[73] And in Wisconsin, NVDRS data indicated a dramatically increased suicide rate was disproportionately among adolescents. From the localized data, particular school districts and communities that were most impacted were prioritized for a five-year school mental health project focusing on youth suicide prevention.^[74] This evidence-backed allocation of resources and creation of prevention and intervention programming is precisely what will help state and local health departments, law enforcement, and communities reduce violent deaths in a meaningful and resource-sensitive manner.

Data from NVDRS is also a critical tool for law enforcement. Law enforcement's role in investigating violent deaths and in promoting public safety with the goal of preventing violent death is supported in many ways by NVDRS data. The comprehensive picture the NVDRS data provides can uniquely support law enforcement in understanding crime in their particular community, revealing trends and "hot spots" (and as compared to other similar communities). Importantly, this data can be



effectively used to prioritize available public safety resources in a way that impacts the reality of violent crime in their community and to develop and justify requests for enhanced resources to local and state governments.^[75] Other government agencies and community service providers can similarly benefit from this data. With respect to intimate partner violence, having a reliable picture of intimate partner-related homicides in the community can help identify which services the community might benefit from most—for example, enhancing access to domestic violence advocacy services, like safety planning support and emergency housing, or increased funding for competent domestic violence victim legal services.

CalVDRS

California, through the California Department of Public Health, participates in the CDC's National Violent Death Reporting System as CalVDRS. CalVDRS, a secure and confidential database, combines data on violent death from vital records (i.e., death certificates), law enforcement, and coroners/medical examiners. Violent deaths included in CalVDRS include those collected by NVDRS: suicides, homicides, deaths by legal intervention, deaths of undetermined intent, and unintentional firearm deaths.^[76]

However, county participation in CalVDRS is voluntary. Currently, only 35 of California's 58 counties are reporting data to CalVDRS. This means the data analysis is only accurate for less than 70% of the violent deaths in California.^[77] This publicly accessible data set is the only insight into county and state-level homicide trends. The work to prevent intimate partner homicides and firearm homicides depends on data like this. Prevention work depends not only on the sheer number of homicides in any given state/county/locality, but reliable information about *who* has been killed and *why*.

The counties that are not currently participating are missing an opportunity to gain insight into violent crime trends, including knowing whether suicide is increasing among a particular population or whether a significant portion of firearm homicides are actually intimate partner violence-related, despite an assumption that firearm violence is concentrated in "street violence". Law enforcement in non-participating counties is working every day to promote public safety and reduce violent deaths without the peripheral vision of critical trends and contextual information that is easily available to them.

Hope and Heal Fund's California Gun Homicides Dashboard and the Missed Opportunity to Improve Homicide Prevention Efforts

In 2023, the Hope and Heal Fund and RomoGIS Enterprises, as part of a larger effort to raise awareness of the reality of where and when firearm homicides are perpetrated in California, built the [California Gun Homicides 2014-2022 dashboard](#).^[78] The dashboard provides a visual representation of firearm homicides across California. It was initially intended as a resource to support the breaking down of assumptions about urban communities being the drivers of firearm homicides in the state. Looking at the map's statewide visual, it's fair to say this goal was achieved. But looking at the available data overall led to further questions—the answers to which would make a meaningful difference in developing and funding services and programs which reduce firearm homicides, particularly intimate partner homicides.

The picture provided by the Hope and Heal Fund dashboard provides county-level insight that can help California communities focus on the reality of firearm homicides *in their own community*, rather than operating on conjecture, or even on state or national trends. In turn, the Hope and Heal Fund dashboard can help California infuse needed resources to communities to do just that. However, with data from only 35 counties, there are 23 counties missing the benefits this data can provide. Among the findings from observing the Hope and Heal Fund dashboard:

- More than 80% of the California counties that report complete firearm homicide and suicide data (so 30 out of 36) have high levels of firearm suicide, homicide, or both.
- Numerous rural counties (including Humboldt, Tehama, Tulare, and Butte counties) have high firearm homicide rates, in addition to high firearm suicide rates.
- Nearly two-thirds of California firearm homicides were perpetrated outside the ten most populous cities.^[79]
- The county that recorded the second most 911 calls for domestic violence (Fresno) reported zero intimate partner homicides.^[79]

This evidence suggests we are missing critical information that would help us understand the circumstances leading to firearm homicides in many California communities, which, in turn, would help identify and devote the resources that would prevent such deaths. When we acknowledge the reality that a majority of the firearm homicides in California (based on the available data) are not, in fact, attributable to densely-populated urban community “street violence,” we must challenge our communities to understand what is actually fueling high firearm homicide rates in particular communities. Looking at the handful of rural counties with higher-than-state-average firearm homicide rates, these are not likely communities plagued by persistent “street violence.”



