A Study on Gun Violence and Intimate Partner Violence

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Prepared by
Esprene Liddell-Quintyn, PhD, MA, Co-Principal Investigator
Noelle M. St. Vil, PhD, MSW, LMSW, Co-Principal Investigator
Devon Ziminski, MS, Research Assistant
Jennifer Elliott, MSW, Research Assistant

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ABSTRACT

Historically, intimate partner violence (IPV) and firearm violence have often been treated separately in areas such as funding, research, prevention, and intervention efforts. Recently, there has been an increasing focus on the overlap between firearms and IPV, especially in relation to policy. However, there has been less emphasis on how current policies may be less effective for Black women and other people of color, non-policy approaches, policies addressing social determinants of health, and community-driven interventions. This gap has contributed to the ongoing issue of intimate partner femicide, particularly among Black women, who face disproportionately high rates of IPV involving firearms. To address the intersection of IPV and firearms effectively, it is crucial to understand the current state of this issue, as well as the gaps in existing policies. Developing interventions must intentionally explore alternatives to the conventional approaches to IPV, such as law enforcement, and investigate strategies proven effective in reducing firearm violence, like credible messengers and community violence interventions. With adequate support and funding, firearm-related IPV prevention can significantly broaden the scope of public safety through violence reduction initiatives. This report aims to address the gaps in our collective understanding of the intersection between firearm violence and IPV by reviewing existing literature and drawing insights from interviews with over a dozen funders, academics, and community leaders with expertise in this area.

LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

Intimate partner homicide (IPH) accounts for over half of all homicides of female victims in the US (Fridel & Fox, 2019; Jack et al., 2018). In fact, women are more likely to be killed by someone they know, such as an intimate partner—a husband, boyfriend, or ex-husband—than anyone else (Cooper & Smith, 2011; Messing et al., 2023). While there are a variety of mechanisms used for intimate partner homicide, including a sharp instrument, strangulation, hanging, and suffocation, firearms are used in more than half (53.9%) of homicides of females aged 18 years and older (Petrosky et al., 2017). Fifty-five percent of national femicides and 57% of intimate partner femicides from 2010 to 2019 in the US were committed by firearms (Kaplan, 2021). Firearm ownership significantly increases the risk of homicide (Kivisto et al., 2020; Stansfield & Semenza, 2019), even with safe storage practices (Dahlberg et al., 2004; Kivisto et al., 2020). The majority of intimate partner homicides are committed with a firearm, and when abusers have firearms, the risk of homicide increases by 500% (Campbell et al., 2017; Fox & Zawitz, 2001). Using firearms as weaponry allows abusers to increase dominance, exert power, control victims, inflict psychological abuse, and threaten and injure victims (Sorenson, 2017; Sorenson & Schut, 2018). According to a nationally representative study on intimate partner violence (IPV), 4.5 million women have reported being threatened by a partner with a firearm, and almost 1 million reported being shot or shot at by an intimate partner (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Exacerbating such statistics was the COVID-19 pandemic, which presented additional conditions that may have contributed to the rise of the intersection of IPV and firearms (Shipley et al., 2024). A recent study found that from 2018 to 2021, there was an overall 7.1% increase in domestic firearm violence (Shipley et al., 2024). The combination of COVID-19 lockdown measures, stay-at-home orders, and a historic increase in firearm sales (Anestis & Bryan, 2021; Miller et al., 2022) may have isolated and increased risk to people with abusive partners or family members at home, specifically among some of the most vulnerable groups (e.g., Black women). This literature review provides an overview of what is currently known about IPV and firearms. It begins with a framing of the issue through an intersectional and ecological lens.

IPV at the Intersection of Gender and Race

IPV-related homicide is a leading cause of fatalities among women worldwide, with nearly half of female homicide victims in the United States being killed by an intimate partner (AbiNader et al., 2023) and with the majority involving firearms (Kivisto & Porter, 2020). Research has shown that women are disproportionately affected by IPV-related homicides, with women of color, particularly Black women, facing even higher risks (Waller et al., 2021). Black women experience higher rates of IPV, especially violence involving firearms, than other races (Campbell et al., 2002; West, 2014). Black women, who constitute nearly 14% of the US population, represent close to one-third (31%) of IPHs (Puzzanchera et al., 2020; Ujima, 2022). Between 2019 and 2020 (the beginning of COVID-19) there was a 47% increase in the firearm homicide rate among Black women (Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions, 2022). Without aggregating by type of homicide (e.g., intimate partner, domestic violence [DV], accidental), Black women in the US are disparately affected by homicide in every region across the country (Waller et al., 2024). In Wisconsin, for example, Black women are 20 times more likely than White women to die by homicide (Waller et al., 2024; Wilson & Blair, 2024). Additionally, research has shown that sexual- and gender-minority women (i.e., women whose sexual orientations, gender identities, or gender expressions differ from the traditional binary understanding of gender and heterosexuality) are also at a higher risk of being killed through intimate partner homicide when compared to nonsexual and gender-minority women, and this risk is greater for sexual- and gender-minority Black women (Anderson et al., 2023). Notably, these statistics underscore the profound and disproportionate impact of IPV, illustrating it as not only a prevalent issue but one with particularly devastating effects on women from marginalized communities.

IPV at the Intersection of Gender and Race

Intersectionality, a term originally developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw to understand the unique experiences of persons identifying as Black and female, which has now been extended to other intersecting social identities (e.g., race, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic status), can be used to contextualize these statistics. The prior work of scholars (Miller, 2008; Threadcraft & Miller, 2017) and a feminist and intersectionality framework used by Posey (2024) further illuminate the structural injustice of IPV's effects on Black women and how the systematic violence on Black men and women are deeply intertwined. Posey (2024) and Gray et al. (2024) explained how Black women are faced with violence in a White-dominated, patriarchal society, making them more vulnerable to IPV. Posey (2024) outlined how IPV/IPH can be understood through structural disenfranchisement geared towards Black women. Financial distress and lack of economic opportunity and stability can lead to violence, especially when additional stressors occur, such as a job loss or unplanned pregnancy (Posey, 2024; Wallace, 2022). Posey (2024) provided the example of research about Florida homicides where Black women were disproportionately victimized, and partners' reasons were found to be related to reluctance or incapacity to contribute to the finances of having a child (Spence & Huff-Corzine, 2023). At times, the social economic disenfranchisement of Black men in turn heightens violence exposure towards Black women. Using feminist ideology and race/class intersectionality, these scholars concluded that violence against Black women is closely tied to the structural violence and limitations on Black men, and that Black women experience higher and more complex risks for firearm-related injuries and deaths. They argued that "Black femicide in this context can be characterized as an outcome of invisibility, as Black women's victimization is an unseen consequence of Black men's victimization" (Gray et al., 2024; Posey, 2024; Spence & Huff-Corzine, 2023). These lenses are critical to adopt when evaluating existing IPV policies and programs and when planning for future programs and research.

Bronfenbrenner Ecological Systems Theory

In addition to intersectionality as a lens to understanding IPV and firearms, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is a lens that sheds light on this issue. Ecological perspective recognizes that persons and their environment consistently interact and adapt to one another. According to an ecological perspective, several systems influence people and populations, including individual systems, family systems, exosystems (e.g., government), macrosystems (social norms, economics), and chronosystems (time). An ecological framework acknowledges the interconnectedness of environmental systems and how multiple levels of the environment impact social issues. An ecological framework helps us to better understand gun culture, gun violence, and IPV as a multifaceted phenomenon that is the result of a dynamic interplay among individual-, community-, and system-level factors that influence an individual's risk to perpetrate or become a victim/survivor of violence. As we review the literature, we think about both individual-level factors (fatal and nonfatal firearm-related IPV incidents, victim/survivor characteristics), and larger contextual factors within which the victim/survivor is embedded (e.g., societal norms, policies that work to address intimate partner homicide [ERPO laws]). We begin by exploring the risk factors of IPV.

What Do We Know About the Risk Factors of IPV?

Risk Factors of IPV

Understanding risk factors, particularly in relation to Black women, is crucial for developing effective prevention and intervention strategies for this high-risk population. This section explores the individual/interpersonal and community and societal levels of risk factors associated with IPV and their specific implications for Black women. At both the individual and interpersonal levels, various factors influence the risk of IPV, such as socioeconomic status, biological characteristics, and close relationships. Lower socioeconomic status, encompassing reduced income and education, is linked to a higher risk of experiencing IPV, with Black women facing additional vulnerability due to historical and systemic inequalities (Gillum, 2019). Close relationships and social networks, including family and peers, significantly impact IPV risk. Research by Copp et al. (2019) revealed that individuals who witness or experience violence within their family are more likely to internalize and perpetuate aggressive behaviors. For Black women, family dynamics and social networks are particularly influential in shaping attitudes toward IPV and affecting both the likelihood of experiencing violence and the response to it (Copp et al., 2019). Additionally, research with ethnically diverse Black women (from Baltimore, Maryland, and the US Virgin Islands) found that cohabitation, fear of partner, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and depression were factors associated with an increased risk of violence among those women (Sabri et al., 2014).

At the societal level, social norms, policies, and institutional structures significantly influence IPV risks, particularly for Black women. A key example is the "code of silence" prevalent in many Black communities, which discourages reporting IPV to law enforcement due to a historical mistrust of authorities and a commitment to racial solidarity (Duhaney, 2024). Duhaney (2024) highlighted this issue in a qualitative study of 25 Canadian Black women, revealing that this norm contributes to their reluctance to seek help and increases their exposure to violence. This phenomenon is not unique to Canada; similar patterns can be observed in the US, where institutional racism, discriminatory policies, and inadequate support systems also exacerbate IPV risks for Black women (Waller & Bent-Goodley, 2023). For instance, in the US, systemic issues such as historical injustices, biased law enforcement practices, and limited access to culturally competent support services contribute to the perpetuation of socioeconomic disadvantages and barriers to help-seeking (St. Vil et al., 2022; Waller & Bent-Goodley, 2023). These societal-level factors create an environment where Black women face heightened vulnerability to IPV, underscoring the need for comprehensive policy changes and targeted interventions to address the immediate and structural factors affecting their safety.

Now that we have reviewed the risk factors for IPV, we will review the literature on guns before looking at the intersection of IPV and firearms.

What Do We Know About Gun Ownership?

Gun Culture/Firearm Ownership Among Black Women

Reasons for gun ownership across all US subpopulations continue to be focused on self-defense and protection (Ward et al., 2024). Among a national sample of gun owners, in addition to having guns for protection at home (93%), Black owners also selected having guns for protection outside of the home (92%) from dangerous people and situations, during public events, and against police violence. The findings point to growing groups of Black and Hispanic Americans who own guns, who also see their ownership extending for protection in public places. The recent rise in gun ownership among new owners during and around the COVID-19 pandemic years, including younger people and minorities, is often attributed to political and national strife and tensions (National African American Gun Association, 2022; Miller et al., 2022; Light & Boine, 2023). In particular, firearms are critical to self-defense against racialist anti-Black violence that has been thread throughout our nation's history and has flamed again in recent years of white supremacist and militant activity (Light & Boine, 2023).

While it is true that ownership may have risen among minorities during the COVID-19 pandemic, scholars have called into question the narrative that this is a "first-time" occurrence—particularly from claims of gun manufacturers, as Light and Boine (2023) noted: "Appeals to the increasing racial and gender diversity of gun owners are consistent with gun rights organizations' efforts to rebrand themselves as defenders of civil rights, and to disparage any/all gun regulation as a vestige of the nation's racist past" (p.12). Indeed, Black citizens have been arming themselves against white supremacist violence for centuries, and the recent surge continues to mirror that pattern, giving rising to hate crimes, continued police violence against Black individuals, and higher visibility for white supremacist groups and rhetoric (Light & Boine, 2023). As such, the choice to purchase and own firearms is one many Black Americans are making. A separate exploratory study (Bowen et al., 2023) examined the motivations and strategies adopted by Black women in the United States who own at least one firearm. Interviews with Black women showed that safety and self-protection were the main motivations for purchase, with protection geared for in the home and out of the home around race-based mass firearm violence and/or racial/sexual harassments in public (Bowen et al., 2023). Participants also spoke about keeping their firearm concealed, storing it in their vehicles at times, and engaging in de-escalation during any police interactions (Bowen et al., 2023).

A deeper dive into Black women gun owners from 2019, the National Lawful Use of Guns Survey (NLUGS), showed that compared to Black men and White women, Black women were the respondents with the highest proportion of gun ownership to protect themselves (39%) and the lowest group connected to recreational firearm activities (e.g., hunting, target shooting). The Black female owners identified politically as liberal, were significantly less likely than the other groups to express or support antifeminist ideas, and were also the most likely to mistrust the government (55%, compared to 45% of White women and 30% of Black men) (Light & Boine, 2023). The authors concluded that the data point to the complex intersectionality among Black women in the US and that "embodied experiences of insecurity, alongside deep, historically rooted distrust of the state, provide Black female respondents with a more critical understanding of armed protection, one that captures the racial and gender hypocrisies of legalized gun carry and use in alleged self-defense" (Light & Boine, 2023). Additional research of Black women gun owners is essential.

Legal and Illegal Firearms

There is little current research on the direct relationship between illegal versus legal firearms and IPV, and much research to date focuses on the overall relationship between access to firearms and IPV. Accurately and adequately measuring gun availability remains a challenge for both illegal and legal guns (Mancik et al., 2020).

Due to federal restrictions on tracking the number of firearms in the US, overall numbers of legal firearms are estimates. Nonetheless, the number of guns owned legally by US citizens has increased over the most recent decades. A national survey (Berrigan et al., 2023) found that the number of firearms owned by US adults rose from 265 million in 2015 to 326 million in 2019. Ownership is highly concentrated among a small number of individuals, as 87% of all the nation's firearms are assessed to be owned by half of firearm owners who own more than two firearms (Berrigan et al., 2023). The majority of legal guns are pistols (102 million), rifles (113 million), and shotguns (65 million), followed by revolvers (43 million) and military-style (23 million) and hunting (22 million) rifles (Berrigan et al., 2023). The overall legal gun market continues to manufacture, sell, and process firearms following a purchasing surge during the COVID-19 pandemic. A survey by Miller et al. (2022) comparing 2021 purchases to 2019 showed that the number of new gun owners from 2019 to 2021 was an additional 7.5 million people, many of whom represented diverse subpopulations. As of April 2021, approximately 10% of all US firearm owners had become new owners over the past two years (Miller et al., 2022). Despite this increase, the authors noted that even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the demographics of legal firearm purchases were already shifting to include younger people and people of color, but not to the extent that it would disrupt the main profile of who purchases or owns the most legal firearms (older, White men in rural places) (Miller et al., 2022).

While the legal gun market is a vast web of federally licensed firearm dealers, gun shows, and manufacturers, the illegal firearm market is more convoluted. At times, people who are permitted to legally possess a firearm can later be prohibited from possessing one, as outlined in later sections on removal of firearms for people convicted of IPV (Pear et al., 2021). More often, though, is the illegal possession, distribution, or transfer of firearms between parties, and even through entire distribution channels (Cook et al., 2007). Additionally, recent technological developments have led to the rise of privately made firearms (PMFs), or "ghost guns," that can be manufactured at home and are not marked with a serial number. PMFs can be made in large quantities and are often sold and purchased in parts or assembly kits (Wintemute, 2021; Braga et al., 2022). These guns are nearly impossible to trace when received at crime scenes, and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) and other law enforcement agencies have reported their dramatic rise over the past few years (2018 to 2024). The inability to trace them makes PMFs an optimal choice for illegal firearm transfers or creation of firearms by those barred from possession or purchase. A recent study that examined recovered PMFs at crime scenes in San Diego and Los Angeles showed that PMFs were more likely to be involved in violent and weapon-related offenses in Los Angeles but more likely to be involved in drug-related offenses in San Diego (De Biasi et al., 2024). In both cities, the most common weapon was the 9-millimeter Polymer 80 handgun (De Biasi et al., 2024). A separate analysis submitted 4,593 guns recovered in Oakland, California, between 2017 and 2021 to the ATF for analysis to see if firearms recovered in crimes were from recent purchases and/or PMFs. Findings suggested that during the pandemic, there was a higher likelihood that firearms recovered at crime scenes were both privately made and recently purchased (Braga et al., 2022). As the development of PMFs continues to surge at a fast pace, additional state and federal guidance and regulations could help curb their proliferation.

Both legal and illegal firearm availability overall has been associated with IPH and nonfatal firearm incidents (Semenza et al., 2022, 2023) across 226 US cities from 2010 through 2017. Illegal guns were associated with firearm homicide, while the presence of federally licensed firearm dealers did not significantly affect rates of firearm homicide (Semenza et al., 2022, 2023). Research by Semenza et al. (2022) found that "a greater concentration of firearm dealers within counties increases the risk for intimate partner homicide when the victim is Black. Stronger gun laws decrease the risk of total and gang/drug-related gun homicide with White victims and decrease intimate partner homicides across racial groups." In an examination of the availability of legal firearms, the presence of federally licensed firearm dealers is positively associated with IPH in urban counties (Stansfield & Semenza, 2019). Moreover, with regards to both illegal and legal firearms and IPV, data from 286 large US cities from 2010 to 2019 showed that a higher rate of licensed firearm dealers was associated with a higher risk of IPH, and this finding was more pronounced in states with low gun ownership levels (Mancik et al., 2020; Stansfield et al., 2021; Stansfield & Semenza, 2019; Semenza et al., 2022). This may mean that firearms purchased at local gun dealers could end up being used in intimate partner situations. Legal firearms may pose more of a threat to IPV than illegal firearms. More lost and stolen guns (illegal firearms) are associated with non-intimate perpetrated homicide. Given scarce research and data availability, research has supported additional ways to try to understand the illegal firearm market as illegal firearms are diverted through multiple pathways, and thus will require a variety of gun trafficking and illegal firearm policies to address it moving forward (Braga et al., 2012).

