



WHEN MEN MURDER WOMEN: CALIFORNIA

AN ANALYSIS OF 2018 HOMICIDE DATA



Violence Policy Center

This analysis is drawn from research conducted for the September 2020 Violence Policy Center study *When Men Murder Women: An Analysis of 2018 Homicide Data*, available at <https://vpc.org/studies/wmmw2020.pdf>.

A PDF version of this analysis is available at <https://vpc.org/studies/wmmwCA2020.pdf>.

Copyright © October 2020 Violence Policy Center

The Violence Policy Center (VPC) is a national nonprofit educational organization that conducts research and public education on violence in America and provides information and analysis to policymakers, journalists, advocates, and the general public.

This analysis was funded by Hope and Heal Fund, the only state-based donor collaborative fund investing in racially equitable, public health, community-based strategic solutions to prevent injuries, trauma and death as a result of firearms within the homes and communities in California. Hope and Heal Fund works with community leaders and thought leaders to provide communities with actionable data, resources and capacity to achieve success. Hope and Heal Fund strategically invests in gun violence prevention strategies throughout the state of California.

For a complete list of VPC publications with document links, please visit <http://www.vpc.org/publications>.

To learn more about the Violence Policy Center, or to make a tax-deductible contribution to help support our work, please visit www.vpc.org.

INTRODUCTION

Intimate partner violence against women is all too common and takes many forms. The most serious is homicide by an intimate partner. Guns can easily turn domestic violence into domestic homicide. One federal study on homicide among intimate partners found that female intimate partners are more likely to be murdered with a firearm than all other means combined, concluding that “the figures demonstrate the importance of reducing access to firearms in households affected by IPV [intimate partner violence].”¹

Guns are also often used in non-fatal domestic violence. A study by Harvard School of Public Health researchers analyzed gun use at home and concluded that “hostile gun displays against family members may be more common than gun use in self-defense, and that hostile gun displays are often acts of domestic violence directed against women.”² The U.S. Department of Justice has found that women are far more likely to be the victims of violent crimes committed by intimate partners than men, especially when a weapon is involved. Moreover, women are much more likely to be victimized at home than in any other place.³ A woman must consider the risks of having a gun in her home, whether she is in a domestic violence situation or not. While two thirds of women who own guns acquired them “primarily for protection against crime,” the results of a California analysis found that “purchasing a handgun provides no protection against homicide among women and is associated with an increase in their risk for intimate partner homicide.”⁴ Another California study found that women who were murdered were more likely, not less likely, to have purchased a handgun in the three years prior to their deaths, again invalidating the idea that a handgun has a protective effect against homicide.⁵

While this analysis does not focus solely on domestic violence homicide or guns, it provides a stark reminder that domestic violence and guns make a deadly combination. The information contained in this analysis is drawn from research for the Violence Policy Center’s annual report *When Men Murder Women* (now in its 23rd year), which details the reality of homicides committed by males against females in single victim/single offender incidents. The study analyzes the most recent Supplementary Homicide Report (SHR) data maintained by the Federal Bureau of Investigation

- 1 Leonard J. Paulozzi et al., “Surveillance for Homicide Among Intimate Partners—United States, 1981-1998,” *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR) Surveillance Summaries* 50 (October 12, 2001): 1-16.
- 2 Deborah Azrael and David Hemenway, “‘In the Safety of Your Own Home’: Results from a National Survey on Gun Use at Home,” *Social Science & Medicine* 50 (2000): 285-291.
- 3 Diane Craven, “Sex Differences in Violence Victimization, 1994,” *Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1997).
- 4 Garen Wintemute et al., “Increased Risk of Intimate Partner Homicide Among California Women Who Purchased Handguns,” *Annals of Emergency Medicine* 41, no. 2 (2003): 282.
- 5 K.M. Grassel et al., “Association Between Handgun Purchase and Mortality from Firearm Injury,” *Injury Prevention* 9 (2003): 50.

