

# GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE POLICY PAPER



# WHO WE ARE

## THE COMMUNITY JUSTICE ACTION FUND IS COMMITTED TO:

CHANGING THE CONVERSATION AROUND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE TO REFRAME IT AS A PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE.

ADVANCING SOLUTIONS THAT GO BEYOND HARDWARE AND POLICING TO FOCUS ON THE CYCLE OF GENDER VIOLENCE AS A CRITICAL COMPONENT OF GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION.

INVESTING IN SURVIVORS OF COLOR AND THEIR COMMUNITIES AS EXPERTS.

Community Justice recognizes a critical policy and organizing gap across the gun violence prevention movement that fails to address the urgent need to advance solutions that focus on community-led survivor support before gun violence occurs. Our work is led by survivors, advocates, and those directly impacted by gun violence.



**THE ISSUES:** Time and time again, news headlines tell stories of gun violence tied to a history of gender-based violence. In many instances, gender-based violence is an act of gun violence, and in many more, it is the warning sign before the gun. Gender-based violence impacts more than just the survivor, it can have a lasting impact on families and entire communities—including increasing the risks of later acts of gun violence.

**GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AGAINST PEOPLE OF COLOR IS OFTEN A PATHWAY TO GUN VIOLENCE, AND THE GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION MOVEMENT MUST ADVOCATE FOR SOLUTIONS THAT INVEST IN SURVIVORS.**

We cannot end gender-based gun violence if our policy solutions do not see survivor care as a critical part of gun violence prevention. Leaders must understand the root causes of gender-based gun violence, treat it as a public health issue, and invest in community solutions that empower and support survivors and their communities before gun violence occurs.

# WHAT IS GENDER BASED VIOLENCE?

When referring to gender-based violence, we are referring to harm, including physical, verbal, sexual, and emotional abuse directed towards a person because of their gender, gender identity, gender expression, or gender performance.

## GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE INCLUDES A WIDE RANGE OF HARMFUL BEHAVIOR, SOME EXAMPLES INCLUDE:

**INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE—** Violence (including sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking), insults, or threats by an intimate partner such as a spouse, a boyfriend, girlfriend, partner, or any person that the survivor has dated.

**SEXUAL VIOLENCE—** Unwanted, physical sexual acts, including unwanted touching or kissing of the intimate nature, including rape.

**FAMILY VIOLENCE—** Violence or harmful acts by a domestic partner (spouse, cohabitating partner) or family member, including children.

**IDENTITY-BASED GENDER VIOLENCE—** Violence directed towards a person because of their real or perceived gender-identity or sexual orientation.

While many people are impacted by gender-based violence every year, people of color and some members of the LGBTQ+ community are disproportionately victimized. According to the CDC's National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, the lifetime prevalence of intimate partner violence is **57%** among multi-racial women, **48%** among Indigenous (American Indian and Alaska Native) women, **45%** among Black women, **34%** among Latina women, and **18%** among Asian-Pacific Islander women.<sup>1</sup> People living with disabilities have double the lifetime risk of intimate partner violence.<sup>2</sup> Among the LGBTQ+ community, **61%** of bisexual women, **37%** of bisexual men, **44%** of lesbians, and **26%** of gay men report experiencing intimate partner violence in their lifetime.<sup>3</sup> According to data from the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey, **54%** of transgender people experienced some form of intimate partner violence in their lifetime.<sup>4</sup> While this data is not separated by race, we know that the Black and Latinx transgender women are particularly at risk of violence.



# A CLOSER LOOK AT INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

**A RECENT STUDY FOUND THAT DURING THE UNCERTAINTY OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, PEOPLE WHO LOST INCOME AND UNDERWENT FINANCIAL AND PERSONAL CHALLENGES WERE AT AN INCREASED LIKELIHOOD OF EXPERIENCING INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE.<sup>5</sup>**

The risks are further exacerbated by guns. The presence of a gun during a domestic violence dispute makes it five times more likely that a woman will be killed by her abuser.<sup>6</sup> Almost one million women alive today report having been shot or shot at by an abusive intimate partner. According to FBI data, more than **600** women are shot and killed by an intimate partner every year—one every **14 HOURS**.<sup>7</sup> Black women are killed by an intimate partner at twice the rate of white women,<sup>8</sup> and homicide by an intimate partner is the second most common cause of death for Black women and girls between the ages of **15** and **25**.<sup>9</sup>

Much of the conversation around preventing intimate partner violence related to gun violence has naturally focused on access to firearms. Research shows that state firearm restriction laws significantly reduce intimate partner homicides among victims.<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, emerging research suggests that restrictions are not as effective in reducing homicides among Black victims of intimate partner related gun violence.<sup>11</sup> While keeping firearms out of the hands of individuals that have caused harm is an important aspect of the struggle to end intimate partner violence, addressing the root causes of that violence and supporting survivors is also essential.



# LOOKING BEYOND POLICING



According to a survey by the National Domestic Violence Hotline, **59%** of survivors reported being afraid the police would not believe them or protect them, and **70%** were afraid that involving police would make things worse, endangering them or their dependents.<sup>12</sup> Myths of what gender-based violence and intimate partner violence “look like” can also deter survivors from coming forward.