Understanding the rates and realities of fatal intimate partner violence, most often committed with a firearm, the natural question to probe is whether some, or many, of these firearm homicides were intimate partner violence-related. Relatedly, communities must also have the data that shows how many of the firearm suicides were intimate partner violence-related. It is also likely that these circumstances were overlooked based on assumptions about rural community suicide rates.

While some data has suggested that rates of intimate partner violence in rural communities may be the same as rates in urban communities, hospitalization related to intimate partner violence appears to be higher in rural areas. This may suggest that difficulty or inability to access prevention and intervention services before severe harm may play a role in increased intimate partner-violence homicide rates in rural communities.^[80] Further, gun ownership in rural communities—at 46% of adults, with 3/4 owning multiple guns—is much higher than urban and suburban communities—at 19% and 28% of adults, respectively.^[81] We must put this in the context of the research indicating the exponentially increased risk of intimate partner violence becoming lethal with the mere presence of a firearm.

This understanding would be furthered by complete participation in CalVDRS by all counties in California, but also by evaluating incongruous data, like why a community with high rates of emergency calls for assistance related to domestic violence has no records of intimate partner homicides. Is it the case that the community has been able to so effectively address intimate partner violence to prevent all intimate partner homicides? Or, are the circumstances around intimate partner homicides systematically misunderstood or ignored, leading to incomplete data?

Preliminary data from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) on 911 calls related to intimate partner violence (IPV) in California point to deeply concerning trends, made more alarming by the lack of reliable data on IPV-related homicides. This suggests these deaths are often misreported, underreported, or not reported at all.

In 2020, the following California counties reported the highest number of IPV-related 911 calls:

County	Population Size	Total Gun Homicides	IPV Homicides	CDC IPV Calls	Rate per 100K
Los Angeles County	10,275,545	559	27	35,498	345.5
San Diego County	3,328,647	76	5	17,683	531.2
Orange County	3,229,809	51	8	10,890	337.2
Kern County	897,549	108	0	8,689	968.1
San Bernardino County	2,153,382	166		8,456	392.7
Fresno County	989,303	105	0	7,535	761.6
Riverside County	2,388,710	118		6,344	265.6
Santa Clara County	1,958,087	40	-	6,178	315.5
Ventura County	861,790	11	0	6,162	715.0
Alameda County	1,647,386	123		5,138	311.9
Sacramento County	1,513,201	89		5,120	338.4
San Joaquin County	744,029	67		4,279	575.1
Stanislaus County	540,604	17		3,283	607.3
Stanislaus County	540,604	17		3,283	607.3
Contra Costa County	1,135,585	32	1	3,190	280.9
San Francisco County	871,042	36	1	2,863	328.7

The high call volumes in these counties demonstrate persistent intimate partner violence victimization and support the need for prevention, intervention, and supportive services. Critically though, we lack a complete picture of IPV by not having access to understand the scope of IPV-related firearm deaths. This is due to significant data gaps and inconsistent coroner reporting. Only Sacramento and Orange County participate fully in data submission, contributing abstracted and disaggregated data so that the rate of IPV-related firearm deaths can be understood in the

context of other IPV and firearm-related data. Other counties fail to submit complete, abstracted data.

The number of IPV-related calls for emergency services should be all the justification needed to support further data examination and intervention and support services. When we examine the per capita rates of IPV calls for emergency service, we get an even starker picture. Smaller counties with limited resources emerge as especially concerning, have staggering per capita rates of emergency calls for IPV:

County	Population Size	Total Firearm Homicides	IPV Homicides	CDC IPV Calls	Call Rate per 100K
Del Norte	27,363	2		1,288	4707.1
Alpine	1,080			13	1203.7
Kern	897,549	108	0	8,689	968.1
Lassen	32,275	0	0	271	839.7
Tehama	65,042	7		514	790.3
Tehama	65,042	7		514	790.3
Yuba	76,307	1		587	769.3
Fresno	989,303	105	0	7,535	761.6
Inyo	18,416	2		140	760.2
Plumas	19,292	0		140	725.7
Ventura	861,790	11	0	6,162	715.0
Lake	65,976	1	0	464	703.3
Mariposa	18,014		-	123	682.8
Merced	271,689	19	1	1,678	617.6
Stanislaus	540,604	17		3,283	607.3

Yet still, among these counties with staggering per capita rates of intimate partner violence necessitating emergency services, there is almost no reported intimate partner homicides, which is incongruous to all we know about intimate partner violence.