INTRODUCTION

and examines only those instances involving one female homicide victim and one male offender. This is the exact scenario—the lone male attacker and the vulnerable woman—that is often used to promote gun ownership among women.

Many women—those in abusive relationships, those who have left such relationships, those who fear, in general, for their safety—have considered bringing a gun into their home as a measure of protection. Yet, gun ownership contains clear risks that should deeply concern women, especially recognizing that a gun in the home is a key factor in the escalation of nonfatal spousal abuse to homicide.

The reality is that women face the greatest threat from someone they know, most often a spouse or other intimate acquaintance, who is armed with a gun. For women in California and across the United States, guns are not used to save lives, but to take them.

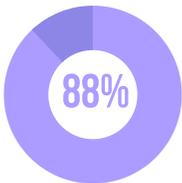
CALIFORNIA FINDINGS



- 192 females were murdered by males in California in 2018
- The homicide rate among females murdered by males in California was 0.97 per 100,000 in 2018
- California ranked 34th in the nation for the rate of females murdered by males



Out of 192 female homicide victims, 71 were white, 57 were Latino, 30 were Black, 20 were Asian or Pacific Islander, 3 were American Indian or Alaskan Native, and 11 were of unknown race.



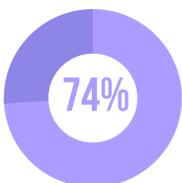
For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 88 percent of female victims (168 out of 192) were murdered by someone they knew. Twenty-four female victims were killed by strangers. Seven times as many females were murdered by a male they knew than were killed by male strangers.



For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 49 percent of female victims (88 out of 180) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 70 percent (62 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 38 females killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 24 females killed by a blunt object, and 15 females killed by bodily force.



Of the victims who knew their offenders, 68 percent (115 victims) were wives, common-law wives, ex-wives, or girlfriends of the offenders. Among the female intimates who were murdered, 53 percent (61 victims) were killed with guns; 75 percent of these (46 victims) were shot and killed with handguns.



For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 74 percent (106 out of 144) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 88 percent (93 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

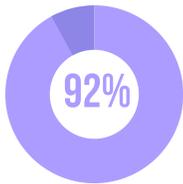
NATIONAL FINDINGS



- 1,946 females were murdered by males in the United States in 2018
- The homicide rate among females murdered by males in the United States was 1.28 per 100,000 in 2018



Out of 1,946 female homicide victims, 1,215 were white, 605 were Black, 56 were Asian or Pacific Islander, 30 were American Indian or Alaskan Native, and 40 were of unknown race.⁶



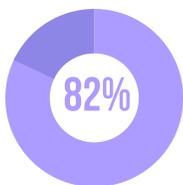
For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, 92 percent of female victims (1,606 out of 1,748) were murdered by someone they knew. One hundred forty-two female victims were killed by strangers. Eleven times as many females were murdered by a male they knew than were killed by male strangers.



For homicides in which the weapon used could be identified, 56 percent of female victims (949 out of 1,698) were shot and killed with guns. Of these, 69 percent (651 victims) were killed with handguns. There were 330 females killed with knives or other cutting instruments, 101 females killed by a blunt object, and 177 females killed by bodily force.



Of the victims who knew their offenders, 63 percent (1,014 victims) were wives, common-law wives, ex-wives, or girlfriends of the offenders. Among the female intimates who were murdered, 62 percent (568 victims) were killed with guns; 71 percent of these (406 victims) were shot and killed with handguns.



For homicides in which the circumstances could be identified, 82 percent (1,219 out of 1,482) were not related to the commission of any other felony. Of these, 60 percent (729 homicides) involved arguments between the victim and the offender.

⁶ Reliable information on Hispanic/Latino ethnicity is not available on the national level from the FBI Supplementary Homicide Report.



Violence Policy Center

Violence Policy Center
1025 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Suite 1210
Washington, DC 20036

202-822-8200