



Emergency services personnel assist a toddler, the survivor of a murder-suicide in a military housing complex, California, December 2011. © Richard Eaton/Corbis

# Too Close to Home

## GUNS AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

### INTRODUCTION

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Small arms policy and research have largely ignored the significance of gender in shaping attitudes and behaviour towards firearms, who owns and uses them, and the differential circumstances in which men and women become victims of firearm violence. The importance of gender differences in gun ownership and gun violence becomes strikingly clear when their role in non-conflict settings—such as family and domestic violence—is considered. Studies in a number of countries have shown that between 40 and 70 per cent of female murder victims are killed by an intimate partner (WHO, 2002, p. 93; UNODC, 2011a); in countries where guns are easily available, they are often the weapon used to commit such homicides. In stark contrast, most men who fall victim to gun violence are killed outside the home by people who are not their intimate partners.

In many cultures, the possession of guns, whether in a personal or a professional capacity, is strongly associated with traditional notions of masculinity that convey authority, privilege, prestige, and power. Yet the presence of guns in the home increases the risks of accidents, murder, and suicide for family members, and they play a significant role in the intimidation and long-term abuse of female partners. These realities have yet to significantly influence policy-making on gun violence prevention in many contexts.

This chapter highlights the relationships between guns, violence, and intimidation by intimate partners. It reviews what limited data exists on the use of firearms in intimate partner violence (IPV)—whether to kill, injure, or intimidate.<sup>1</sup> It also considers the gendered nature of firearm ownership and use, and the cultural supports for gun possession by men. The chapter finds that:

- While the majority of the victims and perpetrators of firearms-related homicides are male, many more women than men are killed, injured, and intimidated by firearms in the context of IPV.
- In countries with high levels of firearm violence, the risk that IPV against women will involve firearms is higher than elsewhere.
- Intimate partner murder followed by suicide ('murder-suicide') is primarily perpetrated by men, and firearms are the predominant weapon.
- Most gun owners are men, as are the majority of individuals in professions using guns—such as the armed forces, police, or private security; the risk of lethal IPV for women, as well as injury and intimidation, is increased by the presence of guns in the home, including work-related guns.
- Gender inequality, the tolerance and cultural acceptance of the use of violence against women, and common notions of masculinity that embrace firearms possession (which may be supported by both men and women) all combine to create a climate that places women at risk of IPV involving firearms.
- Withdrawal of gun rights following IPV incidents and the use of risk assessments for intimate partner homicide may help prevent subsequent violence, but only if cases are reported, which only a small minority are.

- Promising strategies to reduce gun-related IPV include stricter civilian gun possession regulations, broader prevention policies that raise awareness of the dangers of firearms in intimate partner settings, and interventions to change cultural attitudes to guns in relation to certain concepts of masculinity.
- Data that disaggregates victim–offender relationships and the type of weapon used in intimate partner violence and homicides is needed to track patterns and trends in firearm use, and to guide interventions and their evaluation.

This chapter has five main sections. This first considers the significant underreporting of intimate partner homicides, injury, and intimidation in comparison with most other forms of armed violence in conflict and non-conflict settings, and the importance of undertaking gendered analysis of firearms-related violence. It looks at some of the key challenges in identifying data within and between countries. The second section reviews existing data on the incidence and extent of intimate partner homicide in comparison with other homicides, and the marked gender imbalance of victims and perpetrators. It examines the use of firearms in intimate partner homicides, including those followed by the perpetrator's suicide, as well as in threats and intimidation of intimate partners. The third section explores the role of gender in gun ownership and access, in terms of both privately owned and work-related firearms. It examines research on the relationships between gun availability, guns in the home, and the risks of intimate partner homicide, as well as the normalization of gun carrying and its implications. The fourth section surveys the gendered cultural supports for firearms possession, including tolerance of violence in general and against women, and issues of power and masculinity associated with gun carrying and possession. The final section considers some of the policy responses to firearm use in intimate personal violence, in terms of the regulation of gun ownership and handling, court-ordered bans in cases of intimate partner violence, risk assessment, and the need for more fundamental changes in norms and attitudes towards guns and their use.

**Research has not explored sufficiently the impacts of guns on men and women.**

## A GENDERED PERSPECTIVE ON ARMED VIOLENCE

### Starting points

Given that the majority of gun-related fatalities and injuries globally occur outside the home, the role of firearms in intimate partner or domestic violence has received relatively little attention. In the great majority of cases in conflict and non-conflict settings, the victims of firearm-related violence—whether lethal or not—are young and adult men (UNODC, 2011a; WHO, 2002). This fact in itself underlines that gun violence is a highly gendered phenomenon, but research has not sufficiently explored the differential impacts of guns on women and men, or the role of gender in different contexts in which firearms are used.<sup>2</sup> Nor have women's experiences and understandings of violence generally been taken into account in policy discussions. Yet examining the ways in which the use of firearms is patterned, and how it affects men and women differently, offers important insight that can help guide policy and interventions (IFP, 2011; Farr, Myrntinen, and Schnabel, 2009; Bastick, Grimm, and Lazarevic, 2008).

Gun-related intimate partner violence is one part of the much wider problem of violence against women globally. In a recent analysis of femicides worldwide, the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development investigates some of these gender differences.<sup>3</sup> Based on data for 111 countries and territories, the study finds that around 66,000 women are killed violently each year around the world, representing some 17 per cent of all intentional homicides. These femicides generally occur in the domestic sphere, and the perpetrator is usually a current or former partner. About one in three of these femicides is committed with a firearm (Alvazzi del Frate, 2011, p. 114).

Firearms also play a significant role in non-fatal injury, threats, and intimidation by intimate partners, all of which are widespread and highly gendered (see Box 1). Whereas some men display or brandish weapons to threaten their female partners, the reverse is rare (Johnson and Dawson, 2011, p. 71; Tjaden and Thoennes, 2000, p. 11). A recent body of research identifies a range of types of intimate partner violence and threats, including with firearms; this behaviour forms part of a pattern of 'coercive controlling violence', which is characteristically used by men against their female partners (Ansara and Hindin, 2010).

### Box 2.1 Terminology<sup>4</sup>

A number of different and overlapping terms are used to refer to violence in private settings—in the family or the home—and between adults in close personal relationships. Often used interchangeably, these terms sometimes reflect the distinct communities that use them. Throughout this chapter, 'gender' refers to characteristics of men and women that are shaped by culture and social norms, such as notions of masculinity and femininity, and the kinds of roles men and women play in public and private life; 'sex' denotes the biological categories of male and female.

**Intimate partner violence** is widely used at the international level to refer to violence perpetrated by current or former spouses, partners, or friends involved in a close personal or sexual relationship (WHO, 2002; 2010; UNGA, 2012). The term tends to be used by those working from a public health perspective and has largely replaced the term 'domestic violence' (WHO, 2005).

IPV includes not only violence against women, but also violence by women against men, between same-sex partners, and in dating relationships. The violence may be physical, sexual, or psychological, often involves a range of coercive and controlling behaviours, and tends to recur and increase in severity. Physical violence includes a range of actions such as slapping, kicking, hitting, or beating, as well as use of a weapon such as a knife, blunt object, or gun. Psychological violence includes intimidation, humiliation, and belittling; firearms may be used to intimidate and in threats to kill or injure intimate partners or someone close to them, including children (WHO, 2002).

While a number of studies, particularly those based on population surveys, have suggested that physical violence is used equally by men and women in intimate relationships,<sup>5</sup> there is strong evidence that women are more likely to experience long-term and serious injuries, and to be subjected to a range of controlling and threatening behaviours, including emotional, economic, and personal control by their male partners (Johnson, Nevala, and Ollus, 2008; Johnson and Dawson, 2011; Ansara and Hindin, 2010; 2011).

Some European countries and Australia, among other states, continue to use the gender-neutral term **domestic violence**. Until recently, the United Kingdom defined the term as:

any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality (Home Office, 2012).

Following a recent consultation, the UK government expanded the definition to include coercive control and 16-17-year-olds. However, routine household crime surveys in the United Kingdom also use the term 'intimate violence' to refer collectively to intimate partner, family, and stranger sexual abuse (Home Office, 2012).

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention use the term 'intimate partner violence', while the US Department of Justice uses 'domestic violence', yet they define them in very similar ways (CDC, 2010; USDOJ, 2012). In Canada, most provinces use 'domestic violence' to refer to related policies, while the federal government uses **spousal abuse** to refer to abuse by a partner in a marriage or common-law or same-sex relationship. Spousal abuse forms part of the broader category of **family violence**, which includes violence against children and other family members (Statistics Canada, 2011).

**Femicide** is a term used especially since the 1970s to refer to the killing of women or girls who are specifically targeted because of their sex, and to highlight the gendered nature of the act (Bloom, 2008; Sagot and Carcedo, 2010). The term is now widely used to refer to any killing of a woman or girl, whether by an intimate partner, an acquaintance, or a stranger. In this way, it mirrors the term 'homicide'. Apart from intimate partner murders, it includes culturally specific forms of femicide, such as the murder of indigenous women and sex trade workers, the large-scale killing of women factory workers in Mexico and Central America, the execution of women in drug trafficking reprisals, dowry and 'honour' killings, female infanticide and sex selection practices, the killing of civilian women and girls in armed conflict, and as a weapon of war (UNGA, 2012). Firearms are involved in one-third of all recorded female homicides (Geneva Declaration Secretariat, 2011).

