

Doctors Call for Disarmament of Domestic Violence Abusers

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HEADLINE: 20 Percent of Women Murdered in United States Are Shot by Intimate Partner; Physicians Call for Disarmament of Abusers, Better Screening for Victims

BODY: CHICAGO, Dec. 15 [AScribe Newswire] -- Domestic violence continues to devastate as many as 2 million lives each year and immediate steps must be taken to disarm abusers and increase screening for victims, according to a report released today by the HELP Network, a gun violence prevention organization affiliated with Children's Memorial Hospital.

The report, *Guns and Domestic Violence: A Deadly Combination*, gives new focus to the lethal role guns play in intimate partner violence. In addition to providing a comprehensive look at related statistics, research findings and policy implications, the report calls on the medical community to increase screening for abuse victims while urging policymakers to strengthen and enforce laws that separate batterers from guns.

"Health care professionals need to recognize the deadly combination of firearms and domestic violence, screen for both risks, and emphasize the increased threat to their patients when both are present in the home," said Patricia Salber, MD, MBA, co-founder of Physicians for a Violence-free Society.

Among other findings:

- ▶ Every year more than 1,200 American women are killed by their husbands or boyfriends and more than 700 of these deaths involve guns.
- ▶ The report notes that 25 percent of U.S. women report being physically or sexually abused during their lifetimes, as do 7.5 percent of men.
- ▶ A firearm is used in two-thirds of intimate partner homicides committed by spouses or ex-spouses. In up to 65 percent of cases, men who kill their partners with a firearm then kill themselves.
- ▶ Domestic violence-related crime in the United States costs an estimated \$67 billion annually.
- ▶ A gun in the home greatly increases the risk of both suicide and homicide. If there is a gun in her home, a woman is 5 times more likely to be killed by her partner.

"About 40 percent of American men own guns. When abusers own guns, women's lives are at stake," said Katherine Kaufer Christoffel, MD, founder and medical director of The HELP Network. "Progress has been made toward separating guns from batterers but significant loopholes remain that must be addressed to further protect women from potential homicide."

The HELP Network, an affiliate of Children's Memorial Hospital in Chicago, is the oldest and largest network of medical and allied professional organizations and individuals committed to reducing the number of deaths and disabilities caused by guns, emphasizing prevention and policy solutions based on scientific research.

In an effort to provide guidance to medical professionals on DV screening in the primary care setting, Physicians For a Violence-free Society has developed Abuse Assessment Response Course on CD-ROM: Systems Approach to Partner Violence Across the Life Span. It is available at http://www.pvs.org/programs_doc.shtml.

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