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Violence Policy Center

Women and Firearms Violence Fact Sheet

1. In 1999, 4,174 women were killed with firearms. The majority of women died by suicide (2,120 females), while 45 percent died by homicide (1,884 females). An additional 117 females died from unintentional injuries, six died by legal intervention, and 47 female firearm deaths were classified as undetermined.

2. In 1999, homicide was the second leading cause of death among all young women ages 15 to 24. Suicide was the fourth leading cause of death for this same age group. The majority of these deaths (58 percent) can be attributed to firearms.

3. Minority women are disproportionately affected by homicide, particularly by firearms homicide. In 1999, homicide was one of the top five leading causes of death for black females and for Hispanic females aged one to 34. The firearms homicide rate for black females 15 to 24 years of age (7.8 per 100,000) was nearly five times the rate among white females in the same age group (1.6 per 100,000) in 1999, while the rate for Hispanic women that year (3.2 per 100,000) was 33 percent higher than the rate for non-Hispanic women (2.4 per 100,000).

4. With the increased marketing of firearms—specifically handguns—to women for self-defense, female patterns of suicide have changed. In 1970 poisoning was the suicide method most commonly used by women. This means has decreased in inverse proportion to handgun use. Now, like men, women most often kill themselves with firearms. In 1999, 2,120 females killed themselves with guns.

5. A woman is far more likely to be killed by her husband, an intimate acquaintance, or a family member than murdered by a stranger or an unidentified intruder. A 1976 to 1987 analysis of Federal Bureau of Investigation data revealed that more than twice as many women were shot and killed by their husbands or intimate acquaintances than were murdered by strangers using firearms, knives, or any other means.

6. Intimate partners and guns pose a lethal threat to women. From 1976 to 1999, approximately one third of female homicide victims were killed by an intimate partner. From 1990 to 1999, nearly two thirds of female victims of intimate partner homicide were killed with a gun.

7. The gun industry's pitch to women is simple: you're a woman; some stranger's going to try and rape you; you'd better buy a handgun. In truth, women are most likely to be victimized by people they know. According to the National Victim Center, 75 percent of all rapes involve offenders known to the victim—including neighbors, friends, husbands, boyfriends, and relatives. Rape in America is a tragedy of youth, with the majority of cases occurring during childhood and adolescence. More than six out of every 10 rapes occur to children and adolescents under the age of 18. According to the Gun Control Act of 1968, persons must be at least 18 years of age to purchase a long gun and 21 years of age to buy a handgun from a licensed dealer.

8. A 1997 study found that having one or more guns in the home made a woman 3.4 times more likely to be the victim of a homicide. Additionally, when looking at whether a woman would be killed at the hands of a spouse, intimate acquaintance, or close relative, the authors found having one or more guns in the home made a woman *7.2 times* more likely to be the victim of such a homicide.

9. 9) The risks of handgun ownership far outweigh the benefits. In 2000, for every one time a woman used a handgun to kill a stranger in self-defense, 222 women were murdered in handgun homicides.

10. 10) The cost of providing medical care *alone* for firearm injuries in the United States in 1995 was projected to have been $4 billion.

Endnotes

1. Donna L. Hoyert, PhD, et al., "Deaths: Final Data for 1999," *National Vital Statistics Reports* 49, no. 8 (2001): 68.

2. Information from the WISQAR internet program, with the statistics produced by the Office of Statistics and Programming, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, CDC.

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4. Information from the WISQAR internet program, with the statistics produced by the Office of Statistics and Programming, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, CDC.

5. Arthur Kellermann, MD, MPH, et al., "Men, Women, and Murder: Gender-Specific Differences in Rates of Fatal Violence and Victimization," *Journal of Trauma* 33 (July 1992): 1-5.

6. "Intimate Homicide," *Homicide Trends in the U.S.*, Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice, downloaded March 14, 2002, from http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/homicide/intimates.htm; INTERNET.

7. National Victim Center, Crime Victims Research and Treatment Center, "Rape in America: A Report to the Nation," April 23, 1992.

8. James E. Bailey, MD, MPH, et al., "Risk Factors for Violence Death of Women in the Home," *Archives of Internal Medicine* 157, no. 7 (1997): 777-782.

9. Handgun justifiable homicide and handgun homicide data from the 2000 FBI Supplementary Homicide Report. Analysis performed by the Violence Policy Center.

10. Kenneth W. Kizer, MD, MPH, et al., "Hospitalization Charges, Costs, and Income for Firearm-Related Injuries at a University Trauma Center," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 273, no. 22, (1995): 1768-1773.