

Media Statement

Know the law, use the law, save a woman's or child's life this 16 Days of Activism

Saturday 25 November 2017: Three women and one child will be shot and killed today. By the end of the 16 Days of Activism for No Violence Against Women and Children, 48 women and 16 children will have been shot dead; while a further 192 women and 64 children will have been shot and injured, possibly permanently disabled.

While women and children make up just 14% and 4% of gun murder victims in South Africa respectively, guns play a significant role in violence committed against them:

- The biggest threat facing women is not a stranger armed with an illegal gun; a woman in South Africa is more likely to get shot at home by a legal gun licensed to her intimate partner.
- Gunshots have overtaken stab wounds as the primary cause of murder for children aged 15 to 17 years, though this figure starts rising from the age of 10. An analysis of the circumstances under which children between 0-12 years of age were admitted to the Red Cross Children's Hospital after being shot found that 39% were shot in cross-fire, 8.2% were shot intentionally by an adult, 5% were shot intentionally by gangsters, 2% were playing with a gun and 12% were accidental shootings.

These deaths are preventable: The removal of guns and prohibition of gun ownership following threats or acts of violence are recognised globally as important interventions that can prevent future violence.

Both South Africa's Firearms Control Act (2000) and Domestic Violence Act (1998) give the police and the courts the power to remove guns from the homes and from the hands of abusive and negligent gun owners and prohibit gun ownership by violent and reckless individuals.

However, service providers report that guns are hardly ever removed from abusers, either because:

1. Women are not aware that provisions in the Firearms Control Act or Domestic Violence Act give them the power to ask the police or the courts to remove a gun.
2. Police officers and court officials do not ask about the presence of a gun when responding to domestic violence incidents, and so rarely order its removal. This is of particular concern as gun use in domestic violence usually escalates over time; starting with threats and intimidation until shots are fired.

Gun Free South Africa is using this year's 16 Days of Activism to empower women in abusive relationships to use the law to have guns taken away from their abusers. Friends and relatives of women and children experiencing abuse can also use the law to save a life.

However, a law is only as good as its enforcement. As such, we call upon police officers and the courts to respond to calls from members of the public to remove guns from abusers and to also be proactive in asking about the presence of a gun and ensuring its removal when responding to incidents of domestic violence, even where victims do not request this.

Note:

Research in South Africa undertaken by the Medical Research Council shows that legal gun ownership significantly increases the risk of intimate femicide-suicide (the killing of a female by her intimate partner followed by the suicide of the perpetrator within a week of the homicide):

- Two-thirds (66%) of intimate femicide-suicide perpetrators in 1999 owned a legal gun (1999 is the latest year for which national data is available);
- A significant proportion of intimate partner-suicide perpetrators were employed in the police, army or private security industry, reflecting easier access to guns in these professions.

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