The literature is still establishing the link between illegal firearms and domestic violence, as the flow of illegal firearms is hard to track and document. Additionally, while inroads have been made to understand patterns of legal firearm ownership among Black women (and men), patterns of illegal firearm ownership among Black women are less defined. However, it is known that women can sometimes become engaged in illegal gun-related activity when coerced by male counterparts to become straw purchasers, when the person who wants a firearm is barred from obtaining one (Cook et al., 2015; Crifasi et al., 2020; Braga et al., 2021). Operation LIPSTICK (Ladies Involved in Putting a Stop to Inner City Killing) is a program originally started in Boston, Massachusetts, which has provided education to women about the dangers of trafficking, purchasing, and accessing illegal firearms. Many women may not realize they are engaging in illegal activity when they purchase a firearm on someone else's behalf and may often do so out of financial need or abusive/manipulative relationships. Additional research into the role of straw purchasers and how they may be connected to potential incidents of domestic violence is warranted.

What Do We Know About Gun Ownership and IPV?

Characteristics of Who Uses Guns and Why

The gendered nature of IPV and IPH is well documented. According to a study using data from the National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS) from 2003 to 2018, which included 7,588 incidents, men were more likely to use guns when they felt their masculinity was threatened, while women used guns for self-defense against an intimate partner with a gun (Fridel & Zimmerman, 2024). Perpetrators, both men and women, who use guns tend to be older than those who do not use guns (Fridel & Zimmerman, 2024; Kafka et al., 2021; Logan & Landhuis, 2022). Perpetrators who have access to guns tend to be more controlling, violent, and threatening compared to perpetrators who do not have access to guns (Kafka et al., 2021; Logan & Landhuis, 2022). Male perpetrators are more likely to use guns if they are married or live with their partner, if a relationship ended, while using alcohol, or while stalking their victims (Fridel & Zimmerman, 2024; Logan & Landhuis, 2022). Male perpetrators are less likely to use guns when their victims have been drinking alcohol, when they have a history of abusing their partner, when the victim is unemployed or economically dependent, and if the incident occurred inside the victim's home (Fridel & Zimmerman, 2024). Women with abusive ex-partners who own guns report the following characteristics about their abusers: had a history of criminal justice system involvement, had negative attitudes toward women, had been obsessed with weapons other than guns and had specialized training in weapon use, had participated in violence online or made threats online, had friends who were violent, endorsed a "tough guy" image, and had made threats in the past and followed through with those threats, compared to ex-partners who did not own guns (Logan & Landhuis, 2022).

Women who use guns in intimate relationships are more likely to be White compared to African American, have male partners who own weapons, report male perpetrators to be violent first, are married to the perpetrator, have left their relationship (which increases their risk of homicide), and have been in situations where additional victims were killed during the incident (Fridel & Zimmerman, 2024). Women are less likely to use a gun in the relationship while using alcohol (Fridel & Zimmerman, 2024). Additionally, women who report that their ex-partner owned a gun were in the relationship longer, had more separation attempts, and shared children with the abuser, compared to women with ex-partners who did not own a gun (Logan & Landhuis, 2022)

Moreover, many domestic violence and IPV situations occur in nonmarital relationships (e.g., former spouse, current boyfriend or girlfriend, and former boyfriend or girlfriend) (Porter, 2020), warranting interventions and programs that target non-married partners. Analysis of IPV incidents from Philadelphia revealed that over 80% of the incidents involved individuals in nonmarital relationships (Sorenson & Spear, 2018). Incidents involving current boyfriends or girlfriends had the highest percentage of violent behaviors (e.g., punching, strangling). They also were more likely than current spouses to use bodily weapons (hands, fists, or feet) or non-firearm weapons (knives, bats, etc.) to injure their victims and to be arrested, compared to current spouses (Sorenson & Spear, 2018).

Black women are disproportionately more likely to have a weapon used against them, including guns, while experiencing IPV (Adhia et al., 2021; Rubenstein et al., 2021). Women of color (e.g., Black, Indigenous, and Hispanic women), including immigrant women and women with limited English fluency, are disproportionately affected by severe IPV and IPV homicide (Kafka et al., 2021; Lynch, 2019; Sabri & Campbell, 2024). Despite these statistics, Black women and Black mothers are less likely to own a gun compared to White women and White mothers (Burrell et al., 2021; Lynch, 2019).

Additional Characteristics of Victim-Survivor Gun Ownership

White women are more likely than other racial groups to own a gun (Lynch, 2019). Compared to women of color, White women are more likely to report owning a gun for family/traditional reasons (e.g., it was given to them/passed down) (Lynch, 2019). Women who have been threatened by their abusive partners with guns are more likely to own guns for protection and believe that gun ownership reduces their risks of IPV compared to women not threatened with a gun (Lynch, 2019). Compared to White women, Black women report higher agreement that they did not own guns out of fear that they would unintentionally harm their partners (Lynch, 2019). Other women have echoed this, feeling that their hurt and anger would lead to them using their guns against their partners (Lynch & Logan, 2018). Fridel & Zimmerman (2024) found that women in their study reported more often using a firearm in self-defense and that those who used guns were more likely to be married, to have had their intimate relationship end, and to report additional victims (e.g., family, friends) were killed in an IPV incident. Mothers who experience IPV and keep loaded firearms in their homes tend to be younger than 25 years of age, to be White, to report no previous children, and to report alcohol use as well as financial, partner, and traumatic stressors (Burrell et al., 2021). In a study by Lynch and Logan (2018) of female survivors of IPV, participants believed in the right to gun ownership but emphasized that if a woman pulls out a gun against their partner, they should know how to use it, or it can be used on them.

What Do We Know About Survivors and Gun Ownership?

Firearms as Protection

A lethal intersection occurs when IPV crosses with firearms. Most people choose to have firearms for protection (Degli Esposti et al., 2024). A study that examined trends in IPV and firearm-involved IPV during the beginning months of COVID-19 showed varying increases in firearm IPV in Chicago, Los Angeles, and Nashville, and decreases in Kansas City (Tomsich et al., 2023). In considering what may protect or prevent firearm-related IPV, women and others are often encouraged to arm themselves. However, research has not supported claims that firearms purchased or possessed by potential victims provide a protective effect; in fact, much research has documented that firearms possessed by abusers increase homicide risk for victims (Zeoli & Bonomi, 2015). Prior research has noted laws and firearm manufacturers aimed at arming potential victims without complementary efforts to disarm the abuser. Additional strategies are needed to support safety for women beyond calls to arm themselves, particularly without disarming their abuser(s) (Zeoli & Bonomi, 2015). Prior research has shown that in California, purchase was associated with a 50% increase in homicide risk (Wintemute et al., 2003). These findings illustrate that firearm purchase by women does not protect against crime or homicide and increases risk of homicide by an intimate partner (Wintemute et al., 2003).

What Do We Know About Gun Ownership and Firearm Storage?

Firearm Storage

Firearm storage and secure storage refers to a body of practices that aims to secure a firearm when it is not in use (Rowhani-Rahbar, 2023). A firearm safety device is designed to prevent people from using the firearm without activating or removing the safety device. Firearm safety devices include trigger locks, biometric locks, and cable locks (ATF, 2024). Other safe storage means include a gun safe, lock box, or other device that can store an entire firearm and can only be opened through a key or code (ATF, 2024; DOJ, 2024). Best practices for secure firearm storage are to store firearms unloaded and locked, to store and lock ammunition separately from firearms, and to ensure keys and lock codes are inaccessible to children and/or to anyone who might be in crisis or could steal them (Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions, 2024). In a national sample (Anestis et al., 2023) of 2,152 firearm owners, 58% reported storing at least one firearm unlocked and hidden, and 18% reported storing at least one firearm unlocked and unhidden. Among people who used a locking mechanism, gun safes were the most common choice (Anestis et al., 2023). Individuals who did not engage in secure storage expressed that locks were unnecessary and feared that locks would block quick firearm access in an emergency; however, people considered locking unsecured firearms to prevent child access (Anestis et al., 2023).

There are dangerous implications for unsecured firearms (Miller & Azrael, 2022; Rowhani-Rahbar, 2023). For one, people experiencing suicidal ideation often access firearms through family members who own firearms but do not properly store them. People in crisis may be likely to access an unlocked firearm, and locking a firearm and/or storing it outside the home when someone is in crisis can prevent injury and death. Another common consequence of unlocked and unsecured firearms is accidental shootings, often among children. Children often stumble upon unsecured firearms and can easily shoot themselves, another child, or an adult. Unsecured firearms, in the home or in cars, also pose an opportunity for firearm theft. Stolen firearms can then be used in crimes in the community.

There are various ways to promote safe storage and save lives. For one, secure storage laws require firearm owners to lock and store guns when not in use. Similarly, child access prevention laws will impose criminal liability on adults if a child accesses an unsecured firearm and/or a gun is found stored in a way in which a child could easily gain access to it. Education campaigns like BE SMART are behavioral interventions that aim to educate people about the risks of firearms in the home and how to prevent them. These conversations can occur between adults, between professionals (e.g., in a health care setting), or at gun shops. Another option to promote safe gun storage is voluntary temporary gun storage, used as an option to store firearms when someone or their loved one is in distress and at increased risk of self-harm or harm towards others. Firearms can be temporarily stored at a location external to the home to reduce risk of injury or death and returned once the crisis has been resolved (Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions, 2024).

Firearm Storage & IPV Among Black Individuals

The research area of firearm storage practices—at the individual and community level—is developing, and additional research is warranted. Overall, the majority of existing research focuses on military personnel and veterans (Miller & Azrael, 2022; Carter et al., 2022; Monteith et al., 2022), and research is needed that focuses on Black individuals, particularly given the recent rise in Black firearm ownership (Anestis & Bryan, 2021; Miller at al., 2022).

As noted earlier, the lockdown orders during COVID-19 increased fears of IPV and firearm incidents. One research article noted that the absence of firearm safety training or secure storage could create more unlocked firearms, which could make domestic violence incidents potentially lethal (Duncan et al., 2020). Safety trainings by local groups can help promote "safe and controlled" firearm storage (Duncan et al., 2020). Additional gun safe storage education (Sheppard et al., 2023) in general and among health professionals and home care providers (Osborne et al., 2024) are noted solutions. Additionally, media promotion "can promote secure or safe storage in media reports of firearm violence – which also includes using equitable and non-judgmental language in firearms reporting" (Hammig et al., 2024).

Regarding firearm access and ownership, Bond et al. (2023) found that among Black samples, females and individuals with higher education were more likely to own firearms than males and those with less education. Anestis et al. (2023) specifically examined a national sample of Black adults, finding that for firearm access, 30.4% of the sample reported at least one firearm being stored in or around their home. Access was roughly evenly reported between Black men and women (34.7% and 26.8%), and access was more common in rural areas (41.4%) compared to urban areas (29.4%). As expected, the most common reason for firearm access was protection (64.2%) (Anestis et al., 2023). For firearm storage, equal numbers of Black adult respondents indicated they always (39.3%) or never (37.7%) store at least one firearm loaded. Similarly, roughly equal numbers of Black individuals reported storing firearms through a locking device always (42.4%) or never (36.1%). Black women were more likely to store in a locking device, always (51.1%) (and never, 28.5%). Black adults also reported more often "always" (47.9%) storing a firearm in a locked location, compared to never (28.5%).

With regard to ways to think about increasing safety, promoting storage, and protecting against domestic violence with a firearm, a nationally representative sample of gun owners across races (White, Black, Hispanic) found that Black firearm owners were most cognizant of disparities in homicides and least expectant of the idea that firearm ownership or permissive firearm carrying would increase personal safety (Ward et al., 2023). Black firearm owners had 58% lower odds, compared to White firearm owners, that owning a firearm improved personal safety, and 58% lower odds that more widespread firearm carrying would increase safety (Ward et al., 2023).

What Do We Know About Gun Ownership and Firearm Storage?

Risk Factors of Firearm-Related IPV

Firearms significantly escalate the severity of IPV injuries. A quantitative study by Adhia et al. (2021), which surveyed 958 US adults who experienced IPV, found that victims of nonfatal firearm abuse were more likely to be female, Black or African American, divorced or separated, have a household income below $35,000, and have a high school education or less. Additionally, these victims were more likely to suffer from other forms of IPV, including physical abuse and sexual coercion. These results underscore the dangerous interplay between access to firearms and nonviolent risk factors in escalating IPV to potentially fatal outcomes, transforming situations that might otherwise result in nonlethal injuries into fatalities.

In the context of lethal firearm use, Lynch et al. (2021) identified key risk factors for IPH by firearm, including stalking, coercive control, and access to guns. Their study, involving 133 criminal justice and victim service professionals, assessed perceptions of risk factors associated with IPH. Findings revealed that perceived threats of harm with a firearm, combined with stalking and coercive control, are significant indicators of the risk of lethal violence. Matias et al. (2020) conducted a study to analyze risk factors associated with IPH by reviewing 28 quantitative studies. These studies compared cases of IPH with nonfatal IPV incidents, other homicides, or cases involving intimate partner homicide followed by suicide. The findings revealed that certain abusive behaviors, such as threatening with a weapon, making death threats, severe control, stalking, abuse during pregnancy, and physical violence, significantly increased the likelihood of IPH. Pregnancy, specifically among Black women experiencing DV (compared to White and Hispanic women), substantially increased the risks of IPH rates among Black women (Kivisto et al., 2022; Modest et al., 2022; Posey, 2024).

Risk factors commonly associated with IPH include a history of prior abuse and violence, along with elements related to violence escalation (i.e., more frequent and severe acts of violence, including strangulation), stalking and violating no-contact orders, relationship issues and separation, and jealousy (Matias et al., 2020). Characteristics of both victimization and male perpetration play a crucial role in assessing the danger of IPH. High-risk factors for IPH victimization involving male perpetrators include direct access to firearms, prior threats made with weapons, previous nonfatal strangulation, prior rape of the victim, displays of controlling behaviors, and prior stalking of the victim (Spencer & Stith, 2020). Additionally, factors increasing the risk of IPH victimization include having less than a high school education, being separated from the perpetrator, having children from a previous relationship (not with the perpetrator), experiencing abuse while pregnant, and substance abuse (Spencer & Stith, 2020).

What Do We Know About Survivor Experiences?

Survivor Experiences with and Consequences of Nonfatal IPV and Firearms

The role of firearms is prevalent in DV incidents, like IPH, as well as in nonfatal DV situations. Thus, while sometimes fatal, not all IPV and gun cases end in death. It is estimated that 4.5 million US women alive today have had an intimate partner threaten them with a gun, and approximately 1 million women have been either shot or shot at by an intimate partner (Sorenson & Schut, 2018). Another study estimated that 10% of US adults (nearly 25 million) experienced nonfatal firearm abuse by an intimate partner (Adhia et al., 2021). Zeoli (2017) noted that while much focus is on homicides and domestic violence, the role of firearms in nonfatal domestic violence incidents is likely much higher, is underreported, and continues to be understudied. Zeoli's (2017) work highlighted that firearm use in DV situations can be used to gain power over and coerce victims—through threatening to shoot, intimidating the victim, pistol whipping, and brandishing the gun. Nonfatal domestic violence incidents with firearms are less likely to result in visible injuries than those with the use of other weapons (Sorenson, 2017).

Often, the goals of perpetrators using guns on their intimate partners relate to coercive control, which includes an intentional pattern of behavior by the perpetrator to control, belittle, intimidate, surveil, isolate, and restrict their victims so they may continue to perpetuate physical and sexual abuse (Adhia et al., 2021; Lynch & Logan, 2018; Sorenson & Schut, 2018). Perpetrators use guns to scare, harass, and manipulate their partners (Kafka et al., 2021). Rarely do perpetrators use guns to intentionally inflict physical injury (Kafka et al., 2021). Victims of IPV identify experiencing multiple types of nonfatal firearm gun abuse, including spoken threats (threats to their partners, threats to harm themselves, and threats to harm family members, children, or a victim's new intimate partners), displaying a gun, and holding a partner at gunpoint (Adhia et al., 2021; Kafka et al., 2021; Logan & Lynch, 2022; Logan & Landhuis, 2022). A national survey study of the nonfatal use of guns in IPV relationships revealed that 67.5% of abusers displayed a gun to their victims, and 63% of victims were threatened with a gun, 12.6% had partners who shot their guns but didn't hit anyone, and 8.7% reported their partners shooting them and hitting their body with a gun more than once per year (Adhia et al., 2021). Victims who are separated and experience stalking from their ex-partners who own guns report higher levels of gun threats both during and after the relationship compared to those with ex-abusive partners who do not own guns (Logan & Landhuis, 2022), indicating these women may be at higher risk of homicide. Two-thirds of women with ex-partners who own guns believe their partners are extremely capable of harming them and others compared to half of those with ex-partners who do not own guns (Logan & Landhuis, 2022). Other research (Logan et al., 2022) comparing the experiences of women who were held at gunpoint by their partners to those who were not held at gunpoint showed that women held at gunpoint overall experienced more threats and violence from their partners.