## Data challenges

The widespread lack of focus on the gender dimensions of firearm violence and the differential impact of guns on men and women has meant that access to reliable information on both lethal and non-lethal firearm use in IPV is quite limited and, in many regions of the world, unreliable. Information on the range of gun-related IPV incidents—including lethal and non-lethal violence and intimidation—may come from police reports, victimization surveys, public health records, household surveys, court records, or specific studies of victims or perpetrators of intimate partner violence.

In the past two decades data on IPV has expanded considerably as more countries become compliant with international norms and standards on violence against women and as they begin to collect more standardized and disaggregated data.<sup>6</sup> However, states are often slow to implement and enforce new legislation and regulations, and setting up and maintaining a detailed national data collection system is expensive and time-consuming. A study of femicides in Mexico from 1985 to 2009, for example, looks at the registration of violent deaths of women following legislative changes in 2000 that required evidence of domestic violence to be recorded on death certificates. In 2009, reports on 88 per cent of female homicides recorded that year (1,858 cases) still had no information on whether they resulted from domestic violence (Echarri Cánovas and Ramírez Ducoing, 2011).

Reliable information on lethal and non-lethal firearm use in IPV is limited.

The underreporting and undercounting of intimate partner deaths is a significant issue in both developed and less developed countries. In some cases, the police classify intimate partner murders as accidents or suicides; in others, the deaths are systematically covered up or under-investigated, as has been the case in Mexico and Guatemala, as well as in Canada.<sup>7</sup> There are also social and cultural pressures on victims not to report incidents of intimate partner violence in many countries, so that official data on injuries caused by firearms, or their use to threaten or intimidate, is highly unreliable.

To overcome some of these problems, an increasing number of population-based IPV victimization surveys have been conducted and IPV-related components have been included in regular government household surveys.<sup>8</sup> These provide more accurate information on the extent of IPV and on non-lethal threats and intimidation with weapons, but not on intimate partner firearm deaths. Some information on intimate partner homicides has been collected by public health or household surveys conducted in a number of countries, for example by the Pan American Health Organization, the Small Arms Survey, and the World Health Organization (WHO).

Systematically assessing the role of firearms in IPV requires a considerable range of data to be collected and disaggregated, often from different sources; key details include the location where the firearm-related homicide or injury took place, who was involved, the relationship between victim and offender, and the type of weapon used. At each level of analysis, greater specificity is required, while the likelihood of error, differences in definitions, or missing information increases, and reliability and comparability decreases.

In the case of lethal violence, homicide data is available from 207 countries, of which 116 record firearms as instrument type, although many do not do so systematically.<sup>9</sup> In the United States, the US Bureau of Justice Statistics maintains updated information of intimate partner violence and murders (Catalano, 2007; 2012; Cooper and Smith, 2011); in addition, the Violence Policy Center uses federal data to compile an annual report that enables the tracking of the use of firearms in IPV (VPC, 2012a). Some European and other high-income countries such as Australia and Canada maintain data that is necessary to track firearms use in intimate partner homicides, but it is not always published routinely.

In middle- and low-income countries, however, reliable disaggregated information is much less common, and definitions of IPV vary. This makes it difficult to provide accurate estimates of the extent of firearms use in intimate settings in many countries, and to make comparisons between countries and across regions. Even in countries that track IPV, the definitions may vary. In the United States, for example, national homicide data and some states use a definition of

'intimate partner' that includes former spouses but not former boyfriends or girlfriends (Sorenson, 2006).<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the range of different data sources on IPV or firearms use, with variations in scope and questions asked, affect which incidents are captured and reported.<sup>11</sup>

Similar issues arise in relation to data on non-lethal firearms injury, threats, and intimidation; most such incidents go unreported (Johnson, Nevala, and Ollus, 2008). Even in countries such as the Netherlands, where hospital data on firearm-related admissions is routinely collected, information on the type of weapon or the relationship between victim and offender is not published (Alvazzi del Frate, 2012, p. 96). That said, many victimization surveys on violence against women are modelled on international surveys such as the International Violence against Women Survey, which includes questions on injuries, impact on health, intimidation, controlling behaviours, and frequency of violence. That survey also asks about the use of weapons to threaten or injure, but it does not disaggregate guns and knives (Johnson, Nevada, and Ollus, 2008). Similarly, the WHO Multi-country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence against Women uses six questions to assess the types of physical violence used by a partner, but it does not disaggregate by type of weapon (WHO, 2005).<sup>12</sup>

In the absence of national data, researchers often rely on information for individual states or provinces, or on small data sets from diverse sources such as hospitals and clinics, court records and programmes, or women's shelters. These studies may provide quantitative record data, or qualitative information from interviews and case studies. In some cases they offer vivid first-hand accounts of gun-related incidents and can serve as powerful documents for raising awareness of the dangers of guns in IPV.<sup>13</sup>



A crime investigator shows the jury a firearm used by Robert Ward to kill his wife, Florida, September 2011. © Red Huber/AP Photo

There is a clear need for enhanced routine data collection on the relationship between firearms and IPV in many countries. Internationally, indicators on violence against women could include specific information on firearm use. The Economic Commission for Europe and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime recently developed a model for disaggregating homicide statistics to take account of firearm use, the attributes of and relationship between the victim and the perpetrator, the location, and context (ECE and UNODC, 2011, p. 27). The femicide register established by the public prosecutor's office in Peru is a good example of a national system that includes specific information on firearm involvement in all circumstances (ECLAC, 2011, p. 14).

**The overwhelming burden of partner violence is borne by women.**

The inclusion of modules on firearm possession and their use in IPV in routine household or victimization surveys would help to build a better picture of their role in society and on attitudes towards firearm possession. Better surveillance data would also enable some of the social and economic costs of firearm use in IPV to be estimated, which could help to inform policies and their evaluation.

## **PULLING TOGETHER DATA ON GUNS AND IPV**

This chapter pulls together data, research, and publicly available information on the use of firearms in IPV from a variety of sources, including:

- studies and reports on homicides, IPV, firearms, gender, and related legislation and criminal justice interventions published by researchers and international or regional organizations such as the Council of Europe, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the European Union, the Small Arms Survey, the Geneva Declaration Secretariat, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, and WHO;
- the International Violence against Women Survey;
- national statistics databases such as those of Statistics Canada, the UK Home Office, and the US Bureau of Justice Statistics and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention;
- resource centres such as the US National Criminal Justice Reference Service and the US National Online Resource Center on Violence against Women; and
- criminal justice abstracts and medical databases.

### **The gendered nature of IPV**

Over the past decade, a number of international comparative studies have demonstrated the prevalence of intimate partner violence in many different countries. By drawing on victimization surveys of selected populations, these studies show that IPV is common, universal, and highly gendered: 'the overwhelming burden of partner violence is borne by women at the hands of men' (WHO, 2002, p. 89). While population-based surveys often show that women also use violence against intimate male partners, extensive evidence reveals that women experience greater physical injury and emotional stress than male partners, and that the long-term health consequences are more serious.<sup>14</sup>

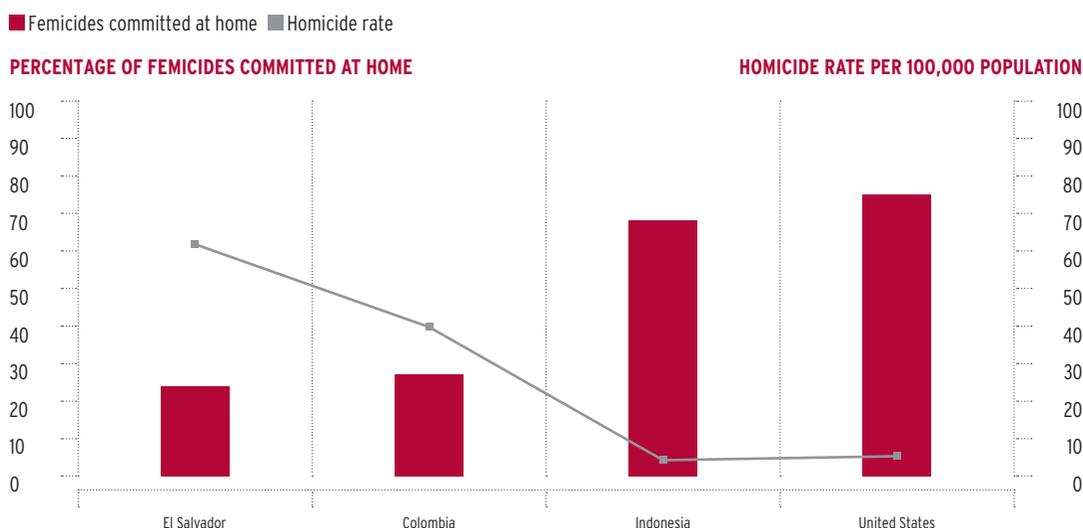
Some of this research has identified a number of types of IPV, such as coercive controlling, situational, violent resistance, and separation-instigated violence. In each case, gender is an important factor in terms of the relative involvement of men and women. Coercive controlling violence is primarily perpetrated by men against their female partners; it is chronic, more frequent, and more severe than other types of IPV, and it can include the use of firearms and other weapons (Ansara and Hinden, 2011; Johnson and Dawson, 2011).