Despite efforts by the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) to simplify and expand access to reporting systems—including digital platforms, fax, and mail—many counties, especially



coroners' offices, fail to share data. This negligence is especially troubling considering the overwhelming burden of IPV on women. Analyzing lethality rates and obtaining accurate IPV firearm deaths go well beyond academic purposes. Accurate and complete data is critical for identifying risk, allocating resources, and preventing future deaths. Without clarity on injury and death related to IPV, particularly those caused by firearms, any strategic response will be misinformed and likely ineffective.

The preliminary data above shows that nearly every county in California is struggling with IPV-related harm. A coordinated and accountable state response is not only necessary—it's long overdue. We have observed the consequences of refusing to prioritize gender-based violence, of which intimate partner violence is the most prevalent form. For decades, victims, survivors, and advocates have worked to dispel myths and misconceptions rooted in misogyny and racism that fueled a persistent refusal to prioritize addressing domestic and sexual violence as a community safety issue. A stark example of this is the rape kit backlog that came to light in several communities in the U.S..

For example, in the city of Detroit, a systemic deprioritization of sexual violence—perpetrated overwhelmingly against women—led to the discovery of more than 11,000 sexual assault evidence collection kits dating back to 1984, which had never been tested. This staggering number led to a resource-intensive effort to undue that harm led to the identification of more than 2,600 rapists through DNA profiles, including the identification of 824 suspected serial sexual offenders impacting cases of sexual violence across 40 states.^[82] The harm to the victims of the more than 11,000 sexual assaults, and the victims of those serial offenders who *could* have been prevented from further violence, their families, and their communities, is incalculable. We will never know the full scope of opportunities to intervene and prevent sexual violence that were lost because of the years of refusal to prioritize sexual violence as a public safety issue worthy of attention during those years.

Lessons can be learned with access to complete data, which would expose the previous breakdowns in identifying the intimate partner violence context contributing to a death that occurred. Like the harsh lesson learned in Detroit, counties and agencies refusing to look at and contribute contextual data for firearm deaths are missing an opportunity to identify intervention strategies that would actually prevent firearm homicides and suicides. If one of these rural counties, plagued by a high firearm death rate, were to understand the portion of deaths attributable to intimate partner violence, the community could look to either established or innovative strategies to address the problem.



Coordinated community response teams throughout the country have been able to identify barriers to intimate partner violence victims accessing services and protections and make progress in removing those barriers. For example, communities might identify and prioritize resources for an informed domestic violence law enforcement officer, or increased domestic violence shelter services, or legal advocacy services to assist survivors navigating the civil protection order process. Communities might realize they have underutilized tools available to remove perpetrators of intimate partner violence from continuing to access firearms and make progress to more consistently implement these policies. Domestic violence homicide review teams—multidisciplinary teams that collect and assess data regarding domestic violence fatalities across their state, county, or locality—provide a model for taking fatality data and contextualizing it in such a way that the community has a clearer focus on what questions must be answered next or what barriers and gaps must be addressed first to continue reducing intimate partner homicides. Typically, a death review by these teams goes far beyond the information contained in death records, giving much greater insight. For example, Orange County, CA’s Domestic Violence Death Review Team’s review of intimate partner homicides between 2006-2017 indicated that in less than half of the cases there was a known IPV history, meaning in more than half of these homicides across more than a decade the victims were unable or unwilling to reach out to available systems for support. In three of the homicides during the examined period, the victim had a protection order against the perpetrator, which barred them from accessing a firearm and was, in turn, murdered with a firearm, demonstrating the high stakes of ensuring implementation of the legal interventions the judicial system promises to victims.^[83]

Without reliably complete and accurate data, communities are without the tools to effectively strategize and focus on precisely the interventions that could most effectively reduce intimate partner and firearm deaths. Given the disproportionate impacts of intimate partner firearm violence on women—particularly Black and Native American women—this is an issue of gender and race equity.

Considerations / Implications

1. The absence of comprehensive data on intimate partner violence (IPV) distorts public narratives and leads policymakers and the public to erroneously attribute all firearm-related homicides to other factors, namely gang violence. This misrepresentation both undermines the credibility and potential success of Community Violence Intervention (CVI) strategies and deprives IPV-focused interventions of critical resources.