One study found that a significant percentage, 80.5%, of victims of nonfatal IPV with guns reported a child at home during the incident (Adhia et al., 2021) while another study found that over half of respondents reporting experiencing IPV and gun violence had children in the home while the gun-related IPV took place (Lynch et al., 2022). Over one-third of participants, 36%, living with a child reported that the perpetrator threatened or physically harmed the child, while 21% reported that the perpetrator threatened or physically harmed the child with a gun (Lynch et al., 2021). Indeed, other work has started to look at the role of firearms in nonfatal domestic violence situations with other family members. The work of Labrum et al. (2024) highlighted the use of firearms to threaten family members (adult parents and their adult children), finding that while the majority of the reported incidents did not involve a firearm, in those that did, the firearm was used to threaten victims (66%), fire on victims (6%), or pistol whip victims (4%) (Labrum et al., 2024).

Firearms used during an assault to intimidate often result in victims having greater fear and potentially long-lasting mental health impacts (e.g., post-traumatic stress disorder), even when physical injuries did not occur (Sorenson, 2017; Zeoli, 2017). Qualitative interviews with women who experienced intimate partner violence and were asked about the experiences of their partner using or threatening use of a firearm towards them or their children revealed the fear instilled by firearm access, ownership, and use from their ex-partner(s) (Spearman et al., 2024). Women who experienced firearm threats are reported to have symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (Sullivan & Weiss, 2017), sleep loss, heightened fear (Kafka et al., 2021), heightened distress levels (including stalking-related fears), and a broad range of physical and mental health problems (Adhia et al., 2021; Logan & Landhuis, 2022; Lynch et al., 2022). Victims of IPV and gun violence are at increased risk of experiencing this type of violence again in another relationship (Lynch et al., 2022). Among women, direct threats of firearm violence, as well as overall cumulative firearm violence exposure, are associated with functional disabilities (e.g., the ability to concentrate, walk/use stairs, run errands, etc.) (Semenza et al., 2024).

Help-Seeking

Victims who experience intimate partner violence via gun violence are more likely to engage in help-seeking behaviors (Logan & Landhuis, 2022). For example, residents of domestic violence shelters are twice as likely to report a gun in their home, and rates of nonfatal intimate partner violence are highest among those seeking help or involved in an intervention (Sorenson & Schut, 2018). The use of a firearm in a domestic violence situation has also been related to an increased likelihood of requesting a protective order (PO) against the abuser. Lynch et al. (2022) found that over 50% of victims who requested a PO were threatened to be shot, and those who experienced firearm domestic abuse had a 302% increase in the odds of requesting a PO. Similarly, Lynch et al. (2022) found that women held at gunpoint, who had perpetrators threaten to shoot them or others, or who experienced a high level of abuse with guns were more likely to engage in help-seeking (e.g., PO, legal help) than those who did not have these experiences (Lynch, Boots, et al., 2021). Victims of IPV who have children in the home are more likely to engage in help-seeking behavior (e.g., calling the police, filing for a PO, getting legal services, or seeking medical care) compared to those who do not have children in the home (Lynch, 2022). During separation, women with ex-partners who own a gun are more likely to engage in help-seeking behavior than women with ex-partners who do not own guns (Logan & Landhuis, 2022). It is important to note that it is fear of harm from a gun that drives help-seeking behavior, as opposed to ex-partner gun ownership (Logan & Landhuis, 2022).

When survivors do seek help, many report that they were not taken seriously by the justice system, felt despair while interacting with the justice system, and felt that the justice system has difficulty enforcing mandated gun laws (Lynch & Logan, 2018; Spearman et al., 2024). The work of Logan et al. (2022) revealed that only about half of the women in their study who were held at gunpoint, and one-third of those who were not, engaged with police or asked for a civil protective order. Another study found no difference in police response among incidents with guns present and incidents without guns, highlighting the need to find creative ways to address the intersection of IPV and guns (Rubenstein et al., 2021).

Due to fear that traditional DV resources (e.g., police, domestic violence services) may not respond appropriately or helpfully, many victims and survivors decide not to disclose to traditional helping sources. In their study of assessing risk for IPV, Sabri et al. (2014) reported that more women in the high-risk IPV group (30.1% to 36.4%) used domestic violence resources compared to those in the low-risk group (12.6% to 15.6%); a large portion of the overall sample did not, however, use DV resources even with a high-risk label (67.7% to 70%). Women who filed for restraining orders or other legal assistance were more likely to be at high risk for violence than other women (Sabri et al., 2014). Safety planning is key for violence victims who face firearm-related threats. This information also shows that many people are not reporting, and might not choose to report, to police, especially Black women and other women of color.

While women of color experience higher levels of IPV and IPH, research has also shown they may be less likely to seek help, particularly from formal help-seeking channels (e.g., law enforcement, social service organizations) (Harper, 2022; Potter, 2015). Research has highlighted that many Black and Latina women, in order to uphold their cultural identities as “strong women” or “superwomen,” may refuse or resist help-seeking (Gray et al., 2024; Harper, 2022; Potter, 2015) and aim to highlight strength and avoid vulnerability (Debnam et al., 2022; Posey, 2024). Additionally, many of these women may refuse or resist help due to their lack of trust or faith in institutional structures (Gray et al., 2024; Harper, 2022; Potter, 2015). Fears around how their partner/family member may be violently harmed or prosecuted by the criminal legal justice system may discourage Black women from seeking help (Gray et al., 2024; Monterrosa, 2021; Ting & Panchanadeswaran, 2009; Posey, 2024). Additionally, Black women may also resist seeking help through resources due to potentially reinforcing destructive stereotypes about Black families and communities (Hattery & Smith, 2016; Jones, 2009; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005; Posey, 2024). Indeed, a recent dissertation project showed that victims and their compensation are viewed differently or “more deserving” according to race (Whalen, 2020).

Studies suggest that victims with abusers who have access to guns were less likely to talk to police officers out of fear, suggesting that women do not feel safe, as discussed below (Logan et al., 2022). Research exploring formal domestic violence outreach suggests Black IPV survivors utilize formal resources when experiencing severe or life-threatening abuse when attempting to stop the abuse from occurring or when children are at risk of harm (Bent-Goodley, 2007; Lipsky et al., 2006). Survivors who separate from ex-partners fear for their lives and that of their children due to the abuser's access to a firearm (Spearman et al., 2024). Among Black women survivors of IPV, severe fear of being killed strongly predicts formal utilization of resources (Lucea et al., 2013).

The interactions of the Black community with the criminal justice system include a historical context of unjust and unfair treatment (Bent-Goodley, 2005; Potter, 2015; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005). Among Black women, there is hesitation to engage law enforcement and report victimization due to the possible negative outcome that might arise from hostility from officers (Decker et al., 2019; Harper et al., 2022; Hulley et al., 2023; Monterrosa, 2019). Police are seen as unreliable when responding to an emergency and are perceived to escalate a situation (Bent-Goodley et al., 2023). Law enforcement officers fail to provide immediate assistance in times of crisis (Waller & Bent-Goodley, 2023). Black women are afraid to call the police because they are afraid of dual arrest policies, where both parties are arrested and criminalized (Bent-Goodley, 2013; Hulley et al., 2023; McCormack & Hirschel, 2021). Seeking help from the judicial system comes with frustration and hopelessness, due to survivors not being believed by judges or witnessing their ex-partners' abusive courtroom actions to harm them, resulting in re-traumatization of survivors and contributing to mental distress (Gutowski & Goodman, 2023; Spearman et al., 2024).

Help-seeking among African-American women is a complex process shaped by sociocultural barriers based on race, class, and gender. Black women are more likely to reach out to informal sources of support by relying on kinship networks or spirituality and resist reaching out to formal sources (Bent-Goodley, 2013; Harper, 2022). When seeking help from formal sources, survivors experience racism and discriminatory treatment from providers neglecting to meet the needs of Black women (Bent-Goodley, 2013; Few, 2005; Nnawulezi & Sullivan, 2014; Richie, 2012; Waller et al., 2022). The Black church is a place of refuge and strength useful in addressing IPV, yet encourages women at times to stay in unhealthy relationships (Bent-Goodley et al., 2012). Factors inhibiting help-seeking include racism and discriminatory practices that result in delayed help-seeking (St. Vil et al., 2017; Waller et al., 2021). Black women are also likely to delay help-seeking efforts because they are portrayed as strong, resilient, and capable of navigating difficult circumstances and thus may rely on themselves and those within their network when in crisis (Bent-Goodley, 2013; Waller & Bent-Goodley, 2023). Network members may be ill-equipped to provide proper guidance, eventually leaving women mentally and physically exhausted and unsure of what to do when faced with unmet needs. Racial loyalty plays a role in survivors choosing to withstand abuse, avoid seeking help to avoid betraying their partners, and protect the abuser from prejudice and unjust treatment while interacting with the criminal justice system (Bent-Goodley, 2013; Nash, 2005; Richie, 2012; Ritchie, 2017).

There are many cultural considerations for aiding Black women who experience IPV and specific channels and considerations to design and implement programs, policies, and strategies that can effectively reach and provide support for this population. The next section details how that support manifests currently.

What Is Being Done at the Macro Level to Support Survivors?

Domestic Violence & Firearm Policies

The criminal legal system across states is an intricate web of varying policies related to domestic violence, leading to unequal protection of victims/survivors. Raissian (2016) noted that from 1991 to 2016, 38 states enacted a DVPRO (domestic violence protective restraining order) firearm prohibitor law—some through DVROs (domestic violence restraining orders) (37 states), others through TROs (temporary restraining orders) (20 states), and some through both means (19 states) (Cloud et al., 2023). Additionally, a variety of political and social factors contribute to whether states or local jurisdictions will adopt domestic violence firearm laws (DVLs) (Schiller & Sidorsky, 2022; Smucker, 2019; Zeoli et al., 2022; Zeoli & Paruk, 2020), and subsequent implementation is critical.

Existing research has shown the effectiveness, among some groups, of restraining orders and firearm removals from domestic abusers. A review of these policies showed that one study examining the association between DVPROs and firearm injury admissions in New Jersey saw a small, significant decrease in firearm admissions following the enactment of the DVPRO (Neufeld et al., 2020; Raissian, 2016). Zeoli et al. (2018) found that firearm restrictions (e.g., handgun permits, firearm dispossession legislation, federal misdemeanor domestic violence firearm prohibition) that captured a broader range of domestic violence abusers were associated with decreases in IPH. In other work, a statistical analysis of 5,350 individuals showed that states where those convicted of misdemeanor crimes of domestic violence (MCDV) were barred from owning a firearm had a 60% lower likelihood of firearm ownership in families with high-conflict males (Prickett, 2018). Longer firearm prohibitions were also associated with decreases in firearm ownership among families (Prickett, 2018).

Existing research has shown disparities in how domestic violence protection orders (DVPOs) are called in/used when it comes to race. Wallin et al. (2022) highlighted that Black women continue to be overrepresented in IPH fatalities, using a cross-sectional time-series analysis that looked at the effects of firearm restriction laws on IPH by race of the victim across 45 states from 1981 to 2013. Authors found that state DVRO firearm restrictions were associated with an 11% decrease in IPH and a 16% decrease in firearm IPH for White, and not Black, victims (Wallin et al., 2022). MCDV laws that prohibited convicted persons from having a firearm were found to be associated with a 23% decrease in IPH and a 28% decrease in firearm IPH among White victims only (Wallin et al., 2022). At the federal level, the federal DVRO was associated with a 27% decrease in state-level IPH and a 28% decrease in state-level firearm IPH among Black, but not White, victims. An additional dissertation research project further highlighted racial disparities in domestic violence protection orders in Boston, Massachusetts, and Hillsborough County, Florida (King, 2021). Gray et al. (2024) found that for every piece of firearm legislation, there was a 1% lower likelihood of victimization of White females, while for every piece of firearm legislation that passed, there was a higher risk of Black female victimization (as well as Hispanic victimization), although these results were not significant. Together, research such as this highlights how firearm policies may have disproportionate effects across race, and additional research is needed to unpack the differences in effects and how legislation can be more supportive towards women of color. Policies need to expand implementation of existing protection for DV victims/survivors in culturally congruent ways and expand avenues where firearms are removed in volatile situations (Lockwood et al., 2023).

Implementation of Domestic Violence Policies & Firearm Dispossession

As highlighted above, systematic reviews have shown that access to firearms is associated with an increase in the severity of DV and fatality, and existing research has shown that an abuser's access to/possession of firearms is associated with an increased likelihood that the firearm will be used during a domestic violence incident. As such, much criminal legal system work has focused on removing access to prevent firearm domestic violence (Scott, 2022). A body of research has delved into the implementation and adoption of DV-related firearm policies, which has important implications for protecting women, particularly Black women. Research is still needed to understand which components of DVPROs affect a law's effectiveness, and greater understanding/evaluation of how DVPROs are enforced is warranted (Oliphant & Zeoli, 2024; Zeoli et al., 2016).

Research regarding DV policy implementation (Frattaroli & Teret, 2006) has assessed willingness to comply and difficulty in enforcement. One study across four jurisdictions regarding implementation highlighted the need for leadership, localized context, deep commitment and expertise in the domestic violence space, and multiple avenues to understand if the person who is prohibited from having a firearm still has one (e.g., multiple data sources and an agenda for how these goals/implementations will occur) (Frattaroli et al., 2021). Additional research has examined across 49 laws in 29 states the process for domestic violence restraining order implementation—with specific regards to implementation and any available instructions about from whom firearms should be dispossessed, if permission is needed to transfer a firearm to a third party, and the timeframe for dispossession (Zeoli et al., 2019). Additional prior research into the process of DVPO firearm restriction processes revealed that access to firearms with regards to the defendant was rarely discussed across 406 cases (Kafka et al., 2022). The study reviewed 303 orders prohibiting firearm possession and showed that only 39% (143) of orders included orders for firearm surrender (Kafka et al., 2022). Restrictions for firearm possession were more likely when a defendant had threatened to kill the victim/survivor (Kafka et al., 2022).

While there are federal and state regulations that bar convicted domestic abusers from possessing or purchasing a firearm, the implementation of the process to remove any firearms remains murky in many cases. Some states have proposed laws that outline a process for firearm dispossession. Scott's (2022) study showed that these firearm relinquishment laws may support prevention of intimate partner homicide and reduce domestic abusers being rearrested. Related research (Lynch & Logan, 2020) addressed the challenges of implementing firearm dispossession in accordance with protective orders—in interviews with professionals, rural communities viewed the risk of DV/IPH involving firearms and overall gun violence as lower than members of urban communities. Additionally, rural residents saw firearm dispossession as less effective than those in urban communities. Findings also showed differences in law enforcement limitations to enforce firearm policies, which warrants considerations for creative ways to enforce firearm policies and programs (Lynch & Logan, 2020). Another dissertation (Scott, 2022) contributed to a better understanding of domestic laws and their ability to ensure dispossession of a firearm. The author looked at Tennessee and Iowa, which had processes for gun relinquishment laws for domestic violence offenses, and found that while these laws were associated with lower gun violence, the results were not significant. This has important implications for not only having firearm domestic violence laws but ensuring how dispossession is then enforced. Additional research has also considered the prior suicidal patterns and behaviors of the perpetrator, before and after firearm dispossession, and how that is also linked to domestic violence (Dalve et al., 2023).

Recent work (Blackwatters et al., 2023) has also explored the process of implementation of firearm restrictions in DVPOs with police. Findings showed how law enforcement officers engaged with perpetrators in a friendly manner to help them understand the terms of their firearm dispossession. Implementation strategies, however, may "have unintentional negative consequences, such as reinforcing harmful stereotypes about plaintiffs' motivations for seeking DVPOs"—there are specific implications when considering the race of the plaintiff/abuser/victim/survivor and to what extent the police are involved (Blackwatters et al., 2023). With regards to police, other research (Goralski, 2013) examining the role of police in assessing potential lethality in individual circumstances involving victims of DV examined the assessments when responding to DV calls, which are supposed to assess certain elements of a victim/survivor's environment that may indicate a future fatal outcome. These assessments could certainly be implemented differently across communities, and considerations of implicit bias and racial profiling in determining "risk" are warranted. Overall, the current heavy reliance on law enforcement to help implement and/or enforce firearm policies warrants additional considerations in communities of color that have been systematically harmed by police and where police-community relations may be frayed.

Other research finds that having specific teams to help with implementation of firearm dispossession can help streamline the process and increase compliance, ultimately supporting increased safety for DV victim-survivors (Ellyson et al., 2023). A recent study that assessed implementation, compliance, and enforcement of firearm restrictions before and after a Regional Domestic Violence Firearms Enforcement Unit (RDVFEU) was implemented in King County, Washington, found that compared to DVPOs granted before RDVFEU implementation, DVPOs after the RDVFEU implementation were 4.5 times more likely to have an order to surrender weapons (OTSW), and the RDVFEU implementation was associated with greater odds (3.4) the defendant complied and also greater odds (3.3) of releasing at least one firearm (Ellyson et al., 2023). These types of processes can help with enforcement of firearm dispossession orders.

DV policy enforcement and firearm dispossession can be a challenging task, and avenues of implementation should be rooted in just and fair principles that support victims/survivors. Whether it be IPV assessments, serving a DVPO order, or enforcing a firearm dispossession order, accountability to support victims/survivors—particularly those of color—should be rooted in a public health and socially just approach. Scholars have pointed to the use of a health belief model to understand how community professionals evaluate the risk of DV/IPV, to understand what may support enforcement of firearm dispossession, and to examine what the remaining barriers are for implementing programs and supporting victims/survivors (Lynch & Jackson, 2019). Research with 133 community health professionals illustrated that focusing on family violence prevention and community safety and avoiding direct conversations around gun control/everything solely resting on firearms might be beneficial/more well-received (Lynch & Jackson, 2019).