Members of the Gulabi Gang, a women's movement founded in response to widespread violence against women, address a local man, Uttar Pradesh, India, February 2008. © G Akash/Panos Pictures

Homicide data provides particularly strong evidence of the gendered nature of IPV, showing that 'almost without exception [ . . . ] females are at greater risk than males, and that the majority of female homicide victims are killed by male intimate partners' (UNGA, 2012, p. 8). In the very small proportion of incidents in which women kill their male partners, they do so after prolonged violence and threats by those partners.<sup>15</sup> The Geneva Declaration Secretariat estimates a global ratio of one female to five male victims of homicide; the majority of those women are killed in the home (Alvazzi del Frate, 2011, pp. 117, 130).<sup>16</sup>

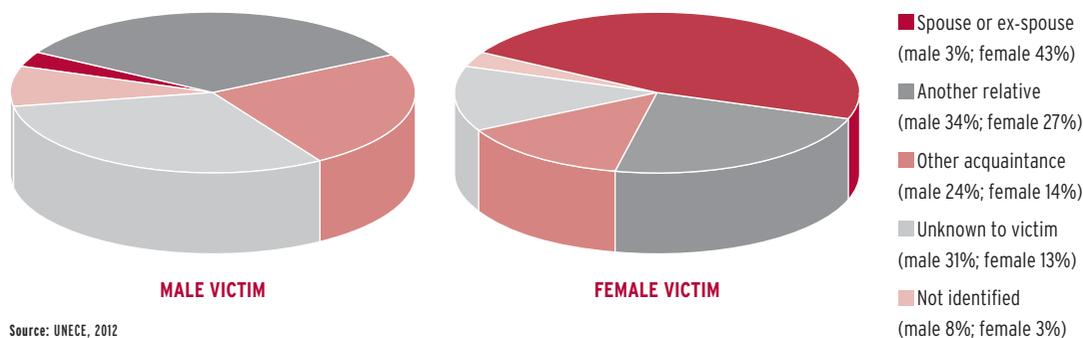
There are very wide regional variations. Based on the Global Burden of Armed Violence database, some 25 countries in southern Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean show 'high' or 'very high' rates of homicide and femicide compared to others. In countries where violence is widespread, women are at higher risk of being killed not only by their partners, but also by strangers, as well as in organized crime-related violence. In countries that exhibit low homicide rates, such as in Western Europe, domestic violence accounts for the great majority of intentional female deaths, including cases of homicide followed by suicide, which are primarily perpetrated by men. Figure 2.1 shows the percentage of women killed in private homes across a range of high- to low-homicide countries.

Figure 2.1 **Femicides committed in the home vs. total homicide rates, selected countries (latest available data)**

Sources: Geneva Declaration Secretariat (2011); Ricaurte Villota (2011); Statistics Indonesia (2006); USDOJ (2000); Vaquerano (2011)

While some women also use violence against their male (or female) partners, this violence accounts for a very small proportion of intimate partner deaths overall. Data from selected European countries, for example, shows that 43 per cent of women were killed by a current or former intimate partner, compared with 3 per cent of men (see Figure 2.2).

A number of high-income countries, such as Canada and England and Wales, have experienced a decline in intimate partner homicides over the past three decades (Statistics Canada, 2011; Home Office, 2009). A similar decline is evident in the United States, whose Bureau of Justice Statistics shows a drop in the rate of IPV, homicides, and non-fatal injuries between 1980 and 2010, especially as regards male victims (Cooper and Smith, 2011; Catalano, 2012, p. 1; see Figure 2.3). Yet, despite the decline in intimate partner homicides, the proportion of female IPV victims has remained relatively stable, and four out of every five victims are female (Catalano, 2012). This underlines the huge challenges in reducing IPV against women.

Figure 2.2 **Relationship of perpetrators to homicide victims in 16 European countries, by sex of victim (latest available data)**

Source: UNECE, 2012

Figure 2.3 Intimate partner homicides as a proportion of all US homicides, by sex of victim, 1980–2008



Source: Cooper and Smith (2011, p. 18)

### The role of firearms in intimate partner homicides

Death and serious injuries are far more likely to occur with the use of firearms than with other violent methods (Liem and Oberwittler, 2012). In one US study, assaults with a firearm were found to be 12 times more likely to result in death than non-firearm assaults in family and intimate partner violence (Saltzman et al., 1992). In its *Global Study of Homicide*, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime shows that homicide rates are strongly associated with the level of firearm availability in a country (UNODC, 2011a, p. 10). This finding has been corroborated by a number of quantitative studies using data from criminal justice and public health sources.<sup>17</sup>

Globally, around half of all homicides are committed with firearms (UNODC, 2011a; Geneva Declaration Secretariat, 2008; 2011). Again, research reveals wide regional variations, with guns used in 74 per cent of all homicides in the Americas compared to 21 per cent in Europe, where gun ownership levels are relatively low (UNODC, 2011a, p. 40). Other methods, including force, knives, blunt objects, and strangulation, are more common in Europe (UNODC, 2011a, p. 40). The Global Burden of Armed Violence database estimates that one-third of all femicides are committed with guns; the rate is much higher in countries with high femicide rates, such as Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. In those countries, more than 60 per cent of femicides are committed with firearms (Alvazzi del Frate, 2011, pp. 131, 132).

Evidence from a number of countries illustrates the significance of firearms in intimate partner deaths. Women are not only predominantly the victims, they are also more likely to be killed or threatened by firearms than men in such circumstances. Canada is a case in point. Even though the rate of spousal homicides has declined over the past 30 years, national data for 2000–09 shows that women are still 3–4 times more likely to be killed by their spouses than are men; in 26 per cent of these cases, women are killed with firearms, compared with 11 per cent of the men (Statistics Canada, 2011, pp. 33–35).

The first cross-national study of the relationship between firearm availability and female homicide was published in 2002 (Hemenway, Shinoda-Tagawa, and Miller, 2002). Using records from 25 high-income countries with populations

exceeding two million, the study relies on data for the most recent available year between 1994 and 1999. The analysis reveals a very high correlation between firearm availability in a country and firearm femicides, with the United States appearing as ‘an extreme case in terms of both gun prevalence and female homicide’ (p. 102). The study finds no correlation with urbanization or income inequalities. Of the femicides whose perpetrators were identified, the majority were committed by intimate partners of the victims, leading the study to conclude that the availability of firearms is a major risk factor for women.

While the overall rates of homicide and IPV declined from 2004 to 2009 in the United States, recent statistics show that firearms are still heavily implicated in female intimate partner homicides. In 2010, 52 per cent of female homicide victims in the United States—849 of 1,622 femicides—were killed with a firearm, and two-thirds of them (574) by an intimate partner. Handguns were used in around 70 per cent of firearm femicides (VPC, 2012a, p. 7). The homicide rate for black women was nearly 2.5 times higher than for white women, although roughly similar proportions of black and white women were killed by an intimate partner and with a gun (pp. 7, 9).

**The majority of murder-suicides involve a male perpetrator and a female victim.**

A national study of femicides in 1999 in South Africa estimates that half were intimate partner murders—a rate of 8.8 per 100,000.<sup>18</sup> The rate for ‘coloured’<sup>19</sup> women was more than double that of black women, and six times that of white women. The study finds that the overwhelming majority of perpetrators were men (Mathews et al., 2004). The authors subsequently reviewed all femicides that were registered in 2009, ten years after the first study. Given an overall reduction in the number of homicides in South Africa over the previous ten years, the second study finds fewer intimate femicides and a lower rate: 5.5 per 100,000.<sup>20</sup> Yet it also reveals that a higher proportion of all femicides—57 per cent—were intimate partner deaths, making them the leading type of female homicide. The study also notes a significant decrease in gun-related intimate femicides, from 31 per cent in 1999 to 17 per cent in 2009 (Abrahams et al., 2012).<sup>21</sup> Another recent report estimates the rate of firearm-related intimate partner murders in South Africa to be 2.7 per 100,000 (Abrahams, Jewkes, and Mathews, 2010, p. 586).

A national study of violence against women and femicides perpetrated in 2010 in Brazil finds that 40 per cent of women were killed at home, compared with 15 per cent of male victims; 54 per cent of the women were killed with a firearm. Of the reported IPV cases, 65 per cent involved a partner or ex-partner (Waiselfisz, 2012, pp. 6, 7, 17).

In Peru, research shows that 70 per cent of femicides are perpetrated by intimate partners (UNGA, 2012, p. 9, n. 37). In 2010, the police recorded a total of 121 femicides and 47 attempted femicides. In 99 per cent of the cases, the aggressor was a man; most perpetrators were partners or ex-partners and 55 per cent of the femicides took place in the home. Ten per cent of the incidents were gun-related, while the most frequently used weapon was a knife or sharp object (Peru, 2010); that rate of firearm-related femicides appears to be much lower than in other countries (Small Arms Survey, 2012, ch. 1; Alvazzi del Frate, 2011, p. 129).

### **Firearms and intimate partner murder-suicide**

Murder-suicides are generally defined as violent events in which the perpetrator kills one or more people and subsequently commits suicide within a short period of time.<sup>22</sup> While they are relatively rare events, available data suggests that the majority of murder-suicides are intimate partner incidents, with a male perpetrator and female victim, and sometimes their children as additional victims (Liem and Oberwittler, 2012; Liem et al., 2011; van Wormer, 2008).<sup>23</sup> Some studies in Canada, Sweden, and the United States report a high prevalence of prior physical abuse among intimate partner homicide-suicide cases (Liem and Oberwittler, 2012, p. 201). Jealousy, a recent or impending break-up, and financial problems are often factors in these events (van Wormer, 2008).

