



Domestic Violence Survivor Explains Why Guns Don't Actually Protect Women: 'I Was Shot With My Own Gun'

By: Tara Culp-Ressler - October 29, 2013

Domestic violence survivors are traveling to Capitol Hill this week to make sure that firearms don't end up in the hands of abusers. Working in conjunction with Mayors Against Illegal Guns, they're encouraging lawmakers to support comprehensive background checks, a lobbying effort that's timed to coincide with the end of Domestic Violence Awareness Month.

Gender-based violence and gun policies have become particularly entwined lately. Over the past several months, proponents for looser gun laws have argued that women need easy access to guns to protect themselves against abusers and rapists. According to some of the conservatives who oppose gun control, additional regulations on concealed weapons and assault rifles aren't compatible with feminism. On Tuesday, that line of reasoning made yet another appearance at a Senate hearing about Stand Your Ground laws, as a conservative policy analyst from the Cato Institute suggested that feminists support the policy that allowed George Zimmerman to kill an unarmed teenager.

Christy Salters Martin, a domestic violence survivor who was stabbed and shot by her husband after she attempted to leave him, has a very different perspective on the issue.

"Having a gun isn't enough," Christy explained in an interview with ThinkProgress. "Women who fear for their life don't need a gun — they need to go to their local police department, they need to go a family member, they need to go to the domestic violence shelter in their area where they have some type of protection."

Christy and her estranged husband both owned guns and both had concealed carry permits. Christy also had a very successful career in professional boxing. That didn't stop her husband from shooting her.

"I was shot with my own gun. Just putting a weapon in the woman's hand is not going to reduce the number of fatalities or gunshot victims that we have," Christy pointed out. "Too many times, their male counterpart or spouse will be able to overpower them and take that gun away."

The evidence backs up Christy's point. Abusers who have access to a gun are more than seven times more likely to kill their partners. By some estimations, the presence of a gun in domestic violence situations — no matter who technically owns it — increases the risk of homicide by 500 percent. In 2011, 44 percent of the women in this country who were killed with guns were murdered by a current or former intimate partner.

"These things are going to continue to happen until Congress steps up and changes these laws," Christy told ThinkProgress. "And in order for them to act, it's going to take people like me, survivors, to stand up and say: Be more aware of the gun laws."

Thanks to current loopholes in federal law, some domestic abusers are still able to get their hands on guns. That's what Christy and her fellow survivors want to change. They're holding a press conference on Wednesday to urge Congress to pass stronger background check measures, saying that will help save women's lives. Indeed, in states already require background checks for all gun sales, 38 percent fewer women are killed by intimate partners.

Immediately after the Sandy Hook massacre, support for universal background checks soared. An estimated 90 percent of American voters supported the policy in the lead-up to a Senate vote on the issue in April; nonetheless, the Senate ended up killing the bill. But Christy is still hopeful.

"It's just going to take more people getting up there and talking about their personal experiences," she said, pointing out that more stories from victims of intimate partner violence need to be elevated. "If it's not happening in your house or within your family, you're not thinking about it."

Aside from raising awareness about gun violence prevention, Christy and her fellow survivors are also doing their part to help destigmatize the issues surrounding domestic abuse. Even though intimate partner violence is incredibly widespread in the United States, most people still don't feel comfortable talking about it. One recent survey found that 64 percent of Americans agree that talking more about these issues would make it easier for them to feel comfortable stepping in and trying to help someone in the midst of an abusive relationship.