Recent developments from the 2022 Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (BSCA) have made inroads for domestic violence at the federal policy level. The law strengthened prohibitions against convicted domestic abusers purchasing or possessing firearms. Previously, this law only covered individuals who abused spouses, people who shared a child, or people who lived together. This “boyfriend loophole” excluded romantic partners who lived in different homes or who were ex-partners. Implementation of this new statute has involved trainings with law enforcement, practitioners, and victim/survivor services (White House, 2024). The FBI’s National Instant Criminal Background Check System has also hosted webinars and distributing materials to raise awareness and increase understanding of how the new dating relationship rule may apply in DV situations (White House, 2024).

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Addressing Firearm-Related IPV: Solutions

There is renewed interest and funding in the firearm injury prevention space, and multiple gaps and opportunities currently exist that, as they are addressed, can improve understanding of the scope of the problem and avenues to address it. One key avenue is to continue to understand gender motivations and unpack gender roles for who uses firearms and how they are used. Understanding the influence of toxic masculinity, gender inequality, and firearm manufacturing marketing can help explain and ideally dismantle the link between firearms, masculinity, and DV. The related key avenue is to better understand the person in the environment and in the context of why Black people and Black women are facing higher levels of IPV (Gillum et al., 2025) and how it can be reduced. While additional efforts—through policy, practice, and research—are certainly needed to more fully understand the role of DV in society and how to prevent it among groups most afflicted, there are multiple current strategies that aim to prevent and/or stop IPV.

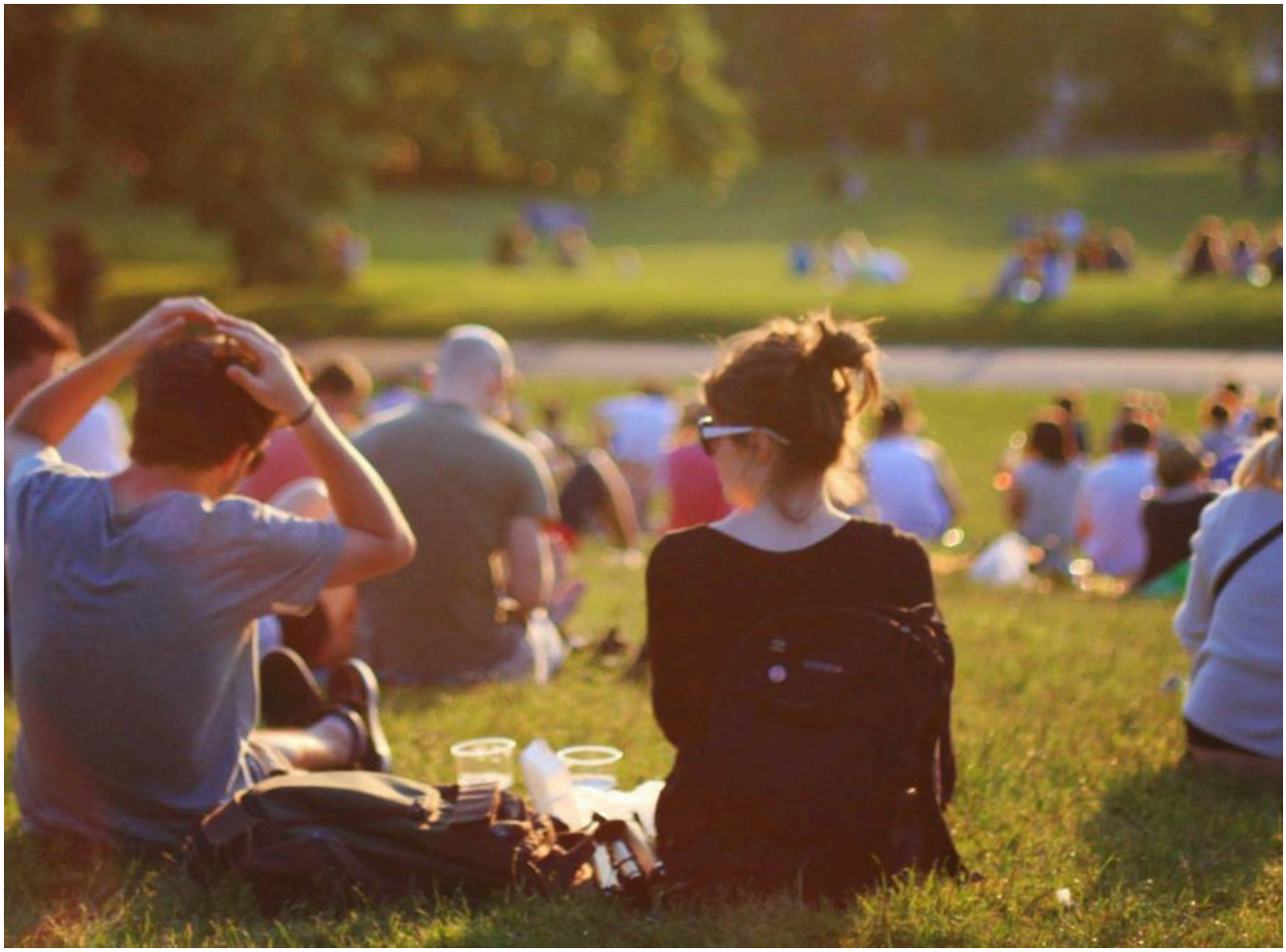
One solution is to focus on hospital-based programs that have a specific IPV focus (Aboutanos et al., 2019). An example of this type of program is called Project Empower, which includes staff education, patient screening, a crisis fund, and a multidisciplinary domestic violence intervention team. People who enter the hospital with suspected IPV are referred to Project Empower and then engage in case

management (Aboutanos et al., 2019). Also, people who are in lower income brackets are more at risk of IPV and less likely to have the resources for legal aid (Tobin-Tyler, 2023). Free legal aid and resources can help people leave IPV situations and begin processes that will force their abuser to relinquish firearms. The Legal Assistance for Victims Grant Program funded through the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) provides funding for legal representation of IPV victims/survivors; however, these resources and funds can be hard to access for people living in under-resourced communities (Tobin-Tyler, 2023). Medical-legal partnerships are programs that embed lawyers in health care and social service organizations, providing free legal aid to victims/survivors. These types of programs can help identify IPV and provide options and assistance to victims/survivors to understand their options (Tobin-Tyler, 2023). Other groups have employed co-responder models to prevent IPV and support victims/survivors.

For example, the Cincinnati Police Department (CPD) partnered with Women Helping Women (WHW), a gender-based violence prevention organization, to create the Domestic Violence Enhanced Response Team (DVERT) (Rubenstein et al., 2021). Additional responders are sent to an IPV call to connect with victims/survivors. Research into this program showed that victims/survivors who faced weapons (including firearm DV) were more likely to receive service referrals (Rubenstein et al., 2021). Initiatives like this support the need for community-based co-responder models that help provide nuanced support for survivors. Other solutions—developed specifically for Black and Brown transgender and gender-diverse individuals that could be replicated across other groups (e.g., Black women)—focus on empowerment self-defense (ESD). These approaches are group-based interventions that empower participants with physical, verbal, and psychological tools to view themselves as strong while also holding abusers responsible for IPV (Berke & Collins, 2023). Initiatives and programs conducted in an intentional manner through equitable community-government partnerships and funding for grassroots community-based organizations (CBOs) can further support current and potential IPV victims/survivors.

Others (Tobin-Tyler, 2023) have suggested applying a health justice framework to further assess the problem and address it through solutions that serve communities better. The framework includes addressing the structural systems that have tolerated violence against women and the ways in which historical inequities have systematically created greater risk of DV/IPV for Black women. Part of this includes removing access barriers and healing distrust in the legal criminal justice system among communities of color (Tobin-Tyler, 2023). Firearm domestic violence does not occur in isolation and is deeply intertwined with social determinants of health—both in the conditions that lead to it and in the health consequences after IPV (e.g., chronic pain, substance use disorders, chronic stress). IPH is closely linked to economic disadvantage and increased risk of homicide (Mancik et al., 2020). Investments in communities can provide resources such as community centers and health centers to both prevent IPV and provide support following IPV. More community resources could support people (mainly men) who might one day engage in IPV—economic opportunities and understanding what a healthy relationship is can prevent IPV (Tobin-Tyler, 2023). Furthermore, direct engagement from communities and groups representing Black women can encourage productive discussions around firearm ownership, domestic violence, and political and legal accountability. These voices can provide community-driven solutions and policy suggestions that bring the voices of Black women to the forefront of this issue that disproportionately affects them and their families (Tobin-Tyler, 2023).

Another solution includes building on the examination of firearms-related IPV risk factors and heightened homicide risks. The presence of firearms significantly heightens risk and demands a comprehensive approach, including thorough risk assessments and effective coordination among agencies. A study by Rubenstein et al. (2021) evaluated Cincinnati's DVERT model, which facilitates collaboration between law enforcement and community-based services for IPV incidents involving weapons. Analyzing 1,253 police calls from August 2018 to January 2020, the study found that perpetrators using weapons had higher rates of prior abuse and substance abuse, and that Black women disproportionately faced weapon-involved IPV. These results emphasize the need for a proactive, second-responder intervention approach during crises. Furthermore, the study revealed that police officers with positive experiences working with advocates were more likely to connect survivors to advocacy services, highlighting the crucial role of collaborative relationships in safeguarding victims.



In studying risk assessments for IPH, Messing et al. (2021) introduced the Arizona Intimate Partner Homicide (AzIPH) study, a pilot project designed to advance the understanding of IPH risk factors, including firearms. This study reviewed existing literature on data collection methods and the experiences of marginalized and under-researched populations, emphasizing the importance of examining victim-offender relationships and situational risk factors. To address gaps in previous research, the AzIPH study employed a triangulated approach, integrating official records with in-depth interviews of next of kin to capture a comprehensive range of IPH risk factors. It illuminated the need for inclusive, up-to-date risk assessment tools and served as a model for community-based data collection. By bridging gaps in prior research and focusing on marginalized groups, the AzIPH study aimed to provide a nuanced understanding of IPH and inform more effective prevention strategies.

Another solution involves additional conversations around secure firearm storage, particularly in contexts when firearms are possessed for protection. More research is needed to understand how firearms are stored when they may be used in a DV situation and who has access to those firearms (the perpetrator or the victims/survivors). Specifically, while the removal of firearms from the home has been promoted through DVPO policies, less is understood about the use of storage prior to or during an incident or repeated incidents of firearm DV. Research in Black communities that takes the perspectives and experiences of both perpetrators and victims/survivors who have been involved in firearm DV on where and how firearms are stored can be helpful.

Specific recommendations to reduce the burden of violence on Black Americans include, as recommended by the Society of Black Academic Surgeons (Neufeld et al., 2020), federal and state funding for the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program. The Society of Black Academic Surgeons also recommends additional scientific research, conversations between health care workers and their patients/clients around firearm access and safe storage, closing of gun-show loopholes and mandatory background checks, and banning access to military-style assault weapons and high-capacity magazines, as well as bump stocks (Neufeld et al., 2020). With specific regards to DV, they recommend expanding federal law to abusers who abuse non-spouse partners and other family members, dispossessing firearms from abusers and stalkers in the period prior to a hearing, and strengthening reporting processes for abusers that are prohibited from accessing or possessing a firearm (Neufeld et al., 2020).

Addressing Firearm-Related IPV: Future Research

Looking ahead, there are many areas for future research that will help increase understanding of IPV, firearms, and Black women. While the research itself can and should use an intersectional framework, researchers and research teams should also represent intersectionality. This approach emphasizes intersectionality by including legislation/policies, race/ethnicity, class, and structural predictors. Moreover, Black women are underrepresented in research circles, and additional grant support, mentorship, and research opportunities aimed towards Black women are needed and can reduce this disparity (Mowatt et al., 2013; Nguyen et al., 2023; Owens et al., 2019). Additional domestic violence and firearm research—by and for Black individuals and Black women—needs to occur (Gray et al., 2024; Posey, 2024). Many remaining gaps exist in the literature, and there are many areas for both programmatic and research expansion that center on the experiences of Black women and girls, particularly in research projects that support creating and maintaining safety (Barge et al., 2020; Jordan-Zachery, 2017; Posey, 2024).

Posey (2024) also outlines the need to expand DV/IPV frameworks to include variations of "family" to include both biological and nonbiological relatives. Extended family and relatives have been shown to be connected—both positively and negatively—to incidents of domestic violence (Ali et al., 2021; Chatzisymeonidis & Kioskli, 2023; Clark et al., 2010; Fernandez, 1997); nevertheless, Black communities in the US often involve extended families as kin (Chatters et al., 1994). Extended family and friendships are often viewed, in Black communities, as intense bonds beset by familial obligations and duties (Chatters et al., 1994; Posey, 2024). Similarly, LGBTQ+ individuals, due to homophobia, often have extended and "chosen" families that may be different than their biological families (Glass, 2014; Posey, 2024). These models differ from the White-dominant nuclear family and support research that better unpacks the role of firearm family domestic violence in Black communities.

Also, heavy reliance on law enforcement as the main intervention avenue for IPV may not be as effective in Black communities—additional research to understand the use or hesitancy of engaging law enforcement in IPV situations is needed. Hearing from domestic violence victims/survivors on their experiences with the criminal legal system may identify other avenues to prevent or resolve domestic violence incidents. Other ways to identify and support women who may be straw purchasers, who may be facing DV, and/or who are firearm owners are essential. Future research in this space can expand understanding of domestic violence through highlighting the experiences, expertise, and solutions of individuals and women of color.

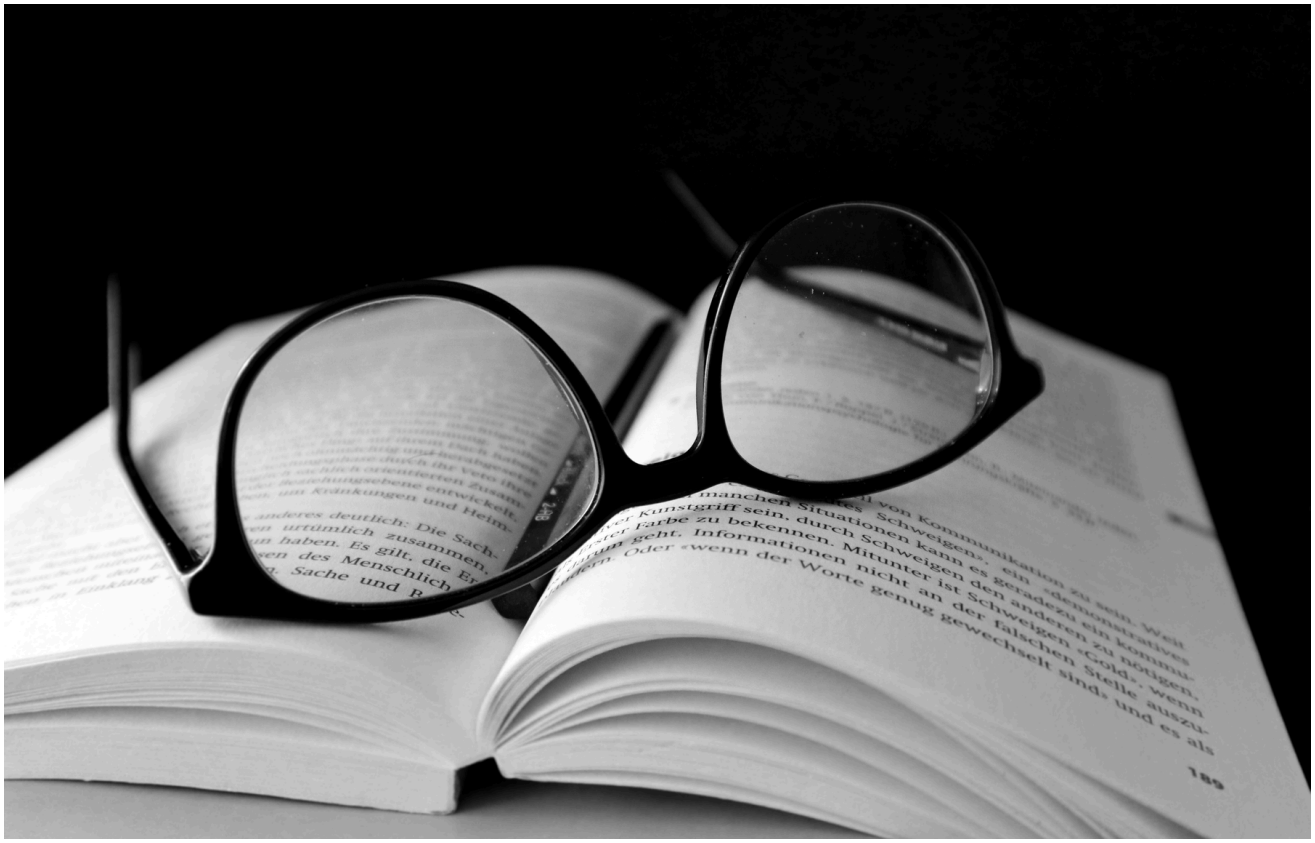
Additionally, several other critical research gaps include: 1) A closer look at stalking, which is well-documented as a risk factor for IPH. The rapid advancements in technology over the past decade have not been adequately studied in relation to their use in stalking behaviors and the impact on IPV survivors. Addressing this gap is critical as technological innovations can alter the dynamics of stalking and potentially heighten the risks for survivors; 2) There is a notable scarcity of research on the warning signs and behavioral indicators that precede IPV involving firearms and IPH. Identifying these signs is essential for developing effective early intervention strategies and improving risk assessments; 3) There is a significant deficiency in research addressing non-policy preventative measures related to IPV and firearms. This is particularly alarming given the severe consequences of IPV involving firearms and the urgent need for practical, actionable interventions that go beyond policy changes to directly support and protect vulnerable individuals.

