

## **What does gun control have to do with domestic violence?**

Guns don't cause domestic violence -- but they do increase its severity and lethality. Jan's story is just one example:

*Jan's husband told her that if she left him and sought custody of their two children, it would be "the worst day of her life." He was right. When she finally escaped after years of abuse and went to pick up her children, her husband was waiting, with a gun. "I felt certain he was going to kill me," Jan recalls. "He abducted me at gunpoint, dragged me into the woods by the hair, beat me, and had a gun at my head for an hour." When he momentarily loosened his grip, Jan broke free and ran, but got just a few feet away when a bullet crashed through her, piercing her back and exiting through her ribcage, missing her spinal cord by a quarter inch. She held her breath and closed her eyes while her husband checked to make sure she was dead. He then shot and killed himself.*

Jan escaped with her life that day. Many victims of domestic violence are not so lucky: nearly one-third of all women murdered in the U.S. in 1997 were slain by a current or former intimate partner. Guns were used in almost two-thirds of these domestic homicides. One study in Atlanta found that domestic violence assaults involving guns were 12 times more likely to result in death than intimate assaults not involving guns.

The gun industry has been marketing guns to women as a form of self-defense, trying to convince them that a gun in the home will increase their safety. However, the statistics prove that's simply not true. A gun in the home increases the chance that a woman will be injured or killed. How often a gun is used to intimidate or threaten a victim of domestic violence has not been documented, although victims frequently report that the mere threat of gun violence exacerbated the abuse.

There are laws that attempt to restrict gun ownership and protect victims of domestic violence, but loopholes and shortcomings leave many women at great risk of harm. The federal Brady Law prohibits federally-licensed gun dealers from selling firearms to, among others, those convicted of any felony or a domestic violence misdemeanor. People subject to a domestic violence restraining order are also prohibited from owning a gun.

There is evidence that this law has been effective in reducing access to guns by domestic violence perpetrators. In the U.S. between January and November 1998, 70,000 handgun purchases were rejected due to pre-sale background checks. Of these, 9,310 (13.3%) were attributed to the purchaser having a domestic violence misdemeanor conviction or a restraining order filed against him. In fact, domestic violence misdemeanors and restraining orders combined were the second most common reason for rejection, after felony indictments or convictions.