In the United States, studies based on online news reports have tracked murder–suicide cases since 2002. The Violence Policy Center estimates that more than 1,300 people died in murder–suicide incidents in the United States in 2011. The most recent figures report a total of 313 such events—defined as a suicide occurring within 72 hours of the initial murder—in the first six months of 2011 (VPC, 2012b);<sup>24</sup> 72 per cent of them were intimate partner incidents, of which 84 per cent were in the home and 94 per cent involved women killed by male perpetrators.<sup>25</sup> Children are often killed as well.<sup>26</sup> Guns are used frequently: 90 per cent of all incidents involved firearms (VPC, 2012b, p. 2). A report on 408 family murder–suicide cases recorded by the US National Violent Death Reporting System in participating states notes that 91 per cent of the perpetrators were men, and 88 per cent of the incidents were committed with a gun (Auchter, 2010).<sup>27</sup>

In Canada, based on homicide data covering more than 40 years—from 1961 to 2003—an estimated one in ten homicides was followed by the suicide of the perpetrator, amounting to 1,994 of all recorded homicides (Statistics Canada, 2005).<sup>28</sup> Three-quarters of the homicide–suicide victims were killed by a family member; of these, 57 per cent, or an average of 20 cases per year, involved spouses (857 cases in total). Of the spousal incidents, 97 per cent involved women killed by a husband who subsequently committed suicide, and 3 per cent involved men killed by a wife who then took her own life. Firearms were the most common method; some 74 per cent of all reviewed cases involved firearms used by a male perpetrator (Statistics Canada, 2005, p. 61). The same report also finds that firearms were the weapon most frequently used in murder–suicide cases in studies published in the 1990s in Australia and England and Wales (p. 61).

A subsequent review of data for England and Wales between 1997 and 2006 reports that an estimated 10 per cent of all intimate partner homicides, or 12 cases per year, were perpetrated by men and followed by suicide (van Wormer, 2008). The most recent data confirms that guns were the primary instrument used in homicide–suicides in England and Wales (Liem and Oberwittler, 2012).

In South Africa, 20 per cent of 1,349 intimate femicides in 1999 were classified as intimate murder–suicides—defined as a suicide occurring within one week of the murder (Mathews et al., 2008, p. 553). The perpetrators tended to be white, came mainly from professional or middle-class backgrounds, owned a gun legally, and frequently worked in the security sector as a police officer, member of the army, or guard (p. 5).

While firearms are less commonly used in IPV in Europe than in the Americas or South Africa, a comparative study of seven European countries shows that guns were the predominant weapon in murder–suicide incidents in 1990–2005 (Liem and Oberwittler, 2012).<sup>29</sup> In all seven countries under review, the perpetrators were almost exclusively men aged 25 to 64 and the large majority of victims were women in intimate partner relationships. In all countries except Poland, firearms were the primary means used for both the homicide and the suicide, and especially so in Finland, Germany, and Switzerland—all countries with relatively high rates of guns kept in the home. The authors conclude:

*The observation that these three countries also have the highest rates of homicide–suicide lends support for the idea that the availability of firearms could play a decisive causal role in the frequency of homicide–suicide* (Liem and Oberwittler, 2012, p. 211).

Similar conclusions were reached in a cross-national study that compares murder–suicide deaths in the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the United States (Liem et al., 2011). Given that the presence of guns in the home is much higher in Switzerland and the United States<sup>30</sup> than in the Netherlands, where firearms possession is restricted and low, the substantially higher murder–suicide rates in those two countries, which primarily involve intimate partners, is partly attributed to the presence of firearms (p. 75).

In European countries, guns were the predominant weapon in murder-suicides in 1990-2005.

### Non-lethal injuries and the use of guns to threaten intimate partners

As discussed earlier, intimate partner violence is defined as including a range of coercive and threatening behaviours that have physical, psychological, and emotional impacts on the victims. A consistent thread running through most research and commentary on IPV is that it is often chronic and enduring. In England and Wales, for example, domestic violence is associated with a very high rate of repeat victimization, with some 42 per cent of victims victimized more than once (Home Office, 2009, p. 14). Victimization survey findings from the British Crime Survey show that surveyed women experienced an average of 20 incidents per year, often increasing in severity (Home Office, 2009).

In Brazil, following the enactment of the Maria da Penha Domestic Violence Law of 2006, a women's hotline—the Central de Atendimento à Mulher—was set up. In the first ten months of 2008, 216,006 calls were received; some 64 per cent of callers said they were subject to aggression on a daily basis (Lemle, 2008).<sup>31</sup> A reported event of IPV is thus unlikely to be the first, and retrospective studies of intimate partner homicides generally show a history of violence and threatening behaviours. Indeed, reviews of more than 22 studies on the risk factors associated with spousal homicide indicate that, in all cases, previous violence was a precursor to homicide (Campbell, Webster, and Glass, 2009; Aldridge and Browne, 2003).

It is difficult to arrive at reliable estimates of the extent of non-fatal firearm injuries sustained by women in intimate partner violence, in part because incidents are not necessarily reported to the police or at hospitals. Nevertheless, as discussed above, it is likely that lethal incidents form a very small proportion of all events. Of the 8,000 women interviewed for the 2000 US National Violence against Women Survey, 22 per cent said they had experienced physical IPV in their lifetime, while only 1 per cent said a gun had been used in the assault (Tjaden and Thoennes, 2000, pp. 9, 11). Other US studies have shown that, while men are more likely to seek hospital treatment for gunshot wounds than women, women are more likely to have been shot and injured by an intimate partner than are men (Sorenson, 2006; Weibe, 2003).

A household survey of the incidence of non-fatal physical IPV undertaken by the California Department of Health Services finds that in 1998–99 nearly 6 per cent of the female population over 18 had experienced physical violence of some sort in the previous year—meaning that more than 620,000 women were affected. For 40 per cent of these women, the violence was serious; an estimated 25,000 had sought emergency hospital treatment (Lund, 2002).

Estimates of the use of guns to threaten and intimidate intimate partners are similarly difficult to make, primarily because most IPV events are not reported to the police (Johnson, Nevala, and Ollus, 2008; Tjaden and Thoennes, 2000). The threat that an intimate partner could use a gun may inhibit victims from making reports or taking any action that could provoke its use.

**Table 2.1 Use of guns or knives in IPV events in nine countries**

	Percentage of women who reported the use of a knife or gun in the most serious IPV assault they ever experienced
Australia	15%
Costa Rica	26%
Czech Republic	8%
Denmark	10%
Hong Kong	8%
Mozambique	5%
Philippines	14%
Poland	19%
Switzerland	12%

Notes: The survey data was collected between 2002 and 2005 in the nine countries. The respondents reported on IPV assaults perpetrated by current and former partners.

Source: Johnson, Nevala, and Ollus (2008, pp. 45, 46)

The International Violence against Women Survey finds that the percentage of women who reported the use of guns or knives in the most serious intimate partner violence incident they experienced from current or former partners ranged from 5 to 26 per cent in the nine countries surveyed (see Table 2.1).

A number of specific population studies in the United States have found that guns are used to threaten and intimidate partners far more frequently than they are used to kill (van Wormer, 2008; Vetter, 2006; Rothman et al., 2005). One study finds the main risk factors associated with gun threats to be substance abuse, making threats with knives, and gun ownership in the preceding three years (Hemenway, Azrael, and Miller, 2000).

Another study was based on data for 8,529 men involved in court-ordered male batterers' programmes in Massachusetts between 1999 and 2003. It finds that 7 per cent of the sample reported owning a gun in the previous three years; these men were almost eight times more likely to have threatened intimate partners with guns than those in the sample who did not own guns. Yet the gun owners and the men who did not own guns were equally likely to have threatened their partner with a knife. The authors conclude that owning a gun is highly correlated with using it to threaten an intimate partner. They list four main types of threatening gun behaviour that had been used by the men: threatening to shoot their partner; cleaning, holding, or loading a gun during an argument; threatening to shoot a pet or person the victim cared about; and shooting a gun during an argument with a victim (Rothman et al., 2005).

Other US research has found that, when compared with a sample of women with a history of abuse, women killed by their partners were far more likely to have received death threats (73.6 per cent v. 7.6 per cent); to have been threatened with a weapon (55.3 per cent v. 4.7 per cent); and to have had a partner who used a gun (38.2 per cent v. 0.9 per cent) (Campbell et al., 2003). Threats to use a gun have also been associated with intimate partner stalking incidents (Campbell, Webster, and Glass, 2009; Tjaden and Thoennes, 2000).

Studies in Brazil and South Africa provide additional evidence of the use of firearms to threaten women in intimate relationships. In Rio de Janeiro in 2005, 60 per cent of 615 women reporting intimate partner abuse to the special police stations for women said their partner had a gun; 69 per cent of those women said it had been used to threaten them.<sup>32</sup> In addition, 73 per cent argued that the presence of a gun prevented them from reacting to the violence, and 68 per cent maintained that they felt unable to end the relationship for fear the partner might use the gun (IFP, 2011, p. 21).

