

August has already been a deadly month in the United States. Global Rights for Women mourns the loss of even more victims of gun violence, an epidemic we know intimately because of our work to end violence against women and girls. We know that every day, nearly three women are killed by their intimate partners in the United States.¹ Globally, domestic violence kills 137 women daily. The majority of mass shootings are related to domestic violence (although the media rarely emphasizes the connection).² Men were responsible for all but a handful of at least 114 mass shootings since 1982.³ And we hear time and time again that these men had histories of domestic violence, that they belong to misogynistic social media groups, or that they espoused racist and xenophobic philosophies.⁴

Gun control, including background checks by private and unlicensed dealers and red flag laws, is critical to ending the rampage of violence in our communities. Guns make misogyny and racism alarmingly lethal; in fact, access to a gun by a woman's abuser increases her likelihood of being killed by 500%.⁵ Although some people with domestic violence convictions are prohibited from owning guns, a loophole allows abusers who weren't married to or living with their partners to keep and purchase guns. Congress's failure to reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act in 2019 leaves this loophole open.⁶

Our experience tells us that understanding and disrupting dynamics of power and control are also crucial to ending the epidemic of violence. The motivation for men to kill innocent strangers or to murder their partners stems from a similar place: the equation of masculinity and violence, a sense of entitlement to dominate, and a fear that power and control are slipping away.

It is time for a national and global reckoning of the relationship between violence and masculinity. We need to heal the cultures of patriarchy and white supremacy that inspire and enable men to take the lives of innocent people - whether they be girlfriends, wives, children, or families doing their back-to-school shopping. We need to embrace,

¹https://everytownresearch.org/reports/guns-violence-women-americas-uniquely-lethal-domestic-violence-problem/?source=etno_ETRHomepage&utm_source=et_n_&utm_medium=_o&utm_campaign=ETRHomepage&refcode=ETRHomepage

² Ibid.

³ <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/12/mass-shootings-mother-jones-full-data/>

⁴ <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2018/01/17/gun-violence-masculinity-216321>;
<https://www.cnn.com/2019/08/05/us/connor-betts-dayton-shooting-profile/index.html>;
<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/03/us/patrick-crusius-el-paso-shooter-manifesto.html>

⁵https://everytownresearch.org/reports/guns-violence-women-americas-uniquely-lethal-domestic-violence-problem/?source=etno_ETRHomepage&utm_source=et_n_&utm_medium=_o&utm_campaign=ETRHomepage&refcode=ETRHomepage

⁶ <https://lawcenter.giffords.org/gun-laws/policy-areas/who-can-have-a-gun/domestic-violence-firearms/>

teach, and embody understandings of masculinity characterized by equality, connection, cooperation, integrity and accountability to others. We need to promote policies that prioritize victim's safety, and hold perpetrators accountable - and this accountability must include a way forward, a way for men to change.

At Global Rights for Women, we apply an understanding of the dynamics of power and control to our work to reform legal systems that intervene in cases of violence against women and girls. Centering the experience of victims shifts the power dynamic, ensuring that police, judges, probation officers and other practitioners remain accountable to each other and, most importantly, to the safety of women and their children.

For example, our survivors' focus groups in Moldova revealed a common theme: time and time again, police failed to respond when women sought help, taking the side of the abuser, ignoring histories of violence, and minimizing even very severe harm. These women's experiences were the starting point for our analysis of the system, and for our ultimate recommendations, which included mandatory use of a law enforcement questionnaire to assess the risk of repeated and lethal violence in every domestic violence case. Although risk assessment tools have been proven to prevent repeated and lethal violence, they are used by only a small number of criminal justice systems around the world.

This work - the shifting of power dynamics, and the centering of women's experiences - is life-saving. We urge leaders in the United States to face the connection between violence against women and mass shootings, and to take action to ensure that this country is a place where all people enjoy the human right to live free from violence.