Qualitative Report

Intimate partner violence (IPV) continues to affect millions of women in the US, as it cuts across gender, race, sexual orientation, and class. While 46 million (14%) people living in the US self-identify as Black, over half of Black women surveyed in a 2016/2017 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS) reported experiencing domestic violence (DV). The increased vulnerability of Black women to domestic violence is rooted in patriarchy, racism, and other systems of oppression. Given the heightened risk of fatality and the nonfatal harm firearms pose in abusive relationships, along with the reality that Black women in the US are more likely to be killed by firearms and killed by intimate partners, it is critical to focus our research on Black women.

Methodology

We leveraged the expertise from a variety of stakeholders in the domestic violence and gun violence field during August 2024 and October 2024 to understand their perceptions of firearm-related domestic violence. This section of the report provides insights from 15 interviews into how funders, academics, and practitioners across the United States think about the intersection of firearms and domestic violence. Project participants were identified through professional relationships and snowball sampling with key stakeholders in the firearm research field. The interviewees spoke about their experiences in the field with an understanding that the results would anonymously be mentioned in a report submitted to the MacArthur Foundation. Following verbal consent, all interviews were recorded on Zoom. The interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes, and participants were given a $25 gift card as compensation for their time. The semi-structured interview guide was informed by the literature review. The research team relied on open coding that led to a list of themes. This project was approved by the University at Buffalo Institutional Review Board. The extent of knowledge and experience reflected in this report underscores the deep expertise shared by funders, academics, and practitioners. Below, we offer a summarized table of the findings and provide a more detailed report with quotes paired with supporting evidence associated with the themes.



Themes	Summary Findings
Funding	• Federal funding is more restrictive and difficult to obtain than private funding. • Private funders offer flexibility that allows for implementing community interventions in the Black community. • Federal funders focus too much on research outcomes and not enough on community outcomes. • There is a discrepancy between who is receiving the funds to do the work and who may be most knowledgeable in doing this work in Black and Brown communities. • There is a lack of firearm-related IPV knowledge among funders, and some funders are hesitant to get into the firearm space out of fear of the repercussions of engaging in an inherently political environment. • In the midst of discouraging firearm statistics, some funders may wonder if they can really make a difference.
Gun Culture	• There is a shift in gun culture and an increase in fear and the belief that guns will keep you safe. The narrative, emerging since 2016, about guns equaling safety does not bear out in research data.
The Rise of Ghost Guns	• Ghost guns can be difficult to track, lead to increased gun accessibility, and are difficult to address through policy.
People of Color and Gun Ownership	• The presidential election of 2016 as well as the racial reckoning that occurred with George Floyd's murder confirmed for many people of color the need to keep themselves safe amid systemic and racial oppression. • Black women's fear of White people may perpetuate their need to own guns.
Survivors and Gun Ownership	• Survivors of IPV own guns as an adapted help-seeking or trauma response.

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Survivors and Gun Ownership	• Survivors of IPV own guns as an adapted help-seeking or trauma response.
Gun Safety and Gun Education	• Victims, survivors, perpetrators, and the community need education around gun safety. • Educate women on the danger of straw purchases (purchasing firearms on behalf of a prohibited purchaser) and the need to ask more questions before agreeing to purchase a gun for their intimate partners.

Themes	Summary Findings
Gun Safety and Gun Education	• There is some difficulty in educating the community on gun safety within a cultural context of ever-present danger. The inconsistency of safely storing your guns in a lockbox or safe makes it difficult for gun owners to be ready when faced with a threat to their safety. • Utilize different settings to educate the public about gun safety.
Policy Gaps	• Firearms are accessible to individuals, especially those who should be prevented from owning a firearm. • An ERPO (Extreme Risk Protection Order) is a civil temporary protection order that prevents someone who poses a danger to themselves or others from possessing or purchasing a firearm. It is not clearly understood and has implementation gaps resulting in its underutilization. • Domestic violence protection orders should be used instead of ERPOs due to the belief that ERPOs are too new, have a lot of issues, and offer less accountability. • There is inconsistent implementation when it comes to firearm relinquishment as well as an overall lack of follow-through and follow-up to ensure that firearms are removed from perpetrators. • The honor system in which perpetrators are expected to hand over their guns with little oversight is a problematic piece of policy. • The guidance for how to relinquish firearms is present in policy. However, there is a disconnect between officials' interpretation of policy and actual implementation of firearm relinquishment. • There needs to be more clarity in policy about what happens to firearms after relinquishment and when and how perpetrators get their guns back.
Rationale for Owning Firearms	• There is a need to understand why people in some communities feel they need to own a firearm in the first place.
Experiences of the Black Community and Black Women	• Understand the root causes of IPV and firearms in the Black community by researching the social determinants of health, which are the conditions in which people are born, work, live, and play, as well as understand why people feel they need firearms in the first place. • Much of what we know about IPV in scholarly literature is based on the experiences of White women. Participants in our study would like to see an increase in research depicting the lived experiences of Black women.

Themes	Summary Findings
Experiences of the Black Community and Black Women	• The Black community is not a monolith, and there are many intersecting identities within the Black community that need to be explored if we are really to understand those barriers and challenges that are uniquely experienced by this community of survivors (e.g., stereotypes of the strong Black woman, systemic racism, discriminatory treatment by law enforcement).
Community-Level Intervention	• Community-level interventions are needed to complement policy. While policies may be effective for some segments of the population, they are largely ineffective for other segments of the population. • There is a need to gain more insight into the intersection of IPV, firearms, and community violence. • Community violence interventionists (CVIs) largely focus on decreasing gun violence among Black men in the Black community. Often, intimate partner violence is not considered a part of this work.
Innovation in the Field	• Domestic Violence Fatality Review Boards (DVFRBs) include members with different experiences and expertise in domestic violence who review DV cases and offer insights into practical solutions for addressing DV.
Diversity and Research	• Invite marginalized groups to share their perspectives at federal and state-level events and forums. • Mentor junior scholars from underrepresented backgrounds. • Invite marginalized scholars to sit on research teams. • Fund diverse groups of scholars with differing access to resources. • Include the experiences of marginalized women in research to ensure a focus on equity in research. • Uplift the voices of marginalized scholars at the federal and state levels.
Secure Storage Practices	• Focus on responsible firearm ownership when firearms are not in use.

Themes	Summary Findings
Decentering a System Response	• Move away from carceral approaches that encourage Black women to engage with criminal and civil legal systems perceived to harm Black women. • Shift from one-size-fits-all policies in addition to law enforcement remedies to address domestic violence cases. • There is a need for targeted initiatives to educate judges on domestic violence and firearm relinquishment policies.
Cultural Specificity	• Cultural considerations should be made when working with domestic violence survivors from immigrant and tribal communities (e.g., how to address specific language barriers for immigrant women, engage tribal leaders).
Risk Assessments	• Provide individuals with education on the dynamics of risk factors for domestic violence. • Contextualize risk assessments to capture the reality of the experiences of those with marginalized identities.

Funding

Funders

When asked who the major funders of IPV and gun violence research are, participants in our study identified both private and federal funding. Participants clarified that many funders do not have a specific focus on the intersection of IPV and firearms. Rather, they may vaguely fund either IPV or gun violence prevention, with some organizations funding a few projects that focus on the intersection. This point was illustrated by Participant 2, who said:

> *Our mission and scope are broader than the intersection of domestic violence and gun violence, though we do talk about it in a couple of weeks for domestic violence awareness month, we're doing a webinar with another federal funder that focuses specifically on domestic violence. So, we do some work in that area.*

Among federal funders, participants identified the following organizations:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) GV, IPV[1]
- National Institutes of Health (NIH)[GV, IPV]
- Department of Justice (DOJ)[GV, IPV]
- Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA)[GV, IPV]
- National Institute of Justice (NIJ)[GV, IPV]
- Office on Violence Against Women (OVW)[GV, IPV]

Among private funders, participants identified the following organizations:

- Fund for a Safer Future[GV]
- Joyce Foundation[GV]
- Arnold Ventures[GV]
- RAND[GV]
- National Collaborative on Gun Violence Research[GV]
- California Wellness Foundation[GV]
- Annie E. Casey Foundation[GV]
- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation[GV, IPV]

Private vs. Federal Funding

Participants spoke to the differences in receiving private versus public funding. There is a consensus that federal funding is more restrictive and difficult to obtain compared to private funding. Participant 1 noted the following about federal funding:

> *It is very competitive, and the process is not as straightforward as other types of grants. They make you jump through hoops.*

[1] Note: GV = Funding gun violence, IPV = Funding intimate partner violence

Participant 6 indicated that they are a "huge fan of foundation money, because foundation money doesn't have the same red tape that federal funding does." This participant described how their federal funding "did not allow me to speak with victims, [and it] does not allow me to speak with perpetrators." They also felt that the people they could reach and train with federal funding were limited in scope:

> *My audience that I provide training and technical assistance to is only criminal justice system professionals. So, only law enforcement, judges, and legal aid staff. They [federal funders] consider domestic violence advocates a part of that. But [federal funding] doesn't allow me to work with violence interrupters. So, it is this intentional siloing that allows the violence to continue.*

Participant 10, who is active in community-based participatory research, shared similar sentiments. In her interview, she discussed experiencing fewer restrictions with private funding when engaging in community-based initiatives, and she called for the urgent implementation of community interventions in the Black community. She said:

> *Earlier in my career, I had a little bit more funding from private spaces. And if I'm honest about it, I think [funding] really should come from more private foundations. I say that because I think that there's more flexibility to do work in the community. I think part of the challenge, the funding that we had came from the federal government. We had to work around that.*

This participant went on to describe that while providing food to participants is a huge component of community-based research, government funding would not allow it, which resulted in the research team paying for food for the community out of their own pockets. She concluded:

> *I think private funders create more opportunity for us to do the level of flexible kinds of work that you have to do in community. You could be more responsive. You could be more community centered. You could be more culturally responsive in some of those ways that don't impact your pocket.*

Participant 10 was also concerned that federal funders focus too much on research outcomes and not enough on community outcomes. She stated:

> *I think that some of the other funders who do work in this area, NIJ, I think NIH, I think that so much of it is, so research focused that it has nothing to do with community at some point. And we're so methodical with it that we're not getting anything really accomplished. I hate to say that, but maybe we are, but just not in a timely way for communities. I appreciate the research process, but I think that part of the challenge is we don't get to do the work in the community, and the community needs it now.*

Funding Challenges

Participants described the challenges with funding firearm-related IPV work. One challenge is how to address the discrepancy between who is receiving the funds to do the work and who may be most knowledgeable in doing this work in Black and Brown communities. Participant 2 stated:

> *I think another issue that I see that I'm not quite sure how to remedy, because I don't know who's reviewing applications, is that the funding recipients aren't necessarily the ones that are the most informed in this space. So, I do think there needs to be a holistic look at who's applying for funding, who's getting it, are we making sure that groups that are focused on Black and Brown women who are disproportionately impacted by domestic violence homicide [receive funds], is funding going more to focus on that than other forms of gun violence that are well-funded.*

Similarly, Participant 5 spoke to the challenge of funding culturally specific research:

> *Again, because of this very distinct difference between how Black and Brown people experience the criminal legal system and experience policing versus how White women especially experience the criminal legal system or policing, there is a real need for there to be research that is race-specific that looks at what response should look like in Black and Brown communities as it relates to funders.*

Additional challenges to funding mentioned included the lack of firearm-related IPV knowledge among funders as well as some funders being hesitant to get into the firearm space out of fear of repercussions. Participant 7 spoke to both points:

> *But I think in terms of just getting folks more socialized to what intimate partner violence, particularly looks like for Black women in the context of firearms feels like a little bit of a black box still. I think funders in particular are just not that knowledgeable about intimate partner violence in general. It's a small part of our overall funding of gun violence prevention work. We have a significant research portfolio and only two projects are directly related to intimate partner violence.*

> *I would suspect it comes more from a reluctance to focus on firearms than necessarily on IPV. I have come to understand and see firsthand that folks just are very anxious about anything related to firearms. It feels inherently political. So, that is a challenge for philanthropy, a challenge to overcome. That is a perhaps self-imposed challenge that philanthropy faces around investing in anything related to firearms.*

This same participant spoke to the challenge of funding firearm research in the midst of disparaging statistics. They identified firearm statistics as being an inhibiting factor. Some funders may wonder if they can really make a difference:

> *I think there's also a sense of just the impossibility of the scale when there are 400 million guns in the country, more guns than people. I think that philanthropy remains anxious about the possibility of actually moving the needle on any sort of firearms violence, particularly when rates of gun ownership really spiked during the pandemic. I think that felt like a real setback.*

Gun Culture

Culture of Fear and the Rise in Gun Ownership

Many believe that gun culture, which is the behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs concerning gun ownership and the use of guns, has shifted since 2016. Since 2016, Americans have experienced the first election of Donald Trump, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the killing of George Floyd, which sparked a racial reckoning in America followed by a racial backlash (e.g., attacks on wokeism, DEI, and critical race theory). Each of these events has increased fear in the American public, which has resulted in an increase in the belief that guns can keep one safe, resulting in the rise of gun purchases, especially among people of color. Participant 1 described this shift in gun culture and the increase in fear and the belief that guns will keep you safe, even though data suggest otherwise:

> *With the shift in gun culture, I think we're stuck between a rock and a hard place. Because after COVID, and with everything that has gone on with the country since I think 2016 when things started changing, there's this constant fear that pushes people to think that they need to arm themselves. And there's fear and misinformation because people have this idea that if I arm myself, I'm going to be kept safe. But the misinformation part of it is, unless you've been properly trained and you know what you're doing, you're probably making yourself more unsafe. But I would say that one of the things we've seen in recent years is this more of a fear culture that have pushed people to buy more guns because they think it is going to protect them.*

Similarly, Participant 2 described how events since 2016 have led to a rise in gun purchases:

> *During the pandemic, I wrote a little commentary on this because we saw at the beginning of the pandemic only essential businesses were opened and gun stores were considered essential businesses in many states. That right off the bat was extremely troubling. As a result of COVID and unrest and increased police brutality, I think that people were buying guns, or at least there were more background checks being run, so we know that there were at least more people trying to buy guns.*

Participant 8 discussed how the pandemic as well as a change in administration led to increases in gun ownership:

> *I think in general as a society, when you have something like a worldwide pandemic, people panic. They may not outwardly panic, right? They may not run down the street with their arrow and fire, but there's this internal thing that happens. My observation is that people are really panicking and I'm really focusing on the United States. I also think that our administrations can also drive that fear and that panic. I think that the change [of] leadership at that time, for some, and particularly for those in the gun culture, they felt like they had to do something to protect themselves because the rhetoric as the other leader was leaving office and then the new leader comes in, I think that there was a culture of, "Oh my god, we're going to die."*

The Rise of Ghost Guns

Participants in our study expressed concerns over the rise of ghost guns, or guns that are built by individuals who purchase gun parts and assemble their own guns. Some refer to them as do-it-yourself guns. Ghost guns can be difficult to track and lead to increased gun accessibility.