In South Africa, the 1998 Domestic Violence Act made provisions for restrictions on gun ownership in cases of intimate partner violence. A study of all applications for protection orders conducted in 2000–01 (2,208 cases) finds that 37 per cent involved weapons, and, in 25 per cent of those cases, a gun. In 88 per cent of the cases firearms had been used to threaten a partner (Vetter, 2006, p. 88).<sup>33</sup>

**Intimate partner violence involving guns takes place primarily in the home.**

## GUN OWNERSHIP AND IPV

The preceding review of firearm-related intimate partner homicide and murder–suicide, non-lethal injury, and threats and intimidation shows that they are all highly gendered, and that women are primarily the victims and men the perpetrators. Intimate partner violence involving guns takes place primarily in the home, especially in countries where access to guns is relatively easy. It also appears that having a gun in the household places women at higher risk of injury or death caused by their partners. International and national data further suggests that women rarely use firearms in intimate personal violence, and that it is men, not women, who primarily own and use firearms.

This section reviews the gendered patterns of firearm ownership and use as an important underlying driver of risk for intimate partner violence, especially in the home.

## The gendered nature of gun ownership

In 2007 the Small Arms Survey estimated that there were approximately 650 million civilian-owned firearms in the world, out of a total of some 875 million weapons (Small Arms Survey, 2007b, p. 39).<sup>34</sup> Based on the data available, most guns are owned and used by young and adult men. Women are underrepresented in professions that require the use of firearms, such as the police, military, or security; they are less likely than men to hunt and use guns for sport; and they are less likely to carry guns for self-defence.<sup>35</sup>

Even in the United States, where gun ownership is higher than in any other country, the proportion of women gun owners is relatively small. In a national survey conducted in 1994, only 9 per cent of adult women said they owned a gun (Cook and Ludwig, 1997); that figure has since risen, reaching 23 per cent in 2011 (Carroll, 2005; Saad, 2011; see Table 2.2). That rise may in part be due to the fact that, since the late 1980s, the US gun industry has been marketing guns to women for protection (VPC, 2001). Gun club membership among women, while small, has also reportedly increased, according to news articles and reports by gun shops, clubs, and organizations.<sup>36</sup>

The reasons men and women in the United States say they keep guns vary somewhat. In 2005, most gun-owning men said they used their guns for hunting (63 per cent), target shooting (68 per cent), and protection from crime (63 per cent). Women were more likely to say they owned them for protection (74 per cent), compared with 49 and 59 per cent for hunting and target shooting, respectively (Carroll, 2005). Protection appears to have remained the primary reason women buy guns since those surveys were conducted (*Washington Times*, 2010).

**Table 2.2 Proportion of civilian gun owners and applicants by sex and estimated civilian-held guns, selected countries**

Country	Category/year	Men	Women	Legally held guns*
Brazil	2010	'Almost a male monopoly'	n/a	7.6 million (43% of 17.6 million)
Canada	Gun owners, 2000	87% of all gun owners	13% of all gun owners	1.9 million (2012)
Portugal	Applicants for firearms licences, 2008-09	99% of all applicants	1% of all applicants	1.4 million (54% of 2.6 million)
South Africa	2006	'mainly a male phenomenon'	n/a	3.5-3.7 million
United States	'Personally own a gun', 1994	42% of male respondents	9% of female respondents	192 million
	'Personally own a gun', 2004	45% of male respondents	11% of female respondents	–
	'Personally own a gun', 2005	47% of male respondents	13% of female respondents	–
	'Personally own a gun', 2011	46% of male respondents	23% of female respondents	270 million (2007)

Note: \* Estimates of legally held guns do not necessarily correspond with information in the 'Category/year' column.

Sources: Brazil: Dreyfus et al. (2010, p. 28); IFP (2011, p. 15); Canada: GPC Research (2001, p. 13); RCMP (2012); Portugal: Pureza et al. (2010, p. 68);<sup>37</sup> South Africa: Abrahams, Jewkes, and Mathews (2010, p. 586); Kirsten et al. (2006, p. 17); United States: Cook and Ludwig (1997, p. 2); Carroll (2005, p. 2); Hepburn et al. (2007, p. 15); Saad (2011, p. 3); Small Arms Survey (2011, p. 2)

Outside the United States, the International Crime Victimization Survey has tracked household firearm and handgun ownership since 1989; in 2004–05, firearms were kept in an average of 14 per cent of households in the 30 high-income countries surveyed (van Dijk, van Kesteren, and Smit, 2007, p. 279).<sup>38</sup> However, the survey does not provide rates for men and women. In Canada, 87 per cent of firearm owners interviewed in 2000 were men (GPC Research, 2001, p. 13). A study of firearms (*armas ligeiras*) in Portugal examined data from the national Department of Arms and Explosives on applications for firearms licences. The findings show that, in 2008–09, 99 per cent of the licence applications were from men (Pureza et al., 2010, p. 68).

In India, there are reports of an increase in gun carrying, including by women, for both status and protection. As the *Guardian* reports, 'Ownership levels per capita remain low—three guns for every 100 people in India—but there is strong anecdotal evidence that middle-class interest in firearms is rising fast' (Burke, 2012). Nearly 31,300 gun licences have been issued to women in the Punjab; 31,026 of them have actually purchased arms (Burke, 2012).

Table 2.2 lists the male–female ratio of civilian gun owners and the estimated number of civilian-held guns for selected countries. The information comes from a variety of sources and is not necessarily comparable.

### A gun in the home, a threat to partners

As discussed above, most incidents of IPV take place in the home. The health risks of having guns in the home have been repeatedly explored by researchers over the past decade. There is evidence from the United States and other countries that the risks are elevated, particularly for intimate partner abuse, but also for male suicides and gun accidents. Much of the research has been conducted from a public health perspective, using health registry data and case control studies, or interviews with cohorts of victims of abuse. The research indicates that victims of abuse are more likely to come from households with guns than the general population; they are also at much higher risk of homicide or threats made with guns.<sup>39</sup>

The risks may be even greater for intimate partner murder–suicides. As the above-cited comparative studies show, such incidents, in which firearms play a significant role, were substantially more frequent in European countries with high rates of gun ownership, and in the United States, than in the Netherlands (Liem et al., 2011; Liem and Oberwittler, 2012).<sup>40</sup>

There has been ongoing debate, especially in the United States, about whether elevated risks in the home are offset by the protection that guns may provide homeowners against intruders or partners.<sup>41</sup> Yet there is little, if any, evidence that owning or having access to a gun protects a woman from attack by her partner—even when she lives apart from him (Campbell et al., 2003). US national data indicates there were 278 justifiable homicides committed by private citizens in 2010; only 34 of these homicides involved women killing men and, of those, 21 involved firearms—primarily a handgun.<sup>42</sup> In contrast, 575 women were killed by an intimate partner with a gun during the same period; that figure is six times higher than the number of women killed by male strangers using any weapon (98) (VPC, 2012a, p. 2).

A recent scientific literature review on the health risks and benefits of having a gun in the home in the United States concludes that the risks of keeping a gun outweigh the benefits, and that there are no credible studies showing otherwise:

*The evidence is overwhelming that a gun in the home is a risk factor for completed suicide and that gun accidents are most likely to occur in homes with guns. There is compelling evidence that a gun in the home is a risk factor for intimidation and for killing women in their homes, and it appears that a gun in the home may more likely be used to threaten intimates than to protect against intruders* (Hemenway, 2011, p. 7).

**The risks of keeping a gun outweigh the benefits.**

### Work firearms and the normalization of gun carrying

Apart from privately owned guns, in many countries the possession of guns for professional reasons constitutes another source of risk for gun-related IPV. Professions in which guns are routinely used and sometimes brought into the home include the military, police, border guards, immigration and customs agents, and, increasingly, private security. The presence or availability of work-related firearms in the home has been linked to family violence, including intimate partner violence and intimidation in a number of countries, as well as to suicide (Mathews et al., 2008; Farr, Myrntinen, and Schnabel, 2009).

In addition to access to work guns, work-related post-traumatic stress appears to be a risk factor, especially for individuals serving in the military and police force (Johnson, Todd, and Subramanian, 2005; Knox et al., 2003). There is considerable evidence that male veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress, for example, are much more likely to use psychological and physical aggression against intimate partners than those without the disorder (Monson, Taft, and Fredman, 2009).<sup>43</sup>

**Owning guns for professional reasons is a source of risk for IPV.**

Private policing is rapidly expanding in many regions of the world, and private security companies now hold between 1.7 and 3.7 million firearms worldwide (Florquin, 2011). There is great regional variation in the arming of private security, however, with rates in Latin America ten times those in Western Europe (p. 102). In Brazil and other countries in the region, government offices, businesses, commercial centres, and private residences increasingly use on-site private security and surveillance. With a few exceptions, the great majority of armed private security guards are men.<sup>44</sup> In countries such as Afghanistan, Angola, Iraq, and Uganda, the number of private military security companies has also grown; these often recruit ex-military or ex-combatants who appear to be almost exclusively male.<sup>45</sup> Professional firearm users are typically subject to strict regulations about the storage of firearms when they are off duty, but controls over firearms and their use may be non-existent or poorly enforced in some contexts (UNODC, 2011b; Gumedze, 2008).

Men's work firearms inside and outside the home contribute to the wider 'normalization' of guns in public and private spaces, or to the 'militarization' of societies, with implications for women. This is especially evident in post-conflict situations in Israel, Northern Ireland, South Africa, and countries in Central America, for example (Farr, Myrntinen, and Schnabel, 2009; Hume, 2008). South Africa has been described as a country with a pervasive gun culture and marked gender inequalities, both of which contribute to the normalization of guns (Kirsten et al., 2006; Fish and Mncayi, 2009, p. 318). It has also seen a major expansion in private policing of both public and private space over the past decade. One study finds that 10 per cent of intimate partner femicides in South Africa were committed by men who had jobs with the police, armed forces, or security companies in 1999 (Abrahams, Jewkes, and Mathews, 2010, p. 587). As indicated above, murder-suicides in South Africa were also high among private security personnel (Mathews et al., 2008).