Black and Indigenous women, and other women of color are often victim-blamed because their experience does not fit into the white-centric framework of who a survivor is, and are therefore often not seen as the “perfect victim.”<sup>13</sup> This is even more so for transgender women and gender non-conforming people of color who seek support services.<sup>14</sup> National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (NCAVP)’s 2015 study reported that **12%** of the **33%** of

LGBTQ survivors who actually reported an instance of intimate partner violence to police were met with hostility or ridicule.<sup>15</sup> Since women of color and LGBTQ survivors are too often not supported or believed by institutions tasked with responding to violence, legal and criminal punishment resources are rarely effective before the pattern of violence becomes deadly.

Many survivors face added risks when considering reporting an instance of violence to police that may outweigh the benefits of coming forward. For undocumented immigrants, the risk of deportation is an added deterrent from reporting,<sup>16</sup> as is the risk of criminalization for survivors who are sex workers. Black women are particularly deterred from reporting to police because of the history of abuse Black women have faced when interacting with police. Many Black women are often criminalized for trying to survive abuse, and many survivors, such as Marissa Alexander and CeCe McDonald end up incarcerated for defending themselves from their abusers.

Studies show that between **60%** to **98%** of women who are incarcerated report experiencing at least one instance of physical or sexual abuse in their lifetime.<sup>17</sup> It is clear that reliance on the criminal punishment system cannot be the only option for survivors, and that is largely not even a possibility for many. Thus, we believe that in order to interrupt the pattern of violence, our leaders must invest in solutions that address the root causes of gender-based violence, as well as empower and support survivors before gun violence occurs. It is clear that reliance on the criminal punishment system cannot be the only option for survivors, and that is largely not even a possibility for many. Thus, we believe that in order to interrupt the pattern of violence, our leaders must invest in solutions that address the root causes of gender-based violence, as well as empower and support survivors before gun violence occurs.

# GENDER BASED VIOLENCE AS A PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE

A public health approach to gender-based violence goes beyond interpersonal mitigation, and treats it as a disease that can infect a community, and to prevent further harm, that harm must be interrupted. This approach builds on the proven capacity of communities, and prioritizes their expertise to develop and implement evidence-based prevention strategies that identify societal and environmental risk factors, and interrupt the pattern of violence before it becomes deadly. The disproportionate rate of gender-based violence victimization in communities of color, particularly Black, Latinx, and Indigenous communities, are connected to deeper root causes, including lack of viable employment, systemic disinvestment in affordable housing, and over-policing that cause a chilling effect on communities. These systemic and societal barriers often disade or prevent survivors from coming forward before gender-based violence becomes deadly.

Community-based solutions are critical to gender-based violence prevention, and can address the root causes of violence by providing education on healthy relationships to help communities see the signs of gender violence, as well create systems that protect survivors and their dependents from further harm.

## THE THREE STEP COMMUNITY JUSTICE POLICY FRAMEWORK TO ADDRESSING GENDER-BASED GUN VIOLENCE INCLUDES:



ENACTING A PUBLIC HEALTH APPROACH TO GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE



PRIORITIZING POLICY SOLUTIONS THAT GO BEYOND HARDWARE AND POLICE RESPONSE



INVESTING IN COMMUNITY SURVIVOR CARE AS GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION



# COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS TO GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

**INVESTING IN COMMUNITY-LED AND SURVIVOR-FOCUSED PROGRAMS IS CRITICAL TO ENDING GUN VIOLENCE. THESE TYPES OF SOLUTIONS INCLUDE:**

## COMPREHENSIVE SUPPORT FOR SURVIVORS

These include emergency relocation and safe housing programs, food and cash assistance, violence interruption, and emergency dependent care.

## HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP EDUCATIONAL AND ADVOCACY TRAINING PROGRAMS

These programs teach medical providers, educators, and other community leaders to know the signs of gender-based violence and learn how to interrupt it before it leads to gun violence.

## INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE TRAINING FOR VIOLENCE INTERRUPTERS

By providing community violence interrupters training on identifying the signs of intimate partner violence, organizations that are already addressing gun violence more broadly may be able to successfully interrupt intimate partner violence incidents that could lead to gun violence.

## COMPREHENSIVE HOSPITAL-BASED SURVIVOR MEDICAL CARE PROGRAMS

These programs include medical services, trauma-informed counseling, survivor advocacy, and long-term care referrals.

## LGBTQ SERVING SUPPORT PROGRAMS AND RESOURCES

Existing gender-based violence support systems should prioritize LGBTQ affirming care, particularly support for Black and Latinx transgender people.



# NEXT STEPS

The prevalence of gender-based violence as a pathway to gun violence is a clear call to action for policy makers on all levels of government. However, we must take a comprehensive approach while centering the work and experiences of survivors in local communities. While historically much of the conversation around gun violence prevention in relation to gender-based violence has been focused on reducing abusers' access to firearms, we believe that the most comprehensive way to interrupt the pattern of violence is to also invest in survivors and their communities. Another world is possible, and our communities are ready to build it.

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