Participants expressed the following concerns:

> *The ghost guns, that 3D printing gun stuff just terrifies me because how do you store that, right? You're making it. (Participant 11)*

> *And then unfortunately, one issue that is getting worse is the availability and the proliferation about privately made firearms and ghost guns and un-serialized guns, because that's really hard to address through policy. (Participant 2)*

> *You also have had the proliferation of ghost guns in the last six years, which has coincided with COVID-19. I think while ghost guns existed pre-COVID, I think we've seen rapid increase of their prevalence over the last six years, which may have some relation to what people were experiencing during COVID, but may also just speak to the ease at which you can get ghost guns or the parts to assemble a gun yourself at home and a gun that is illegal. (Participant 5)*

People of Color and Gun Ownership

While participants described how the election of Donald Trump, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the racial reckoning and racial backlash that began with the murder of George Floyd led to increases in gun purchases, many recognize that gun purchases significantly increased among people of color. Many people of color felt that the election of Donald Trump would give rise to increased racism and harm against Black and Brown people. The COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately impacted Black and Brown bodies. The racial reckoning that occurred with George Floyd's murder confirmed for many people of color the need to keep themselves safe amid systemic and racial oppression. Participant 3 said:

> *This started before the onset of the pandemic but was really supercharged by it and then by the murder of George Floyd. But this intense belief that people need a firearm to keep themselves safe is really a driving force from the research we've seen in gun sales and gun culture and the volume of gun ownership, particularly amongst new gun owners. We know, however, from research that the actual risks of gun ownership are much more significant than people are appreciating. In fact, you are much less safe with a gun in your home than you are without. But the perceived risk is very different. I think part of the people's calculus on that question is that they don't have a belief that they will be safe otherwise. And that was really what was turbocharged in the social unrest after the murder of George Floyd. And for us, that is why we also think quite significantly about issues of justice reform and policing reform as being very specifically connected to this debate. Because people are now turning to guns to keep safe, and they're doing so because they don't have trust or belief in law enforcement of keeping them safe and they have very specific and good reasons to believe why law enforcement isn't going to keep them safe.*

Several participants echoed the rise in gun ownership among people of color. Participant 5 stated:

> *Yeah. Well, we know that there was a record period of gun sales where we saw massive amounts of guns being purchased, and we saw a lot of historically absent populations in the gun ownership world start to buy guns. So, you saw gun purchases for first-time gun owners, purchases for women, purchases for Black and Brown communities, Black and Brown individuals buying guns for the first time. Populations that are normally less likely to own firearms purchased firearms during COVID.*

Participant 11 described the fear that Black women have towards White people and how that perpetuates their need to have a gun:

> *And it's not just about protecting oneself from domestic violence. It's not just protecting oneself from your homestead. It's not about being in the streets. It's also about racism. Black women are scared of White people.*

Survivors and Gun Ownership

When asked about their opinions pertaining to survivors and gun ownership, many participants believed that gun ownership increases harm instead of diminishing it. Participant 13 stated:

> *I think that the idea is if I carry out a weapon that I can take care of myself and that I can be safer. I think not just from their partners, but probably just from community violence in general. That's the feedback that I've been given by individuals that I have spoken with who carry a weapon. But we always provide education around the fact that that could or could not be true. Research shows that it's just as likely that a victim will be shot by their own weapon as by their partner's weapon. We do talk about that, but I think it provides a level of self-protection. We also need to talk about the fact that the victim carrying a weapon, whether it's a gun or a knife, could be prosecuted for harming their partner even if they're not prosecuted. We talk about all of the prejudice and the racially biased laws and policies that we have that could make that very true, even if someone is protecting themselves. We have those very honest conversations, and then we also talk about the psychological impact that could happen if they kill their partner. For some of our participants who have harmed or killed their partners, that's a very difficult thing. So, we have honest conversations about that too.*

Similarly, Participant 11 said:

> *There is a political faction that says, domestic violence survivors and sexual assault victims would be better off if they had a firearm. And my response to that is, I know Black women are rising owners because of a myriad of reasons. But unless you are well-trained and unless you practice regularly, you are more likely to be harmed by that firearm than to use it for your own protection.*

While many participants in our study did not support survivors owning firearms, many participants believe that gun ownership is on the rise among survivors of IPV. Participant 12 described an event where a survivor of IPV encouraged all survivors to purchase guns:

> *I do think there are more survivors now that are arming themselves. In fact, I went to, maybe it was two years ago now, but I went to a domestic violence event. It was on the east side of [a city] and they had a survivor speaking. At the end of her speech, she encouraged all survivors or anyone in that kind of relationship, "Arm yourself, get yourself a gun, they're going to use it against you. You should be prepared," kind of thing. And I was like, "Oh, okay. I don't know if that's the message we want out there, but I can hear where you're coming from," because she said once she got herself armed, the dynamics changed a little bit. She could protect herself a little bit more. I found that very interesting because oftentimes you hear about like, "Oh, people want to do self-defense," and all those things, but this was a clear, "Go get yourself a gun and protect yourself," not something I was used to hearing. So, I was just kind of like, "Oh, okay. All right."*

Some participants in our study described survivors of IPV owning guns as an adapted help-seeking or trauma response. They felt that survivors, particularly Black women, who felt like the typical IPV interventions (e.g., criminal justice system) were ineffective sought gun ownership instead of pursuing the legal route. Participant 10 said:

> *And I think especially for Black women, you end up feeling like there's nobody out here for me. Nobody's coming to save me. Nobody's saving us. I've got to take matters into my own hands to make sure that I'm saved. I'm going to be okay because nobody else is doing it. And I think we see a lot of that in just domestic violence in general. If institutions, if others are not going to support [us], we'll figure it out ourselves.*

The same participant explained how gun ownership among survivors may also be a trauma response:

> *One area that we've not done much study on is really looking at that neurobiology of trauma as it connects to survivors of domestic violence. I mean, a lot of work done on this in terms of sexual assaults, really understand what that looks like and what that means. But there's certainly a trauma response for DV survivors. And the question to me would become, how could that trauma response impact utilization of a firearm? For example, if part of your trauma response is that freeze response and you've got a firearm that you've now brought into the situation, now you're in a freeze response and this person basically has the firearm that you bought to help take care of you, what happens then? So, I think that there's so many questions around that. I also think that it may seem to make sense on a practical level, like, "Hey, I have this thing to protect me," but we also know for Black women, the law enforcement system doesn't treat us the same. So how is that then going to potentially negatively impact you in terms of just the criminal justice response?*

Gun Safety and Gun Education

Gun safety and gun education were huge concerns among participants in our study. Many felt that victims, survivors, perpetrators, and the community need education around gun safety. Participants spoke of many aspects of gun safety, including safe storage, straw purchases (purchasing firearms on behalf of a prohibited purchaser), relationships with police, policy or legal concerns, and deadly consequences of gun ownership. Participant 1 described gun safety education as follows:

> *We need to find a way, in my mind, to not just educate people about the risks of gun ownership and possession, which would then elevate the likelihood of fatal IPV. While we're educating about those risks, we also need to address the safety perception. And part of that is by rebuilding trust and legitimacy in law enforcement. I think part of it also is understanding what else community needs are out there to make them feel safer where they are.*

Participant 3 included straw purchases in their definition of gun safety and gun education:

> *I think we still need to find ways to increase the education for people about the risks of firearm ownership and possession in the home. And it's not just merely we have a gun in the home or not. But what we also know is that many women in particular are oftentimes asked to straw purchase firearms for their partners or their spouses because their partners or spouses are prohibited from buying a gun on their own. And one, that action of a straw purchase is illegal in and of itself. And two, we know that again brings a lethal means into the home that we know is fueling some of the deadly domestic violence that we're seeing.*

Participant 11 elaborated on the danger of straw purchases and the need to educate women in asking more questions before agreeing to purchase a gun for their intimate partners:

> *It's education and it could be policy about women who buy firearms for their partners and don't ask the right questions. I was on a panel with a woman. He shot her three or four times. And she had bought the gun for him because he wanted one, and she never asked him if he was prohibited. Like, "Why am I buying the gun?" It was so weird because I could see somebody saying, "Well, can you buy me this? I really want it." And you're buying it as a gift, and it's in your name and you're giving it to him. And he was prohibited from owning a firearm. I think he had a felony or something. That's huge.*

Some participants in our study spoke to the difficulty in educating the community on gun safety within a cultural context of ever-present danger. This inconsistency of safely storing your guns in a lockbox or safe makes it difficult for gun owners to be ready when faced with a threat to their safety. Participant 5 stated:

> *You have to stay safe. You have to be ready with your firearm to respond to these threats that are unpredictable, but ever-present. And so, messages around safe storage, we have yet to see how effective those messages are right now, because what we hear in society is that there's this constant, looming threat, and you need to be ready, which is so interesting because that is everybody's actual risk to that looming threat is not the same. We know that. There are individuals who live in communities with high rates of interpersonal gun violence, who are facing regular threats to their safety. There are folks who live in the suburbs who don't experience violence on a regular basis, who are also getting these messages that they must stay safe because the threat is out there, and it's just waiting for them to be caught off guard. And so, all of these messages, I think, stack up against what we know about safe storage, and stack up against what we know about the messages of how to prevent unintended consequences from gun ownership.*

While acknowledging the challenges, some participants spoke about their experiences with gun safety education. Participant 13, who works as a domestic violence advocate in a hospital-based violence intervention program, described the education her clients receive. Her program meets with clients on a one-on-one basis and provides gun locks and safes on the spot to clients in the hospital who are victims of gun violence:

> *We provide to anybody who discloses that there are guns in the home, that they carry a gun because a lot of our survivors, they also carry guns. We just had a survivor who unfortunately just got shot with her own gun. So, we provide gun locks and gun safes. We offer education around why they're important, how they could help, how they could reduce the chance of an incident if it happens, and we provide those free of charge to anybody who would want them.*

Participant 6 spoke of how their local library educates the community on gun safety as well as distributes locks and gun safes. They also spoke of another program called Pierce's Pledge:

> *There is a woman, there's an organization called Pierce's Pledge, and Lesley is her name. Her son was murdered by her ex-husband with a firearm. And one of the things that has done is that she has partnered with companies who will give her gun locks for free, and she will send them to anybody who wants them. I have seen some local community violence intervention programs get creative with meeting people where it is that they are.*

In addition to gun locks and safes, participants were adamant about the need for gun owners, specifically Black and Brown folks, to understand the consequences of gun ownership. Participant 11 spoke of the possibility of "being shot by the police." Participant 13 went into more detail with regard to the discussions she has with her clients:

> *We also though talk about the fact that the victim carrying a weapon, whether it's a gun or whether it's a knife, could be prosecuted for harming their partner even if the partner is not prosecuted. We talk about all of the prejudice and the racially biased laws and policies that we have that could make that very true, even if someone is protecting themselves. We have those very honest conversations, and then we also talk about the psychological impact that could happen if they kill their partner. For some of our participants who have harmed or killed their partners, that's a very difficult thing. So, we have honest conversations about that too.*

Policy Gaps

Policy gaps were a topic of concern that emerged in our study. Many felt that while there are policies to address IPV and firearms, there are gaps with regard to accessibility, ERPOs (a civil temporary protection order that protects someone who poses a danger to themselves or others from possessing or purchasing a firearm), firearm relinquishment, illegal firearms, rationale for owning firearms, and racial matters.

Accessibility of Firearms

Many participants were critical of how accessible firearms are, especially among those who should be prevented from owning a firearm. Participant 2 stated:

> *So typically, the perpetrators are people who never should have had a gun to begin with. If you're not able to possess a gun legally, it's pretty easy to get one. So, we need to fix that or else everything else is moot.*

Participant 10 spoke to the ease with which perpetrators who cannot legally own a gun in one state can easily cross state lines to purchase a gun in another state:

> *I get concerned that someone in Colorado could cross over to Arizona and get a gun with no problem, come back and shoot his partner. What are we doing that ensures that within NICS (National Instant Criminal Background Check System) and within our background check system, that we're doing everything we can to make sure that those folks who think that they can just walk up and get one, don't get one. I don't even want to put my head around straw purchases and those kinds of things. Oh my god.*

All participants agreed that perpetrators of IPV with an order of protection filed against them should not own a gun. This consensus is illustrated in a quote from Participant 10:

> *I do think that if you have a protective order against you, I think that you shouldn't be able to have a firearm. I know most communities have that policy in place, but some don't, and that should not be.*

In summary, participants were concerned with easy access to firearms, specifically among perpetrators of IPV. They highlighted the need to conduct thorough background checks and explore other strategies to effectively keep firearms out of the hands of people committing IPV.

Ineffectiveness of ERPOs

A key gap in policies was related to the perceived ineffectiveness of ERPOs. Some felt that ERPOs aren't clearly understood and have implementation gaps resulting in their underutilization. Participant 3 stated:

> *I say that because I actually don't think the DV (domestic violence) community has fully learned how to use or has maximized the use of ERPO. And so, as a result, I think it is an underutilized tool more so than the domestic violence restraining order tool.*

Some felt that ERPOs should not be used to address IPV at all. Participant 6 said:

> *In my opinion, ERPOs are never appropriate for domestic violence cases. And the reason is because ERPOs do not name a protective party. It protects everybody. So, it's not naming the victim as the protective party. It's everybody. Similar with firearm relinquishment processes from domestic violence restraining orders and protection orders, ERPOs don't have a mechanism for relinquishment either. There isn't a process.*

This same participant also expressed concerns that ERPOs do not address other aspects of IPV:

> *And also, ERPOs vary from domestic violence protection orders and restraining orders in that ERPOs aren't going to address the other things that survivors need. ERPOs are not going to address housing or who gets access to the car for transportation or who's paying for the health insurance if health insurance is to be. It doesn't account for any of those other things where domestic violence protection orders do.*

Many participants felt that domestic violence orders of protection should be used instead of ERPOs due to the belief that ERPOs are too new, have a lot of issues, and offer less accountability. Participant 7 spoke about their fear of ERPOs:

> *But we've also looked at some early data in states that, this isn't a grantee of ours, but we have colleagues in Minnesota who are looking at the early implementation of ERPOs in Minnesota and there have been something like 85 ERPOs filed and the vast majority of them are against DV partners or against domestic partners. So, they're being used in lieu of an order of protection with a relinquishment requirement. And given that that law is brand new and we know for a fact that there are a lot of issues with the law, that makes me really nervous and particularly nervous for petitioners of color who are both, we know sort of structurally less likely to be well-served by public systems in this way, but also have, are less trustful of and probably having more fragile relationships with them.*

Participant 8 spoke to the preference for ERPOs over orders due to increased accountability:

> *Here's what I think, I think protection orders will have more accountability, do have more accountability than the potential of ERPOs. So even though that person has lost control and a control tool, now they've got a protection order and there may be a bit more accountability in there.*

While many participants preferred orders of protection over ERPOs, Participant 12 identified the potential shortcomings of orders of protection:

> *I guess I'm glad that we could still file for orders of protection and get those granted, but it really is about how are we enforcing them, and that leads down the role too of making sure we're following through with violating people for criminal contempt when they don't comply and not just giving them additional time.*

Relinquishment of Firearms

Related to the dissatisfaction with ERPOs is the relinquishment of firearms. Participants expressed concern with inconsistent policies and implementation when it comes to firearm relinquishment as well as an overall lack of follow-through and follow-up to ensure that firearms are removed from perpetrators. Participants emphasized that the current reliance on an honor system, where perpetrators say they no longer have access to a weapon, is ineffective. They spoke to the need for a standardized relinquishment process.

Participant 7 described the experiences of police officers who agree that removing guns from perpetrators is necessary but are unsure of how to do so:

> *But where we are getting law enforcement engagement, they are indicating simultaneously that they think it is appropriate to remove firearms in a lot of the cases where DV orders are issued and they find the guidance really unclear, but either the guidance is in fact unclear and it is left to their discretion whether they remove a firearm or not or how they sort of pursue that or they're ordered to make the removal. But exactly how they should go about doing that is left unclear, which understandably in my view at least contributes to a real reluctance and hesitancy around how to appropriately prioritize or not this particular law enforcement function. And then also how to go about it, what to do with the firearm, et cetera. And so that I think broadly has rolled up into a research and policy concern that we have around just like can we develop better regional and national guidance to law enforcement around dispossession in general.*

Participant 2 described the role of the honor system, in which perpetrators are expected to hand over their guns, with little oversight to ensure that they do, as a problematic piece of policy:

> *In this country, we know that gun policies save lives and we know states with robust gun policies have lower rates of gun death, but there is still a level of... How do I want to say this? Of honor system, I guess is what I would say. In respect to following laws. There is some level of honor system, even with protection orders of, hey, you have to relinquish your firearm within 24 hours. Well, what happens if you don't? Also, you can do a lot of damage in 24 hours. So, improving some processes where relinquishment is automatic, where there are compliance hearings, certainly curbing the black market of gun sales and gun trafficking is going to go a long way.*

Further expressing their concerns about the honor system was Participant 12, who spoke to the lack of accountability in gun relinquishment policies. This participant discussed the possibility of perpetrators relinquishing their firearms to loved ones and still having access when needed:

> *And when they say, "Oh, I got rid of it." Well, what does that mean? You gave it to your friend who will turn it back over to you at any point? Or like, "Oh, my dad's got it locked up." Oh, okay. But you don't have access to that, right? Yeah.*

Participant 12 also spoke about a client who thought her perpetrator had relinquished their weapon:

> *There was a client who thought that the guns had been removed, the kids were sharing custody so they're going back and forth, and it's the kids that warned mom that, "Hey, I know dad said he doesn't have guns anymore. There's guns in the house," to give her a heads-up like, "Yeah, he still has them."*

Unlike some participants in this study, Participant 6 believed that the guidance for how to relinquish firearms is present in policy. However, there is a disconnect between officials' interpretation of policy and actual implementation of firearm relinquishment:

> *And that's the other thing I hear when I talk to advocates, lawyers, judges about firearm restrictions, and domestic violence orders. They're like, "Well, the law doesn't give us the mechanism to do it. The law says we have to do it but doesn't tell us how to do it." And I'm like, "Well, I'll tell you how to do it. I've told 27 states how to do it, and guess what? Only six of them are doing it right and doing it well." And so it's incredibly frustrating. We cannot say that we don't know what to do. We do know what to do. We do.*

Some participants argued for more clarity in policy about what happens to the firearms after relinquishment and when and how perpetrators get their guns back. They also expressed an urgency for survivors to be notified when perpetrators get their firearms back. Participant 8 spoke to this:

> *I have several thoughts in my mind, but most importantly is continuing to enforce relinquishment, continuing to address recovery of that weapon. And what I mean by that is, do we have a standard across the nation that says, "Once you have your firearm removed as a domestic abuser, when do you get it back? Who's it going to?" I guess I'm getting at we don't have an SOP, a standard operating procedure for across the nation, and I get that. Can you imagine District A trying to do what District B is doing? I get that, but there has to be some basic minimum of timing. I also firmly believe that we got to do a better strategy around background checks. I know that they are uncomfortable for a lot of people.*

Similarly, Participant 10 further described the clarity that should be incorporated into policy:

> *Who are you giving it back to? Where's it going? Are we all saying that you can't have a firearm for seven years? What are we saying, so that it's standard?*

Some participants expressed concern with firearm relinquishment and the possibility that it could put victims in more harm. Participants 10 and 12 said:

> *But I imagine that you immediately removed that firearm and it makes the perpetrator even more angry because you removed that tool from him, or her, but from them that they were using to maintain that control. Do we actually think that once you do that, that they're going to be okay with that and not go get another gun immediately? Because now you haven't had time to hurry up and... Is it the only gun? (Participant 10)*

> *Because I think that's the biggest problem is that even for the courts that are implementing the policies that we have put in place to try to remove guns, there's not the resources or the follow-up after that being done. (Participant 12)*

Illegal Firearms, Rationale for Owning Firearms in Some Communities, and Racial Gaps

While the gaps identified above largely pertain to ERPO, there are concerns among participants that current policies focus only on legal firearms, thus leaving no way to account for illegal firearms.

