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COVID Casts a Long Shadow on IPV Homicides With Firearms

by D. Kelly Weisberg

Intimate partner homicides involving firearms reached a peak during the height of the COVID lockdowns in 2021. From 2019-2021, the number of intimate partner homicides involving firearms increased by 28%. This finding about firearm-related IPV (Intimate Partner Violence) deaths mirrors the overall rise in DV-related incidents in the United States during the pandemic.¹

Evidence of the COVID-related rise in IPV-related homicides is well known. Domestic violence increased during the pandemic because of several contributing factors. Lockdowns were characterized by an increase in emotional and psychological strain, financial stress due to income loss and unemployment, the close quarters of home confinement, isolation from social support networks, and victims' reduced access to intervention services.

Not so well known, however, is the *continued* impact of COVID on the rate of IPV firearm-perpetrated homicides. A recent report from the Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence sheds light on this link based on an analysis of five years of data from the Gun Violence Archive.² The Brady Center study focused on

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Global Homicides of Women at Highest Number in Two Decades, According to UN Data

Overview and Summary

The data below are excerpted from the second joint global research brief on the gender-related killings of women and girls, "Gender-Related Killings of Women and Girls (Femicide/Feminicide)" (2023). This research brief focuses on female victims of intimate partner and family-related homicide. The analysis and the estimates are produced at a global and regional level and are based on data available for 105 countries or territories:

1. Globally, nearly 89,000 women and girls were killed intentionally in 2022, the highest yearly number recorded in the past two decades. Moreover, available data suggest that while the overall number of homicides globally has begun to fall in 2022 after a spike in 2021, the number of female homicides is not decreasing.
2. Most killings of women and girls are gender-motivated. In 2022, around 48,800 women and girls worldwide were killed by their intimate partners or other family members. This means that, on average, more than 133 women or girls were killed every day by a family member.
3. While most homicides worldwide are committed against men and boys (80% in 2022), women and girls are disproportionately affected by homicidal violence in the home: they represent approximately 53% of all victims of killings in the home and 66% of all victims of intimate partner killings.
4. Women and girls in all regions across the world are affected by this type of gender-based violence. With an estimated 20,000 victims in 2022, Africa — for the first time since 2013, when UNODC (the UN Office on Drugs and Crime) on began publishing regional estimates — has surpassed Asia as the region with the highest number of victims in absolute terms. In 2022, Africa was also the region with the highest number of victims relative to the size of its female population (2.8 victims per 100,000 women), although the estimates are subject to uncertainty due to limited data availability.
5. Between 2010 and 2022, Europe witnessed an average reduction in

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the number of female intimate partner/family-related homicides (by 21%), albeit with differences across sub-regions and with some setbacks in Western and Southern Europe, especially since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020.

6. The Americas have seen diverging sub-regional trends in the number

that the femicide risk for women and girls might be slowly decreasing, while limited available data from African countries either are not indicative of clear trends, or point toward an increase in female killings since 2021.

8. Global data availability on gender-related killings is gradually increasing. While 74 countries had at least one data point on female intimate partner/family-related homicide in

women and girls, such killings remain at unacceptable levels. They are very often the culmination of repeated episodes of gender-based violence, which means they are preventable through timely and effective interventions. Over the past decades, initiatives aimed at addressing these crimes have emerged, ranging from the criminalization of femicide/femicide as specific offenses in some countries, particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean, to the implementation of improved risk assessments and protection measures, among others. Several countries have established femicide observatories, often as a result of civil society mobilization and advocacy, and femicide observatories or “femicide watch” bodies have also been promoted by international human rights mechanisms, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Committee¹ and the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women.

Increased efforts are also needed in different areas such as primary prevention addressing social norms at the individual, community as well as institutional levels; social, health and, criminal justice responses, as well as victim support and assistance to enable an evidence-based

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Gender-related killings of women and girls are often the culmination of repeated episodes of gender-based violence. As such, they are preventable through timely and effective interventions.

of female intimate partner/family-related homicides in recent years. While Central and South America experienced a decline in yearly killings between 2017 and 2022 (by 10% and 8% respectively), Northern America witnessed a significant increase (by 29%), while the Caribbean recorded a more modest increase (by 8%).

7. Limited data availability means that the estimation of trends-over-time is not possible in Africa, Asia, and Oceania. However, available national trend data from several Asian countries suggest

the period 2009-2015, this increased to 99 countries in the period 2016-2022. The UN system has taken concrete steps to assist Member States in improving data collection and reporting, including through the introduction and support for implementation of the Statistical framework for measuring the gender-related killing of women and girls.

Preventing Gender-Related Killings

Despite efforts made by countries to prevent gender-related killings of

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comprehensive response that will help prevent and eradicate gender-related killings of women and girls.

One innovative practice with the potential to enhance necessary reforms are in-depth multi-stakeholder reviews of gender-related killings of women and girls. Several countries (including Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Portugal, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States) have established multi-sectoral committees that conduct regular in-depth reviews of

deaths or homicides related to domestic violence, often with the involvement and participation of families and social networks of victims, with the aim of improving institutional responses and preventing future killings.

Most femicide observatories focus on data collection; however, some also conduct case reviews, and the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women has recommended that the mandate of femicide watch panels or observatories on violence against women should include systematic analyses of all cases of femicide, including

court cases, with the aim of determining gaps in the response system to such violence, and of establishing risk factors to prevent such violence in the first place.

The full report, “Gender-Related Killings of Women and Girls (Femicide/Feminicide)” (2023), is available at <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/data-matters.html>.

End Note

1. CEDAW was adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly and is often described as an international bill of rights for women. See generally <https://www.un.org>. ■



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