A study of gun licensing in Israel notes: 'Nearly 60% of the [58,690] new guns introduced into civic space in Israel [in 2000–04] were licensed to employees of private policing companies' (Mazali, 2009, p. 252). It suggests that the private security sector has incorporated 'the broader army and police cultures' of masculinity, has increased levels of sexual harassment, and led to an increase in the number of gun-related murders of intimate partners. At least nine female partners, ex-partners, or family members were murdered by security guards between 2002 and 2007, according to a review of news reports (p. 269).

## CULTURE AND MALE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Attitudes about acceptable gender roles, socially constructed concepts of masculinity and femininity, and the relative normalization of guns are underlying dynamics affecting violence broadly and gun-related IPV.<sup>46</sup> In Western culture, violence and firearms are glorified in films and images, and many boys are still socialized in ways that endorse controlling and violent behaviours. Yet, although attitudes to gun possession and violence against women are highly gendered in complex ways, they are not homogeneous across societies (Bastick, Grimm, and Lazarevic, 2008). Given that the majority of guns are owned and used by men, this section looks at gun use in IPV as part of a continuum of socially endorsed or tolerated attitudes and behaviours that includes violence against women as well as ‘violent masculinities’. Gender inequality underlines all of these issues.

### Tolerance of violence and violence against women

Countries with high rates of violence and gun possession also tend to have high rates of tolerance of violence against women in society generally (Alvazzi del Frate, 2011). In many contexts, women are unwilling to report IPV incidents to the police for fear that little action will be taken, that they may be revictimized by the justice system, or that they will suffer retribution for doing so, especially if their partner has a gun (Johnson, Nevala, and Ollus, 2008; AI, 2008). In cases that are reported, police and prosecutors are often very slow to investigate or pursue accusations, creating a context of impunity for perpetrators.<sup>47</sup>

In Latin America and the Caribbean, the Pan American Health Organization looked at patterns of help-seeking by women who experienced IPV in five countries. The findings show that large percentages of women did not seek any help—not even from family members; the proportion ranged from 41 per cent in Nicaragua to 69 per cent in Haiti. The percentage of women who actually went to the police ranged from 2 per cent in Haiti to 16 per cent in Colombia (PAHO, 2005). Evidence from another study shows that family violence in El Salvador is still generally regarded as a private matter, and as the kind of violence that is normal, expected, and tacitly accepted (Hume, 2008).

In many societies, women themselves think it acceptable for men to use violence against their wives. In the nine-country study, the International Violence against Women Survey finds wide variations among women’s views on whether intimate partner violence was a crime—rather than ‘something that happens’—and whether they would report IPV to the police (Johnson, Nevala, and Ollus, 2008, pp. 141–42). The 2005 WHO multi-country study finds that in some countries 50–90 per cent of women felt that it was acceptable for a man to beat his wife under a number of circumstances (WHO, 2005, p. 39).<sup>48</sup> It also reveals a strong correlation between women’s attitudes to the acceptability of wife beating and rates of IPV (p. 40).

Gender inequalities are also associated with notions of patriarchy and power exercised by men over women, and types of masculinity that reinforce the belief that men should control women (WHO, 2005; Johnson, Nevala, and Ollus, 2008; see Box 2.3, overleaf). These attitudes may be perpetuated by the socialization of boys and girls growing up, and actively or passively condoned by the wider cultural and religious contexts. Research on masculinity in a range of countries and regions has shown that men with non-equitable views are significantly more likely to have used gender-based violence than others (Barker et al., 2011a, p. 9). Similarly, studies of private military and security companies have shown them to endorse and encourage ‘hyper-masculine’ macho behaviours that reject ‘feminine’ approaches to problem solving (Via, 2010; Higate, 2009; Schulz and Yeung, 2008).

**The majority of guns are owned and used by men.**



A member of one of the largest gangs in San Salvador shows off his gun, Las Victorias, January 2013. © Adam Hinton/Panos Pictures

### Box 2.3 Power and masculinity

Gender inequality is often associated with concepts of power and masculinity as well as cultural attitudes that restrict the mobility and behaviour of women. Perceived transgressions of accepted roles on the part of women can provoke violent reactions by men. In India, for example, one member of a group of Hindu activist men who had attacked women for breaking cultural norms in 2009 provided this justification:

These girls come from all over India, drink, smoke, and walk around in the night spoiling the traditional girls of Mangalore. [...] Why should girls go to pubs? Are they going to serve their future husbands alcohol? Should they not be learning to make chapattis? Bars and pubs should be for men only. We wanted to ensure that all women in Mangalore are home by 7 pm (Johnson, 2009).<sup>49</sup>

A wide range of norms—from the perception of men as socially superior to women, to the acceptance of violence as a legitimate way to discipline women—support the use of violence against women, making them vulnerable in the home and on the street.

The normalization of violence and weapons possession is also linked to guns as ways to achieve recognition, status, and power—especially among young men; normalization also extends to the concept of protection among men who perceive their role as protectors of their families. It is also strongly associated with gender inequalities in society. One observer argues that in post-conflict El Salvador, for example, violence has become ‘a key expression of masculine behaviour and a mechanism for ensuring continued male privilege’ (Hume, 2008, pp. 61, 62).

The symbolism and power associated with gun possession is very strong and persistent in many societies. A strong component of violence-endorsing masculinity and gun use is that they are often given both tacit and overt support by women and girls in many countries and cultural contexts.

Sources: AI, Oxfam International, and IANSA (2005, ch. 4); Barker (2005); Barker et al. (2011a); Bevan and Florquin (2006); Hume (2008); IFP (2011); Small Arms Survey (2010); WHO (2010, p. 53)

## ADDRESSING GUN-RELATED IPV

What can be done to reduce the impacts of firearms on personal relationships, and female partners in particular? While it is important to address all forms of IPV, this section focuses specifically on some options for preventing gun-related intimate personal violence.

Recommendations found in the literature tend to suggest closer regulation of gun ownership, safe handling and storage, and the use of actuarial risk assessment instruments and court-mandated bans on gun possession in cases of known IPV. Other approaches include targeted and general public education campaigns to change attitudes towards gun possession and use. Overall, it is important to encompass both criminal justice and prevention approaches, and to work at the societal, community, and individual levels (WHO, 2010). Such a multi-level process can involve strengthening legislation, changing social norms and attitudes, and increasing protection and awareness at the local and individual levels.

National policy on IPV has improved around the world in recent years, with legislation enacted in many regions with high levels of firearm-related violence against women. In Latin American and the Caribbean, for example, the 1994 Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women, also known as the Convention of Belém do Pará, has been ratified by 32 states parties; however, signatories have been very slow to implement its provisions on enacting and enforcing domestic violence legislation, providing services for victims, reducing impunity for IPV, and establishing data collection and training programmes associated with firearms and IPV for the police, judiciary, and health services (OAS, n.d.).<sup>50</sup> In Europe, one promising initiative is the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, now signed by 27—although ratified by only three—of the 47 member states of the Council of Europe (Council of Europe, 2011).

There is some evidence from countries such as Australia, Canada, England and Wales, New Zealand, and South Africa that comprehensive reform of firearm legislation is associated with reductions of overall and intimate partner homicides.<sup>51</sup> In Canada, a universal licensing and registration system for all types of firearms was established in 1995.<sup>52</sup> This included registration of all rifles and shotguns, which are the firearms responsible for the majority of suicides and domestic homicides in Canada. Since 1995, there has been a reduction in both suicides and intimate partner homicides involving firearms (RCMP, 2010). Similar regulations governing purchase and safe handling and storage of firearms have been introduced in recent years in Australia, England and Wales, and Scotland, among other countries (Bricknell, 2012; Eder, 2011).

At the international level, the 2001 UN Firearms Protocol, the 2001 UN Programme of Action on small arms and light weapons, and related regional conventions and protocols are important for building consensus about the need to control and reduce illicit firearms proliferation (UN PoA-ISS, n.d.a; n.d.b).<sup>53</sup> Much of the associated action has focused on trafficking and supply, although the Nairobi Protocol and the South African Development Community Protocols both contain detailed obligations for states to reform and harmonize their laws and regulations on civilian firearms possession and use (Kytömäki, 2006, p. 58). There is still considerable scope for raising awareness of the dangers of firearm possession in domestic situations, and for developing stronger firearm controls in other contexts.

**Restrictions on  
firearms ownership  
in IPV cases can  
help prevent future  
violence and homicide.**

### **Separating abusers and guns**

Legislation and court-ordered restrictions on firearms ownership and use in cases of IPV have become one of the main mechanisms to help prevent future intimate partner violence and homicides. In 1996 the US federal government passed the landmark Domestic Violence Offender Gun Ban as an amendment to earlier legislation prohibiting people under domestic violence restraining orders from purchasing or possessing a gun (Frattaroli, 2009). The 1996 legislation outlaws gun ownership and use for individuals who have been convicted of a misdemeanor domestic violence offence or who are subject to civil restraining orders against an intimate partner or the partner's child.<sup>54</sup> There are no exceptions, even for those using guns for professional purposes, such as the military or the police.