> *I think that if we're going to create policies, I think one, we have to think about those firearms that are known and the ones that are not. I feel like a lot of the policies are built around known firearms. I don't see any that are inclusive of the fact that for some people, there is no knowledge of [it] if it's not obtained legally.*

> *I think that if we're going to create policies, I think one, we have to think about those firearms that are known and the ones that are not. I feel like a lot of the policies are built around known firearms. I don't see any that are inclusive of the fact that for some people, there is no knowledge of [it] if it's not obtained legally. So even the buyback programs, I think sometimes they can be useful, but people also, this is another area [they] have issues with law enforcement. And so sometimes people don't trust that if they return or if they give up this firearm, that it won't be held against them in some way for some people. I just think that we have to think through what does that look like? (Participant 10)*

The same participant also spoke to the need to understand why people in some communities feel they need to own a firearm in the first place. If the reasons for owning firearms are not being addressed, then policy efforts to curb IPV with guns will be ineffective:

> *I think also to craft a policy, we've got to better understand why people have firearms. If we're not addressing the community environmental sort of reasons why people feel like firearms are needed, why would I give up my firearm? It's like you can create a policy that's specific for DV, but then people live in communities, and for some of them, they do feel like they need a firearm. Well, what are we doing to address the fact that you think that this is necessary in the community? And if we're not addressing some of those broader issues, then it's going to be really tough to address firearms. So if we're not looking at the relationships between law enforcement and the Black community, if we're not looking at how do we address the violence in our community, if we're not looking at how or why firearms are being utilized in community level violence, if we're not looking at the economic challenges in particular communities, if we're not doing any of those things, it's really tough to just create a policy that's going to just address firearms.*

Participant 10 identified some of the community issues as systemic issues in the Black community. Some participants expressed that IPV and gun policies are ineffective in the Black community and were not designed with the Black community in mind. These participants spoke to the importance of having policies that meet the needs of the lived experiences of Black people. Participant 4 stated:

> *But when we break it down into racial groups within a state population, it looks like those laws are really only associated with decreases in intimate partner homicide of White victims, not of Black victims.*

Participant 6 emphasized structural racism and the belief that policies are working as intended—to protect some groups and not others:

> *But the law isn't meant to protect all of us. And I don't believe that the laws in this country are meant to protect Black and Brown women or Black and Brown men. Period. You cannot and will never convince me otherwise. My family is system involved.*

Lastly, Participant 7 spoke to the need to identify barriers and facilitators of the Black community in utilizing the legal system to address IPV and firearms:

> *So, I think on a couple of fronts on the work we've been involved with most recently, I think there are potentially huge implications for the Black community and more broadly, communities of color, given that orders of protection, orders of removal are inherently a court involved in systems involved process. And we have a lot of reason to be concerned that communities of color don't use those processes for reasons of this institutional distrust or legal estrangement.*

So, one of the things we're interested in is just to the extent that they are present in the system, what were the facilitating factors or barriers to actually engaging with the process? And then to the extent that we're actually digging into, okay, you got an order, and a removal was required or possible and did that actually happen? Are there racial and gender or ethnic disparities in how and whether those orders were actually carried out?

Research Gaps

Participants identified many gaps in research that they believe need to be filled to propel the field forward in addressing IPV and gun violence. Many of the gaps were related to community. Participants acknowledged that current intervention and prevention efforts largely rest with the legal system. While the legal system is effective for some populations, it has largely been ineffective with communities of color, especially the Black community. Participants perceived an urgency in understanding the reasons for higher rates of IPV in the Black community and exploring effective community prevention and intervention opportunities. Below is an overview of the community-level gaps identified by participants.

Understandings of IPV at the Community Level

Some participants were interested in understanding IPV at the community level by understanding the root causes of IPV and firearms in the Black community. They would like to see more research on the social determinants of health, which are the conditions in which people are born, work, live, and play, as well as understand why people feel they need firearms in the first place.

Interest in the social determinants of health is illustrated in the following quote from Participant 2:

> *And then I am a policy person, so that's where my head naturally goes, but I think, like I've said a couple of times, without addressing the social determinants of health you can only get so far on policy.*

Participant 6 described the importance of learning about the context of people's decisions around IPV and firearms:

> *There are other ways in which we can support people and we can hold people in their humanity of saying, "Help us understand what the context of your decisions are, your lived experience, and why it is that you've harmed people so that we can then develop more meaningful strategies and interventions to more permanently intervene in your violence." Because if we don't, because right now what we ask is, we say, "If it's so bad, why doesn't she leave?" Well, she doesn't leave because he's going to kill her, and it's not a solution. Stalk her and then ultimately end up killing her because she's left, and stalking is also an indication of lethal violence using a firearm. If he does leave her alone, he's just going to go find another, and another, and another, and another. We have to permanently intervene in his violence. We cannot continue to place the burden of ending the violence on victims of domestic violence.*

Experiences of the Black Community or Black Women

Related to the systemic factors impacting IPV is the need to highlight the unique experience of the Black community, and specifically Black female victims and survivors of IPV. Much of what we know about IPV in scholarly literature is based on the experiences of White women. Participants in our study would like to see an increase in research depicting the lived experiences of Black women. Participant 7 spoke to this:

> *Being able to particularly understand the way that Black women experience firearms and intimate partner violence, not just in terms of shootings but in terms of the presence [of firearms] is an underserved area. To what degree is there firearms present in homes where intimate partner violence is taking place?*

Similarly, Participant 4 elaborated on the need to understand the lived experiences of Black women:

> *I think we need to figure out to a better degree when and why and why not for Black women and calling law enforcement, and we need to figure out where they are going because it is not like Black women aren't successfully coming out of violent relationships. It happens. It happens all the time. There's a lot more intimate partner violence than there is intimate partner violence homicide. What can we learn from the women who have left and are no longer in danger? How can we kind of operationalize that on a larger scale?*

Participant 10 emphasized the fact that the Black community is not a monolith and that there are many intersecting identities within the Black community that need to be explored if we are really to understand the issues. She highlighted the need to understand young people's perceptions of IPV and guns:

> *I think looking, again, since the Black community is a diverse community, really understanding what this looks like across different areas, I think that's what we saw in our work when we saw maybe more middle class professional communities, how they thought about it was different than maybe some of our segments of the community that either were younger, right, young people, or were from a lower economic status. I think that's a part of it, how our young people think about it, very much a part of it, right? Because music talks about guns a lot. And so that was another area, again, if we'd had more time, we would've invested in to better understanding how our young people think about it, because they're exposed to it more in social media, in music, in the shows they're watching, things like that. So almost really looking at what I think is a desensitization to it and really understanding what that means.*

Diversity and Research

Some participants felt to adequately capture the lived experiences of the Black community, there is a need for stronger partnerships with the Black community as well as a need for more Black researchers. They spoke to the importance of research being led by communities of color, Black researchers, or at the very least, having diverse research teams. Participant 4 spoke to this point when describing the need to partner with the community:

> *I think we really need to, and as a White researcher, I'm including myself, I think we really need to listen and talk to and converse with and figure things out with the Black community, try to understand what's going on for this intimate partner violence and gun work, trying to figure out why doesn't this look like it's working for the Black community? Investigate that, but also talk to people. Have a community advisory board that is filled with people who are in the community you want to study and work with them to develop the research questions and everything else that goes along with doing research.*

The same participant described the importance of having Black researchers engaged in this work:

> *It is incredibly important to not make assumptions based on your own experiences when you're not part of the community you're talking about, because experiences may be incredibly different for a whole host of reasons. We need more Black researchers in this field, and I think the Black and Brown Gun-Violence Research Collective is really doing some great things and making strides and getting more people into that space. I think that the people who are doing the research should look like the community they're researching. And I don't mean by that that White researchers can't study Black communities or Hispanic communities or anything like that, but I'm saying that an entirely White research team is not a great idea if you're not studying a White population. There has to be that greater level of understanding and belonging to a community for so many reasons, including gaining the community's trust and doing good research.*

Participant 1 shared similar thoughts and expanded on selecting and funding scholars from institutions with varied ranks:

> *I think that we do need to create opportunities for more diverse researchers, for more diverse researchers to be on teams. Outside of just being a contractor or research assistant but bringing on individuals that are going to be credible with these communities, but that also understand dynamics of what's going on in these communities. And I'm going to say this because we say we need more diverse scholars into the field, but the truth of the matter is that a lot of the time, the funding is not there for us because we don't have that big name. And so, you have to team up with the White prominent scholar that has the big name because they're the ones that are going to bring the credibility to it. We want diversity in research, and you get this person from a smaller university that they're working with the Native American communities and they're from a smaller university. And the smaller the university is, it's like you literally have to do everything yourself. And they were like, "Well, this is not that good." And I'm like, but look at the research question. Look at these resources. You can't compare them with the submission from [a well-resourced university] that looked like if it was professionally made with professional figures and stuff. It's like, there's no competition here. They have a grant writer. This person did this while they were teaching their five classes. And they're working actually out in this case. I was like, they're working out with the tribal community. Do you know how long it takes to drive from here to the tribal community in rural Oklahoma? You can't compare.*

Participant 14 shared that uplifting the voices of marginalized scholars in a variety of settings at the federal and state levels demonstrates and emphasizes a commitment to equity in research. This means having qualified individuals from different backgrounds at the table sharing their perspective and expertise to strengthen conversations and our ability to solve complex problems:

> *Our research, our voices are not being amplified. How many of us are actually called in for congressional testimonies? And so that's a whole other piece. Whenever I've seen congressional testimony about the gun violence in the Black community, I see a bunch of White experts. I rarely see Black people at the table. If I go back and look at VAWA, not only was it not created for us or by us, but when I looked at pictures from the White House lawn of the sea of people, I saw maybe 1% of the Black people there. Yet we reflect three times that as it relates to IPV homicides. So why were there not more Black people? We are there. We are doing the research, and the White people are saying, Hey, you want to learn about the Black community go to so-and-so, but when they get access to those rooms, they're not coming back to the people who are the source of the research that you're citing and the source of the people who are doing the training. So, you're sending your people for me to train you, and you recognize that I am the expert, but when you had access to that White House lawn, you did not make sure my name was in that part as well.*

Community-Level Intervention

In recognizing the need to understand the unique experiences of the Black community, specifically Black women, many participants pointed to the need for community-level interventions. Participants felt that while policies may be effective for some segments of the population, they were largely ineffective for others; specifically, in the Black community, where there is a historical and present-day context of police brutality within the community, which has resulted in mistrust between the community and law enforcement. Reducing IPV and firearm violence in the Black community may be more effective with community-level interventions. This was illustrated in a quote from Participant 4:

> *And so I am very interested in what community level interventions may work in these cases may be acceptable and appropriate in these cases that either don't make it to the legal system or the legal system doesn't work... we need as many different options as we can muster because not everything is going to work for everyone and we want to have a menu of options that different people will find appropriate, will find accessible, will find acceptable.*
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> .

Participant 6 described their experience with practitioners who have sought community support in addressing IPV and firearms:

> *One of the things that I do, and one of the things I have started to see other practitioners do is really rely more on community-based supports and resources in that regard. Are there trusted members of people within the family that can have conversations with him about his use of violence? Is it possible that there are people in the family, in the community, friends that can say, "You know what, we don't condone the violence. We're going to explicitly name what it is about your behavior that we don't like, and the perpetrator. And you know what? She's not going to leave the house. You are going to leave the house."*

Intersection of IPV, Guns, and Community Violence

Stemming from the increased desire to see more community-based interventions is the need to address the intersection of IPV, guns, and community violence. Many participants felt that connecting IPV to the larger work on gun and community violence would be an effective way to address IPV and firearms in the Black community. This was illustrated by Participant 10:

> *I think there's been a lot more work done around gun violence as it relates to the community, and less about how it relates to domestic violence specifically. I think that's an area where one, we need to build more understanding. I think some of the work that we've done has shed a light certainly on this. I think if you look at the DVFRT (Domestic Violence Fatality Review Taskforce) work, that too has provided some context. But I think really teasing it out further would be helpful.*

Participant 3 also spoke to the need to gain more insight into the intersection of IPV, firearms, and community violence:

> *I think this is probably the most recent innovation or change of direction of some of the IPV work that we have been supporting or have been in proximity to, and that's really that intersection between community violence, domestic violence, and guns. I think that there is still a lot we don't know about that. And the Department of Justice similarly has acknowledged that that's an area of need to understand. I think they just awarded some grants around that intersection a year and a half or two years ago. But to the best of our understanding, that was really among some of the first research that was being done, and particularly in this area, about that.*

While participants recognized the need to address this three-way intersection, many of them spoke to why this may be difficult for community violence interventionists to incorporate into their current work. CVIs largely focus on decreasing gun violence among Black men in the Black community. Often, intimate partner violence is not considered a part of this work. Yet, our participants believed that much of the gun violence in the Black community may stem from IPV or conflict about someone dating someone else's ex-partner.

Participant 4 described the work of CVIs and the possibility of this framework extending to IPV:

> *One of the interventions for homicide and gun violence at the community level are the violence interrupter type interventions where the violence interrupter is somebody from the community who's trusted, who's been there and is essentially credible to the people who might commit violence. And I wonder if there is that kind of intervention for intimate partner violence. Can you use a violence interrupter in that way? Have people used a violence interrupter in that way? It's entirely possible they have, and I don't know about it because that's not my area of research.*

Participant 7 described how current CVI work ignores IPV:

> *When we talk about the people at high risk and the cost of community violence, we talk as if it's specifically and only affecting Black men. And I think we really allied the intimate partner, the overlap between intimate partner violence and community gun violence in a way that really erases the presence of Black women as part of those dynamics and part of those high-risk networks, let alone the workforce issues. So that's something that I am observing that I think is problematic.*

Participant 3 echoed these sentiments:

> *Yeah, I think one of the big issues that we see in the firearm space writ large is kind of the siloed nature between those working on different types of gun violence and then within that sector, like researchers being siloed from the practitioners being siloed from the advocates and the sort. So, in recent years we have seen a dramatic increase in attention towards community violence intervention work. There's been a surge of resources towards the deployment of direct service activity. The research of those programs and TA for those programs. Where I think there could be more done is infusing some of the domestic violence research as we've been talking about into this growing CVI ecosystem that is now developing. Right now, again, I think has been largely siloed and has not been centered in the CVI action plan work. That's one area where there's an opportunity to try and improve that engagement between the DV guns work with that focused on Black and Brown communities, just knowing that most of the CVI work that's happening, community violence intervention work is targeted towards very specific Black and Brown communities. That's where I would certainly start.*

Participant 5 described how IPV is purposely excluded in the CVI space:

> *As it relates to Little P policy or practice, it's interesting because in the community violence space, more specifically in the community violence intervention and prevention space, so I'm talking about violence interventionists, there is quite a lot of hesitancy to engage in disputes or conflicts that stem from domestic or intimate partner relationships. There are programs that exclude participation if the violence was inflicted by a domestic or intimate partner. In conversations with violence interventionists about which types of disputes or conflicts are hardest to intervene on, intimate partner and domestic violence conflicts come up. And so there needs to be just real conversation about who's out there, what exists, how do we feel about this, how do we want to tackle it. But because those conversations aren't yet happening, I think it's difficult to talk about what strategies they need to be employing because there's a lot to uncover there.*

The same participant described misogynoir, which is violence or hatred towards Black women:

> *I think you also have, in the Black communities, misogynoir. But you have reluctance to really talk about and flesh out gender-based violence in Black and Brown communities. The acceptance of violence against women, particularly in Black and Brown communities, has been, from my vantage point, less explored, less addressed, less rooted out in we have honest conversations about gender-based violence, about misogyny among Black and Brown communities. And that absolutely carries over into violence interventionists who are Black and Brown and raised in the same communities, and living in the same culture, same society as everyone else who's Black and Brown.*

Participant 5 described the disconnect between CVIs, which rely heavily on community intervention, and IPV, which relies heavily on the legal system:

> *Yeah, I think you have a number of things happening at one time. One being that much of what we as researchers know as it relates to addressing intimate partner violence relies on law enforcement. It relies on policy, like Big P policy, the firearm prohibitions that I mentioned. It relies on law enforcement engagement. We know that in Black and Brown communities and communities of color, that willingness to engage with law enforcement is complicated and tenuous at best. That has left communities and research and practitioners with limited knowledge about what strategies are available. So then that carries on to the violence interventionist space. When they're looking for how to engage when it comes to domestic violence situations, if all that we're given based on the research, based on what national organizations may talk about related to resolving domestic violence issues, if it all leads back to police or leads back to enforcement of law, or either enforcing laws or enhancing laws or adding new laws, there's resistance there and concern about what that means for families.*

Participant 4 described the lack of interventions that consider the three-way intersection as a missed opportunity:

> *Number one, I think it's a hugely missed opportunity in the study of community violence. If we're talking about preventing community violence, I think it's a hugely underexplored area and missed opportunity to not really dig into gender-based violence and the overlap between community violence and gender-based violence. You hear a lot about conflict stemming from relationships, from a girlfriend or someone that somebody is interested in, or a wife or something. So, to talk about community violence as if intimate partner violence is in its own vacuum is the missed opportunity that I'm talking about. We, the research community, the practice community, has not done enough to date to really talk about those things at the same time, and talk about how one influences the other. Because the structural drivers of we're talking about community violence or intimate partner violence, the structural drivers are the same. And there's a lot of overlap in the social determinants of those two types of violence, so to talk about them separately has hurt us in terms of understanding what could work effectively in our communities.*

Participant 12 talked about understanding the ways in which intimate partner violence is connected to gun violence. In this example, a district attorney's office discussed how firearm-related domestic violence is uncovered when individuals have gun charges brought against them.

