

Q&A: Guns and domestic abuse: Supreme Court upholds longstanding, lifesaving ban

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The U.S. Supreme Court recently decided *U.S. v. Rahimi*, ruling 8 to 1 to uphold the constitutionality of a 30-year-old federal law that prevents people with domestic violence protection orders from possessing firearms.

For decades, Jacquelyn Campbell has been a global leader in research and advocacy in the field of domestic and [intimate partner violence](#). She is best known for developing the Danger Assessment, a tool that has influenced national policy and helps abused women determine their lethality risk.

Campbell's research found that an abused woman is at a five times greater risk for homicide if the abuser has access to a gun, a finding was cited by Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor in the decision for *U.S. v. Rahimi*.

Here, Campbell talks about risk at the intersection of gun and intimate partner violence, the state of intimate partner violence in America today, and the pipeline to advocacy for [nurse](#) researchers.

What do we need to know about this case and the related research?

We know that a woman is five times more likely to be murdered by her abuser if he has access to a firearm. Guns are way too easy to pick up when someone is in a rage and not thinking clearly, so the presence of a gun makes it all too easy for there to be a homicide.

This finding came from a landmark study conducted by myself and my colleagues in 2003, and it really made a difference in terms of raising awareness among the general public, especially in the domestic violence community, and helped people understand how important it is to do safety planning around guns in the home.

"Does he own a gun" is a question in the Danger Assessment. If there's a gun, we need to do safety planning around the gun. One option is a protective order. But if she's not prepared to leave the relationship, we talk about getting the gun stored safely. It's important for children, too—the [surgeon general](#) just issued a warning because gun violence is the No. 1 cause of death for children and adolescents. Guns in the home are dangerous for children and abused women.

Why are deaths from intimate partner violence on the rise in the U.S.?

Because so many people own guns. There was an increase in domestic violence homicides amidst the COVID-19 lockdowns, but domestic violence homicides have been trending up since 2014. In 2014, 57% of gun-related domestic violence homicides happened with a gun; in 2017 it was nearly 61%, and the percentage continues to rise. There are more guns, and in more states there are more open carry laws, and in many states people are able to buy guns now with fewer background checks.

How do nurses and nurse researchers fit into advocacy fighting violence against women?

As a nurse researcher, I know well that there are millions of nurses who can help in conducting research but also just as importantly help implement the nursing practice implications from research. Nurses are the largest sector of the health care workforce and provide [prenatal care](#),

are in emergency departments, and just exist at every touch point of entry into the health care system. That means we are the closest health care providers in proximity to women experiencing domestic violence.

From our research, only 4% of women who were murdered by an intimate partner called the domestic violence hotline in the year before their death, but 47% were in the health care system during that year. If a nurse can ask a woman about their situation at home in terms of violence and abuse, and has the resources to share with them, that nurse can save a life.

One of the first studies I did was on the health effects of domestic violence. It is very meaningful to know that the legacy of that work continues on through researchers like Michelle Patch, who is investigating [traumatic brain injury](#) in relationship to domestic violence, and Katie Spearman, current Ph.D. candidate, who is investigating post-separation abuse—things like stalking or using the courts against an intimate partner and how that affects the health of their children.

This work is heavy, but the women I work with, the ones we do this work for and with are incredibly strong and smart and give me strength and energy to continue on. My fellow nurse researchers are committed, caring people, and we try to take care of each other. We're all in this work because we want to make a difference. And it also helps that I got a personal Christmas card from Joe and Jill Biden!

Provided by Johns Hopkins University

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