2. Funding strategies and public safety interventions are often driven by data. When IPV-related firearm deaths are undercounted or misclassified, it calls into question the accuracy and equity of our investments aimed at reducing gun deaths and intimate partner homicides.
3. This is not just a data issue—it's a gender equity crisis. In California, county coroners are responsible for reporting these deaths. When they fail to do so fully and accurately, the consequences fall most heavily on IPV victims, the vast majority of whom are women.
4. All sectors charged with promoting safety and health equity should be deeply concerned. Accurate data is not optional—it's essential for ensuring that interventions are just, effective, and truly responsive to the communities most impacted by violence.
5. Based on recent trends—such as the elimination of the White House Office of Gun Violence Prevention—we can anticipate a troubling decline in federal support for improving firearm-related data systems. This signals a critical shift: the responsibility to lead and invest in data-driven public safety strategies will increasingly fall to states. Given this reality, it is imperative that states like California strengthen their own infrastructure for collecting and reporting accurate, disaggregated firearm homicide data, including data related to intimate partner violence. Without state-level leadership, gaps in federal action will continue to compromise the effectiveness of both community violence and IPV interventions.

Recommendations

In order to better understand the complete picture of intimate partner violence firearm deaths in California and to address it, Hope and Heal Fund and BWJP recommend the following:

1. Mandate participation from all of California's 58 counties in the CalVDRS system to gain a full data set of violent deaths in the state. Incentivize compliance with the availability of enhanced state funding for compliant counties to address trends revealed by the data.
2. Strengthen training for law enforcement, medical examiners/coroners, and vital record staff on the nature and dynamics of intimate partner violence and violent deaths.
3. Improve the quality and scope of the "circumstances surrounding death" information in violent death records, particularly for suicide deaths.
4. Make available disaggregated violent death data from each county to fully understand the circumstances behind each death and to determine firearm homicides and suicides related to intimate partner violence. Incentivize compliance with the availability of enhanced state funding for compliant counties to address trends revealed by the data.
5. Support and incentivize county domestic violence homicide review teams.
6. Invest in research-supported intimate partner violence and gun violence reduction strategies that are community-based.

7. Invest in intimate partner violence victim services, particularly culturally-specific victim services led by culturally-specific community organizations.
8. Incentivize implementation of firearm relinquishment/seizure laws and court-based compliance processes by continued, and expanded as necessary, state funding.
9. Fund research that
 - a. Examines the scope of intimate partner violence-related gun deaths, particularly attendant circumstances and predictive factors;
 - b. Examines the availability and efficacy of intervention and reduction strategies, including court-based firearm prohibition compliance processes, firearm relinquishment/seizure protocols in IPV cases, and community-based violence intervention programming;
 - c. Examines the quality control of CalVDRS record entry.

Conclusion

Accurate and timely data is the key to fully understanding any public health challenge and to assessing racial and gender inequities. Intimate partner violence and gun violence each remain endemic across every community in the United States. While California has made great strides in reducing intimate partner and gun deaths overall, far too many lives continue to be lost each year, and Californians in marginalized communities remain disproportionately impacted. Intimate partner violence and gun violence are closely intertwined, and despite laws and policies informed by that reality, gaps in implementation persist that prevent us from realizing the full impact on reducing intimate partner-related gun deaths that is possible.

Reliable and complete data are essential to understanding the scope of intimate partner-related gun deaths and to informing effective policies and victim-survivor supports. Without full and complete data sets on California violent death data, cities and counties are likely under-resourcing the strategies that would be effective in preventing and mitigating intimate partner violence and over-resourcing entities like law enforcement in the belief that their localities' violent deaths are "gang-related". As referenced in this paper, there is ample national research to suggest that use of firearms in intimate partner violence to coerce and harm partners and others is not only prevalent but also is a public health and public safety emergency and requires attention.

The structure for this data and knowledge exists—it now requires full participation informed by an accurate understanding of the nature and dynamics of intimate partner gun violence. Submission of county death data should no longer be voluntary, and counties must be incentivized to fully participate. Participation should include disaggregated data to allow for robust analysis that can



meaningfully inform policy and resources. To fail to prioritize the collection of this data is a disservice to victims and survivors of intimate partner violence and to our communities at large, and it fuels gender and racial inequity.

With this paper, Hope and Heal Fund and BWJP intend to highlight this important data issue in order to spur action from advocates, policymakers, and county officials. Lives are at stake, and action must be bold and immediate.

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