> *It's interesting that you're asking me this now because my answer might be different than it would've been just a few weeks ago, because while I always knew that it's an issue and it's probably not reported as often as we think it's happening just because out of fear and concern about relaying that information, but I was just in a meeting with the district attorney's office and they were saying how they have more domestic violence showing up in their office that starts out by a gun case that they then realize there's a domestic violence angle to this. It's getting to their domestic violence unit not because the survivor reported violence and being threatened with a gun or having a gun used against them, but because the offender gets picked up on gun charges that could be or could not be related.*

Innovation in the Field

Domestic Violence Fatality Review Boards

Participants interviewed for this project emphasized the importance of Domestic Violence Fatality Review Boards (DVFRBs). DVFRBs include members with different experiences and expertise in domestic violence who review DV cases and offer insights into practical solutions for addressing DV. Participant 10 said the review board conducts community-engaged outreach to educate community members on firearms in the home and offers safety planning measures to reduce the risk of harm or injury:

> *We started to do domestic violence fatality education. Instead of doing the regular sort of DV education, we really locked in and focused on domestic violence fatality risk factors. [DV education] includes a conversation around firearms where we are actually talking with people about this. We are giving them scenarios to be able to think through what happens if you are aware a firearm is in the home? What do you do in those situations? What happens if you don't think one is in the home? Are there things you should do to be aware? What are the conversations that we have about firearms in our community?*

Participant 11 added to this the usefulness of including community-based organizations in DV Fatality Review Teams to mobilize resources to reduce the possibility of injury and harm to those who might be at risk:

> *The more contacts you have, the more likely it is that you will reduce your possibility of homicide or injury or harm. But we also know that systems are not built to be welcoming to Black women. They'll go to a Fatality Review Team and each discipline would be like, "Well, she didn't contact us. There's nothing we could have done." And so, what that project does is, instead of saying, "We're done and our hands are clean," why couldn't she out resource your system on what you had to offer? And that includes shelters and advocacy resources as well. We hired a fantastic specialist. We're coming up with a database to show who has Fatality Review Teams and who doesn't, trying to work with them, having peer-to-peer mentoring. And also, coming up with a model statute to make sure that culturally specific community-based organizations are included in the makeup of Fatality Review Teams.*

Concerns in the Field

Racial Disparities in Systems

Participants with experience in the field discussed racial disparities in the criminal legal systems. Participant 5 highlighted the need for research to include the experiences of marginalized women in research to avoid that narrow view in interventions that may be effective for some and ineffective for Black women:

> *II'll speak to gaps that exist in the research. We do not have enough research on the experiences of women of color, their experiences with intimate partner violence, the histories of intimate partner violence, their experiences with what they want or need to help address gender-based violence. There's a great gap in that understanding. So much of the domestic violence research that has been done, and that has been used to inform policy, was with White victims of intimate partner violence. Again, because of this very distinct difference between how Black and Brown people experience the criminal legal system and experience policing versus how White women especially experience the criminal legal system or policing, there is a real need for there to be research that is race-specific that looks at what response should look like in Black and Brown communities.*

Secure Storage Practices

Participants discussed attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs around firearm ownership and storage practices. Interviewees focused on responsible firearm ownership when firearms are not in use. One participant talked about their partner's plan to store a loaded firearm in an easily accessible location. Participant 6 was concerned about her partner's plan to have a firearm not securely stored, which might place her autistic child at risk for unintentional injury and death:

> *I've had conversations with my partner. We don't have guns in this house, but he wanted to have a gun in this house. And he was like, "If I'm going to have a gun in this house, it's going to be loaded and in the nightstand." And I was like, "Oh no, you ain't. We have an autistic child. Oh, no, you're not."*

While easy access to firearms may provide gun owners with a sense of safety in the face of danger, Participant 12 was concerned that storing a firearm loaded in a dresser or nightstand might not only place children at risk for injury and death, but during a home invasion, intruders could access firearms belonging to gun owners, which may lead to unforeseen consequences:

> *When you hear about survivors, whether it's a gun or other weapon they have in place, and then you know that they have children in the house too, it just makes you concerned. I understand why it's under your pillow, or in the dresser, and nightstand drawer and that if you lock it up in a box, how helpful is that in an incident? But this is also where we get kids who end up using guns and getting hurt by guns because they're not stored properly. I think storage is a huge issue with regards to trying to maintain safety for yourself and your kid and then you're putting both of yourselves in a situation because it could also be the perpetrator who didn't have a weapon on them, but in an attempt to protect yourself, you have a weapon somewhere for them to easily obtain and then utilize against you and your kids. That's a perspective I always think about that makes me worried. I understand why you're doing it and I'm sure I probably would do the same if somebody's going to come after me, but that puts you in a worse situation, especially when there's kids in the home.*

While safe and secure storage mechanisms can be put in place to create additional steps to access firearms in hot-button moments filled with irrational thoughts, Participant 15 explained that a firearm in the house can be used by abusers as a tool to exert power and control over survivors. Abusers can use the firearms in nonlethal ways to threaten, coerce, and nonfatally harm survivors.

> *Well, I think [safe storage is] going to be helpful. [It] would reduce accidental shootings. In an IPV context, I'm not sure how much difference safe storage would make. Presumably somebody could emotionally abuse their partner whether or not a gun is safely stored. It might reduce some of the shootings in the heat of the moment if it's harder to access a gun, but it feels like just having the gun in the house is a key way of controlling an intimate partner. And if it's safely stored, that's great. I don't know if that changes the likelihood of using it for control purposes.*

Decentering a Systems Response

Participants called for alternative intervention approaches that move away from carceral approaches that encourage Black women to utilize systems perceived to harm Black women. Participant 6 said:

> *We've criminalized the shit out of domestic violence. And what I mean by that is the majority of survivors are encouraged to engage with criminal and civil legal systems. And the experience of people of color engaging with criminal, civil legal systems has not been a positive experience. So, if the only resource as a Black woman that I have is to go to a system that harms me, historically has harmed me. I want the violence to stop partner to state violence and mass incarceration. Right? And also knowing that the criminal and civil justice system's purpose is not the prevention of crime. It's not what it does. The criminal justice system's purpose is what law was broken, who did it, and what's the punishment? The victim. What are her needs? What does she need to be safe? What does the person who's causing violence need to stop? The solution is confinement and separation only.*

Participant 13, a community-based leader, shared that they give survivors the autonomy to choose to engage with the criminal legal system while also educating them on the benefits and risks of Black women interacting with a system so that they can make informed decisions:

> *I think that the challenge comes around looking at what safety looks like for the individual in front of you. In the hospital, we get many times they should just leave. Why aren't police involved and not seeing that law enforcement and the criminal justice system are not always solutions for individuals who are sometimes even at the highest risk. I don't want to generalize, but I can say many times there are African American women who are presenting to the hospital. So, these are individuals who believe they're not safe in the neighborhood, and they're not safe with their partner. A lot of times, the trauma that someone has experienced because they have been part of the criminal justice system, many of the survivors that I work with, they see that as being a link to the reason that their partner is perpetrating violence against them, does carry guns and have guns, and they don't feel safe navigating traditional systems. So, I think one of the things that we've been trying to do includes: Can we do some harm reduction when it comes to guns and guns in the home with individuals? Does safety planning look different? Does the intervention look different? So those have been some of the challenges that we've been talking about. We work to the extent of law enforcement, that somebody wants law enforcement to be involved. We provide a lot of education around what involving law enforcement may look like. But we are also very transparent with survivors that there are a lot of things that the survivor might not be able to control once law enforcement is involved.*

There is interest in moving away from one-size-fits-all policies in addition to law enforcement remedies to address domestic violence cases. This is in response to the perceptions Black and Brown communities have of law enforcement and mainstream policies. Violence interventionists are left with trying to emphasize an alternative approach while also working in the midst of prevailing notions of domestic violence as a crime, utilizing arrest, prosecution, and incarceration as essential elements of justice. Participant 5 explained:

> *And then you have, as I was mentioning, police, and I think in the domestic violence world, there is... in general, a full universe of folks who think about domestic violence and its prevention, there is a gradually growing appreciation for, we can't only offer law enforcement or police response to domestic violence situations, but it's even more understood in, colloquially. I'll just say Black and Brown communities, because of the harm that police bring to communities historically and presently, the fear that comes from engaging police in violence. Participant 5*

Educating Systems

There is a concern that judges are not equipped to educate the public about protective orders and compliance measures, which has implications for Black and Brown men who could be misinformed about prohibition measures and later become subject to a criminal offense. Participants 6 and 11 said:

> *If you're going to order surrender, what does the person do to comply? And judges will say, "Well, I don't know." Well, if you are the judge and it's your court order, and you don't know how it is to be complied with, how is somebody else? Now we have men and women who are prohibited under potentially state and federal law, not understanding their rights and leaving a courtroom. And then let's be honest, it is going to be Black and Brown men who then get swooped up when the Feds decide, "Oh, we might want to look into something." And now we've got someone who is now potentially facing a felony in prison time because they didn't comply with the law they weren't told how to comply with. Now who is he angry with? He's angry at that victim. It's dangerous for her. It's the same with DV protection. They're the same, neither one. (Participant 6)*

> *One of the things that I just found that was mind-boggling to me was in [X county] judges didn't even know that they could take guns on a protection order. And I was like, "I'm sorry, what?" And I was like, "Yeah." And then it was a matter of, they were doing a lot of third-party transfers. And I said, "Well, okay, if you give it to Uncle Bob, how do we know that Uncle Bob isn't prohibited from possessing firearms? And does Uncle Bob know his liability in the event that he should give his..." I don't even know if Uncle Bob is real. That could be a dog, right? I need to get somebody with a pulse to say that they are Uncle Bob and they are taking possession of these firearms. What I found really, really helpful, in our coordinated community response to address this protocol, I brought in the defense bar. And people were like, "We don't want to work with them." And I said, "Wait, wait. Now, wait a minute. The defense bar is the enemy until we need them to represent battered women charged with crimes." And they were so helpful. I give you the example of Bob, only because when we were trying to figure out how to, one, find out if this is a human, find out if this person is not prohibited, what could we do? I was saying, "Bring Uncle Bob into court, have the litany read, figure out the transfer process on the record." And what I think opened everyone's eyes was the defense bar said, "We don't want bad people to have firearms either." Right? That's not what we're here for. We want to make sure that jurisprudence is followed and we want to make sure that people have due process, but we don't think that bad people should have guns. I'd like for prosecutors to take it seriously, judges to take it seriously. I was called in to*

> *help get a warrant on a protection order violation. And the judge was angry, and he was like, "This is just a waste of my time. Why don't you guys just go do more serious stuff like homicides?" And we're like, "This is homicide prevention. Do we have to wait until somebody dies?" (Participant 11)*

Another participant talked about implementation challenges with enforcing policies, specifically among judges and law enforcement. Participant 12 shared:

> *We have a lot of things that have been put in place even recently over the years. However, I don't think they're implemented as they're intended so they're not being as effective as they could be. I don't know if it's education with some judges or courts who may not be aware of the avenues that are available to them to try to enforce when guns are supposed to be removed or when orders of protection are issued. I think there's a lot of education out there like are you aware that you can order the police to go seize weapons and things like that, because it hadn't always been there, we have added it, is anybody utilizing it.*

While domestic violence education among judges is gaining some traction, there is a need for targeted initiatives to educate judges on domestic violence and firearm relinquishment policies. Domestic violence education is essential for judges to make informed judicial decisions on domestic violence cases, particularly for victims who rely on the system for protection and survival. Participant 3 said:

> *Most places don't have such a targeted unit. But where we have seen others try to educate judges, there's been some efforts in Pennsylvania around that to try and specifically educate judges so as to try and address the gap by having the judge call the question of like, "Hey, what are we doing about these firearms?" For example. That has been, I think, effective. But I go back to that Washington King County example as the best example thus far.*

Participant 15 said:

> *There's a whole body of work about how people can more safely store guns around the house. There's a fair amount of information that's out there about how abusers use guns for controlling their intimate partners, not just when there's a moment of violence, but just having a gun in the house, of course, can be quite an object of control and threats to intimate partners. So I think more communication around how that can play out and more education of people to understand what does intimate partner violence look like if it's not violent, but if it's just manipulation, if it's just control, if it's just emotional abuse, that kind of understanding, more and more people who understand that, the more people understand when it's happening to them, but there's many people who may be experiencing it who don't necessarily identify it as abuse.*

Cultural Specificity

Participants discussed the cultural considerations that should be made when working with domestic violence survivors from immigrant and tribal communities. Interventions must focus on how to address specific language barriers for immigrant women, and community-based efforts must be aware of whom to contact to gain entry into tribal communities. Participant 9 explained:

> *And where it's like if they have language barriers, or they may not understand the particular word that we are presenting them. We want to make sure that we communicate in a culturally appropriate, or linguistically appropriate manner. But not that they would need something special except what the immigration specific things I would say that we need to consider. Because I think what they need would be in terms of safety. For example, I'm saying safe storage, so this applies to immigrant and nonimmigrant. There are things universally, but there are things that we need to account for that are unique to immigrant women and understanding those added layers, and how do we address those barriers and added safety. Like we talked about considering the context, we have this universally standard intervention, but then how do we make it understand the dynamics also in different populations? For example, you work with tribal and native women, the context is different because you cannot just go and do an intervention. You have to engage the tribal leaders, you have to get all the approvals, they own the data. There are challenges of each unique population.*

Another participant focused on centering the cultural experience as part of interventions. Participant 10 shared that in some instances, marginalized communities may not think about the ways in which firearms are utilized in abusive relationships. Therefore, interventions focused on creating spaces to talk about firearm-related domestic violence can be helpful in supporting marginalized individuals with effective programs and resources tailored to their lived experiences.

> *I think part of it is really having these kinds of culturally centered conversations. It can't be a generic talk, but always talk to people very much from a cultural paradigm and really have them think through how they're thinking about firearms and how they are utilized and providing them with education because they don't know necessarily. We're assuming they do, they don't. So, creating the space to even have the conversation, we began to see a reduction in our own county. And I think based on the research that we did, I think if we were to kind of take some of that intervention and plug it into some other spaces, there could be some potential disruption.*

Participant 11 similarly shared:

> *Our role in that project is to do that contextualization for them. Right? We can't validate the tool for them. That's not our role. But our role is like, "Okay, if you choose this tool, how is it applied when you use it for the Black community and the Latina community?" We do a host of listening sessions and get our finger on the pulse of the culturally specific communities, so that we can use that information when we are trying to help them tailor this tool to the needs of their community.*

Risk Assessments

Participant 1 discussed the need to provide individuals with education on the dynamics of risk factors for domestic violence. In their view, having this conversation can decrease the risk of violence escalating and potentially turning lethal.

> *I think that looking at risk assessments is important to identify individuals who are at risk and getting individuals the help that they need when they're at risk for their intimate partner violence to escalate. We know also that education and safety planning, even before incidents occur, can offer some promising results in avoiding domestic violence from escalating or occurring in the first place. But in terms of the escalation, risk assessments, I would say is something very important to look at, as well as using those risk assessments to provide individuals with assistance in getting out of risky types of relationship that can escalate into a homicide.*

Participant 10 talked about having direct and transparent conversations with domestic violence victim-survivors in an abusive relationship regarding firearms as a risk factor for domestic violence. More specifically, this participant said Black individuals should reflect on how firearms can potentially harm household members:

> *We had Black males, Black females of varying ages, people in the community, people who've worked in the community. And one of the things that we thought was really interesting was the fact that in a lot of those focus groups, they did not initially identify guns or firearms as a risk factor, which was really interesting to us. So, I found that to be really interesting how many of our participants did not flag it for whatever reason, but once we flagged it, then we began to talk about it. I think part of the challenge is that for some people, there's a sense of normalcy around it, whether it's to use it as protection to just have so you can feel a little bit more secure, so you know you're okay regardless of what you walk into. And I think we have to think about how we're talking about it with them, because otherwise they may not view it as a red flag until we can talk about how it's being utilized in the community.*

Along with this, Participant 11 discussed the importance of contextualizing risk assessments to capture the reality of the experiences of those with marginalized identities:

> *And even Jackie Campbell's [danger assessment] tool, we know is not culturally specific. Right? And so, one of my challenges, and I'll just use Jackie Campbell's for the purpose of discussion, is that the research that came out around unemployment being a risk factor was not contextualized. Right? And so, it can be a risk factor, but if you extrapolate that and look at the stats about how many Black men are unemployed or underemployed, then everybody's going to be at risk. Right?*

Participant 13 talked about interventions dedicated to conducting risk assessments with clients to provide resources and safety planning measures:

A standard here for our agency and with many of the agencies that we work with here is a danger assessment. We do a brief danger assessment when we meet with somebody, usually bedside, because our agency, most of the time when we're connecting with somebody, we're connecting to them through the hospital. We talk about guns as part of safety planning, even from the very beginning. We do a longer lethality assessment if guns are present or there's a high score on the brief danger assessment to talk about what is research supported, which is if guns are present, there is a higher chance of homicide. We're constantly providing education and safety planning around that when guns are present.

Conclusion

This report illustrates the need for continued investment in this work at the federal, state, and local levels to develop research and specific approaches for the prevention of firearm-related IPV death and injury within the Black community. As Black women are disproportionately harmed by firearm-related IPV, it is important to engage the Black community in recognizing the risk factors of intimate partner homicide involving a firearm while also understanding the cultural context of IPV in the Black community to effectively respond to the needs of the community. The urgency around firearm-related IPV must involve decentering carceral approaches to addressing intimate partner violence in the Black community and instead prioritizing ones that leverage community violence intervention programs that provide community engagement strategies to better engage with and address intimate partner violence in the Black community.

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