Many US states have since enacted additional legislation granting the police authority to remove guns when they respond to domestic violence calls, or the courts to demand the surrender of firearms by convicted offenders and impose other firearms restrictions (Frattaroli, 2009). In cases of domestic violence where a protective order is sought, the courts can variously impose a ban on the purchase of firearms or ammunition, revoke licences to carry a gun, and confiscate existing weapons. In a detailed review of state legislation, 27 states and the District of Columbia were found to have either police gun removal and/or court-ordered gun removal laws, while 23 states had neither (Frattaroli, 2009, p. 29).

Yet the effectiveness of police removal and court-ordered bans on firearms in cases of domestic abuse depends on the strength of the laws and the extent of their implementation and enforcement. Studies of the impact of such



A poster urges voters to 'Protect family' and vote yes in the 2011 referendum on tightening firearms laws in Zurich, Switzerland, January 2011.  
© Walter Bieri/Associated Press

bans in the United States have shown that they can be effective (Vigdor and Mercy, 2006); however, state legislation varies considerably in terms of coverage. Frattaroli finds that both types of state laws varied in the strength of their conditions, including whether the police or judges were required ('shall') or had the discretion ('may') to remove firearms; whether an arrest was required; whether a gun had to have been used as an instrument of abuse; and whether the level of danger had to be considered. There was also variation regarding who had responsibility for the removal of guns, with some states leaving it to the offender to surrender firearms and others requiring law enforcement to confiscate them (Frattaroli, 2009).

Even when legislation is relatively strong, effective implementation still requires training of the police and judiciary—and enforcement. A number of studies have shown that the application of state legislation is sporadic. A report on women who sought domestic violence protection orders in North Carolina examines whether courts took appropriate action following the passage of new legislation; the law requires judges to ask plaintiffs whether their partner has a gun, and requires defendants to surrender their firearms within 24 hours. The results show that only 45 per cent of

women were asked about firearms by judges, both before and after the passage of the legislation, and that of defendants required to surrender their firearms as a condition of the protection order, only 5 per cent were reported to have done so, and only 14 per cent had them confiscated by law enforcement (Moracco et al., 2006).

A similar study evaluates the impact of legislation requiring judges in California to order defendants in domestic violence protection order cases to surrender their guns and prohibiting the purchase of guns. It found that 48 per cent of the defendants were required to surrender their guns and prohibited from buying one, while 38 per cent were only prohibited from buying firearms (Sorenson and Shen, 2005, p. 925). Of further concern was that one in six restraining orders was not served, meaning that defendants were unaware of the conditions of the order (p. 929). Similar findings emerge from other studies, showing that judges do not order surrender in many cases and that law enforcement does not actively ensure that guns are surrendered (Webster et al., 2010; Frattaroli and Vernick, 2006). In addition, plaintiffs may not always know their rights.

South Africa's 1998 Domestic Violence Act allows individuals to request the removal of guns in their applications for protection orders in cases of domestic violence. A study of applications for protection orders in 2000–01 finds that a very small proportion of women requested the removal of guns from their perpetrators. While one in four cases involved a gun, only 2 per cent resulted in the removal of weapons, and only 3 per cent of applications requested their removal. The low rates may reflect the fact that women and magistrates were largely unaware of the legislation, that women were fearful of the consequences of such a request, or perhaps that they regarded gun possession as important in the context of high levels of community violence (Vetten, 2006). Stricter gun controls regulating general gun purchase and use were introduced in legislation in 2000, and more recent research suggests that the proportion of gun-related intimate partner homicides between 1999 and 2009 declined from 34 to 17 per cent, along with a similarly steep drop in all homicides (Abrahams et al., 2012; SOUTH AFRICA).

In Canada, mandatory gun prohibition orders and revocations in domestic violence cases were introduced in 1995 (Johnson and Dawson, 2011, p. 91). In Australia, courts in domestic violence cases may suspend gun licences and remove guns, or revoke licences entirely. Nevertheless, many guns are reportedly returned to their owners if cases are withdrawn, suggesting ongoing risks for partners (Patty, 2011).

Most studies argue that, despite the conflicting evidence of their effectiveness due to poor implementation, police powers to remove firearms and court-ordered restrictions on gun ownership in intimate partner violence are valuable policy options; they call for greater public awareness and better implementation of these measures. Yet the removal of guns, suspension of licences, and prohibition of gun purchases all rely on cases of intimate partner violence being reported in the first place, and may be difficult if guns are illegally held.

## Risk assessments

Possession of a firearm is only one of the factors placing women at risk of gun-related IPV. Intimate partner gun violence is often triggered by a range of individual, social, and economic factors—such as depression, jealousy, the threat of separation, alcohol abuse, or financial problems. Given the repetitive nature of much IPV, a number of studies have assessed the risk factors for further violence and homicide; some have developed actuarial risk assessment tools. These are intended to aid the police, medical, and social services in calculating the risks of homicide in domestic violence situations. Much of the work has been undertaken in the United States, building on studies of gun ownership among men sentenced for battering their wives; case control studies of intimate partner homicide victims and of women with non-fatal histories; and studies of women in shelters. Collectively, they have built a profile of attitudes to, and firearm use in, IPV in the United States (Campbell, 2005; Ventura et al., 2007).

Risk assessment tools aid in calculating the risk of homicide in domestic violence.

The Danger Assessment is a 20-item tool developed by Jacquelyn Campbell over the past 25 years (Campbell et al., 2003; Campbell, Webster, and Glass, 2009, p. 655).<sup>55</sup> It is accompanied by a calendar to educate and enable women to track incidents and reduce the common tendency to minimize the number of violent incidents. Previous domestic violence by a male partner is a major and consistent risk factor, together with death threats, owning a gun, and unemployment. Apart from gun ownership, reviews of more than 22 empirical studies on risk factors for spousal homicide (primarily from the United States) have identified key risk factors: being a witness or victim of family violence; being in a de facto relationship (as opposed to being married); an age disparity between partners; having a non-biological child in the household; drug and alcohol abuse; sexual jealousy; separation or threat of separation; stalking; personality disorder; and previous domestic violence (Campbell, Webster, and Glass, 2009; Aldridge and Browne, 2003; Ansara and Hindin, 2010).

Risk assessment can be a valuable tool in preventing revictimization, but its use depends once again on the initial identification and reporting of abuse. Preventing abuse in the first place requires considerable public education and innovative interventions to increase awareness, provide alternative models, and begin to change attitudes.

### **Changing attitudes, norms, and behaviour**

**Preventing abuse requires public education to increase awareness and change attitudes.** A second major response to firearm use in IPV has been work to change attitudes towards the acceptance of guns as a normal part of society. One of the barriers to changing attitudes to violence against women has been the tendency to separate private violence from public violence, and to consider them separately. As a result, legislation, policies, and programmes on intimate partner violence have paid little attention to the links with sexual violence and harassment (and gun use against women) outside the home. Yet reducing IPV is intrinsically linked to broader social attitudes to the use of violence against women in all situations (Shaw, 2010). Listening to the experiences of victims and perpetrators to understand the wider use of guns in intimidation in IPV has been seen as important in understanding gendered attitudes and behaviours underlying firearm use (Sorenson and Weibe, 2004).

In relation to professional gun users, attitudes about the acceptability of violence are strong within the military, and preventing carry-over into the domestic sphere can be particularly challenging, but some approaches have shown success. One example is a multidisciplinary long-term project with US Air Force personnel. Launched in 1997, the project provided a range of supports and training to servicemen and their families. While it was designed primarily to reduce suicides, it also helped to reduce intimate partner abuse and child maltreatment. Rates of suicide were reduced by 33 per cent and severe and moderate family violence (intimate partner abuse and child maltreatment) by 54 and 30 per cent, respectively (Knox et al., 2003). There is a pressing need for greater attention to the problems of IPV among families in which one partner uses firearms professionally. Brazil is currently developing group programmes for men sentenced for IPV, many of whom are police or security professionals (Instituto NOOS, n.d.).

A number of programmes now engage at-risk populations—men, boys, women, and girls—to change attitudes to gun possession, and notions of masculinity that incorporate violence and weapon ownership (Barker et al., 2011b; Barker, Ricardo, and Nascimento, 2007; Harvey, Garcia-Moreno, and Butchart, 2007). Some seek to change perceptions of women and girls about what is ‘normal’ in relation to firearms and intimate violence. A Brazilian campaign developed by the NGO Viva Rio involved women and girls in Rio favelas—‘mothers, sisters, girlfriends, wives, and cousins’—stressing that guns do not make men more manly or attractive (AI, Oxfam International, and IANSA, 2005).

## CONCLUSION

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The power of guns and cultural supports for gender inequalities are a lethal combination. While young and adult men are far more likely than other groups to die from firearm violence, women are overwhelmingly the victims of intimate partner homicides, and are at much higher risk in situations where their partner has access to a gun. In the places they should be the safest, women are at risk of lethal violence and ongoing threats and intimidation with firearms.

These gendered observations have not received the attention they deserve in wider discussions of guns and gun violence, nor have the economic and social costs of gun-related IPV violence to society—although this may be changing slowly. The impact of comprehensive gun law reform on intimate partner gun violence has been noted, although far more attention is directed to overall homicide rates following the implementation of such laws. In addition, in recent years specific laws that seek to separate abusive men from their firearms have been enacted in the United States and some other countries. This strategy, and the use of risk assessment instruments to guide court, police, and victim services to judge the risks of further lethal and non-lethal IP violence, including with firearms, also appear valuable.

However, preventing intimate partner gun violence before it occurs the first time requires not only legal reform but much deeper changes in cultural norms that influence men and women's attitudes and behaviours to each other, to the use of violence, and to firearms. These are long-term projects, but legal reform is often the beginning of a society's efforts to transform its norms of acceptability of violence. More widespread consideration of the risks to women associated with guns in the home would help to raise awareness, as would more public dialogue about men's gun use, gender inequality, and tolerance of violence against women.

In parallel with efforts to change social norms, there is a pressing need for better data on intimate partner gun violence. To date, the data has allowed us to see the general outline of the phenomenon, which is stark. But patterns of firearm use in intimate personal violence vary considerably across regions and countries, and more systematic data collection on the circumstances of gun violence and domestic violence incidents would improve our understanding of the many factors that influence gun-related IPV. At the same time, it would help to identify promising context-specific interventions, which are much needed since, for many women, the home is a more dangerous place than the street. ■

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

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IPV	Intimate partner violence
WHO	World Health Organization

## ENDNOTES

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- 1 The term 'intimate partner violence' is widely used to refer to violence between current or former spouses or partners, or close friends involved in a sexual relationship. It is often used interchangeably with the term 'domestic violence'. See Box 2.1 for a more detailed discussion.
- 2 Studying the behaviour of girls and young women as they grow up has shed considerable light on the differential cultural patterns and pressures that shape the behaviour and attitudes of young male offenders (Walklate, 2001). In the same way, exploring gender differences in perceptions of firearms and their use can promote a better understanding of the victimization of men and women.
- 3 The term 'femicide' in this chapter refers to any killing of a girl or woman, regardless of the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator. The term includes both intimate and stranger violence. See Box 2.1 for further information.
- 4 Broader terms are also in use. The UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women defines 'gender-based violence' as 'violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately' (CEDAW, 1992, para. 6). The UN

- Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women defines 'violence against women' as 'any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life' (UNGA, 1993, art. 1). See also UNGA (2006, paras. 20, 31–33).
- 5 See, for example, Straus (2004).
- 6 Such international norms and standards are promulgated in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence against Women of 1979 and the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women of 1993. See UNGA (2006).
- 7 See, for example, Beltran and Freeman (2007); NWAC (2010); Prieto-Carrón, Thompson, and MacDonald (2007); Sagot and Carcedo (2010).
- 8 A 2005 research guide identifies nearly 80 population-based studies on violence against women that were carried out between 1982 and 2004 in more than 50 countries (Ellsberg and Heise, 2005, p. 12).
- 9 The WHO International Classification of Diseases, which is used in many countries, features a code for homicides related to guns or explosives, but it does not differentiate between intimate partner homicide and other deaths.
- 10 Sorenson illustrates the practical implications of definitions by looking at the state of California, where intimate partners used to be defined as exclusively spousal (legal or common-law), with all former spouses and current and former boy- or girlfriends excluded. She estimates that a broadening of that definition would have nearly doubled the number of intimate partner homicides in California in 1990–99, from 1,192 to 2,313 (Sorenson, 2006). Other US studies have reported 13 per cent and 19 per cent of partner homicides miscategorized nationally, with the exclusion of former boy- and girlfriends in some states (Campbell et al., 2003; Campbell, Webster, and Glass, 2009).
- 11 For example, information may come from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the General Social Survey, national household surveys, national firearms surveys, the Federal Bureau of Investigation *Supplementary Homicide Report*, injury and mortality reports, or Gallup Poll surveys.
- 12 To estimate the incidence and prevalence of physical violence, WHO asks a female respondent whether a current or former partner has ever: slapped her or thrown something at her that could hurt her; pushed or shoved her; hit her with a fist or something else that could hurt; kicked, dragged, or beaten her; threatened her with or actually used a gun, knife, or other weapon against her (WHO, 2005).
- 13 See, for example, AI, Oxfam International, and IANSA (2005) and AI (2008).
- 14 See, for example, Tjaden and Thoennes (2000) and Ansara and Hindin (2010; 2011).
- 15 See, for example, Ansara and Hindin (2011) and van Wormer (2008).
- 16 These findings are based on information from 111 countries for which reliable data was available, representing some 56 per cent of the world's female population. The database is one of the largest constructed to record female homicide.
- 17 Geneva Declaration Secretariat (2008; 2011); Hemenway, Shinoda-Tagawa, and Miller (2002); Hepburn and Hemenway (2004); Small Arms Survey (2012).
- 18 The study was based on mortuary and police records for 1999. The authors estimated that 1,349 women over the age of 14 were killed by male intimate partners that year (Mathews et al., 2004). An earlier study of intimate partner femicides in Gauteng province identifies 941 cases for the period 1990–99. The author refers to the figure as an underestimate, citing record-keeping problems. The percentage of gun-related deaths increased from 23 in 1990 to 41 by 1999 (Vetten, 2006).
- 19 In South Africa, 'coloured' refers to people of mixed racial ancestry.
- 20 The overall rate of homicide in South Africa decreased 50 per cent between 1995–96 and 2010–11 (SAPS, 2011).
- 21 There was also a drop in non-intimate femicides.
- 22 Van Wormer (2008) discusses the problems of assessing the extent of murder–suicide cases in many countries: data is rarely published and definitions of what constitutes a case vary.
- 23 The most common types of murder–suicide have been classified as spousal homicide–suicide, child homicide–suicide, familicide–suicide, and extra-familial homicide–suicide (Marzuk, Tardiff, and Hirsch, 1992). For a recent review of the literature, see Liem and Oberwittler (2012).
- 24 The Violence Policy Center had previously published reports in 2002, 2006, and 2008; the findings were consistent throughout the decade (VPC, 2008).
- 25 The other cases involved children and other family members as well as non-family incidents (VPC, 2012b).
- 26 Internet searches for IPV homicides in the United States overwhelmingly list murder–suicide cases that include children.
- 27 The National Violent Death Reporting System is maintained by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- 28 They included cases initially categorized by the police as homicide incidents, but subsequently found to be suicides.
- 29 The seven countries and their rates of civilian firearms ownership per 100 people were: England and Wales (6.2), Finland (45.3), Germany (30.3), the Netherlands (3.9), Poland (1.3), Spain (10.4), and Switzerland (45.7). For additional ownership rates, see Small Arms Survey (2007a).
- 30 The rate of civilian firearm ownership in the United States is 88.8 per 100 people (Small Arms Survey, 2007a).
- 31 The cited figures are from the Secretary for Policies for Women in Brazil (Lemle, 2008).
- 32 See Soares (2006, p. 3) and IFP (2011, p. 20).
- 33 The use of guns to threaten victims is also strongly associated with rape cases in South Africa. In Gauteng province in 2003, 41 per cent of rapes of adult women reported to the police involved guns (Abrahams, Jewkes, and Mathews, 2010, p. 587).
- 34 See Small Arms Survey (2007b) for a more detailed discussion of the extent of gun ownership and the problems of estimation.
- 35 AI, Oxfam International, and IANSA (2005); Mathews et al. (2008); Pureza et al. (2010); and Saad (2011).
- 36 See, for example, Cafferty File (2012); CBS New York (2012); Gonzalez (2012); and Hawaii News Now (2012).
- 37 See also IANSA (n.d.).
- 38 The report includes data from the 2005 European Survey on Crime and Safety.

- 39 Hemenway (2011); Hemenway, Azrael, and Miller (2000); Sorenson (2006); Sorenson and Weibe (2004); Weibe (2003).
- 40 The percentages of homes that hold guns were estimated at 5 per cent in the Netherlands, 28 per cent in Switzerland, and 33 per cent in the United States.
- 41 See, for example, Kleck (1997) and Cook and Ludwig (1997).
- 42 The analysis uses data for single victim–single offender incidents.
- 43 The US Department of Veterans Affairs provides information and resources on post-traumatic stress and IPV (VA, n.d.).
- 44 For example, around a quarter of private security guards in the United States were female in 2008, but only some of them were armed (Strom et al., 2010).
- 45 Gumedze (2008); Higate (2009); Joras and Schuster (2008); Schulz and Yeung (2008).
- 46 Barker (2005); Bevan and Florquin (2006); Hume (2008); IFP (2011); Small Arms Survey (2010).
- 47 On impunity see, for example, Hume (2008); Prieto-Carrón, Thompson, and MacDonald (2007); UNGA (2006).
- 48 The countries surveyed were Bangladesh, Brazil, Ethiopia, Japan, Namibia, Peru, Samoa, Serbia and Montenegro, Tanzania, and Thailand.
- 49 Cited in Kapur (2012, p. 2).
- 50 See Shaw (2010).
- 51 Abrahams et al. (2012); AI, Oxfam International, and IANSA (2005); RCMP (2002; 2010); WHO (2008).
- 52 The 1995 Bill C-68 made the registration of shotguns (long guns) compulsory. Long guns are involved in the majority of firearm deaths in Canada, especially suicides and domestic homicides (RCMP, 2010). Nevertheless, the long gun registry was abolished by the Canadian government in 2012.
- 53 Regional protocols have been signed by countries in the Great Lakes region, the Horn of Africa, southern Africa, and the Organization of American States (Kytömäki, 2006).
- 54 A misdemeanour is a lower-level crime category, imposing a sentence of generally less than one year; in the United States, federal law already prohibited those convicted of felonies (typically more serious crimes) from owning and purchasing guns.
- 55 The initial Danger Assessment was a 15-item tool. The 20-item tool resulted from an 11-city study of 4,310 femicides, 194 near-femicides, and 414 controls in the same cities, and has been used in other countries, including the United Kingdom.

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