CHANGEMAKERS
MINNESOTA WOMEN'S PRESS
ALLIANCE

RE-IMAGINING PUBLIC SAFETY

Discussion Guide Part 1: Gender-Based Violence

Preventing and healing statewide trauma

produced by Minnesota Women's Press with support from Minneapolis Foundation & Valvoline: Northern Minnesota

Minnesota Women's Press gender-based violence stories and conversations won a 2023 community service leadership award from the Minnesota Newspaper Association.

(I-r) PaHoua Vang and Becca Gilbuena, MNCASA; Guadalupe Lopez and Nikki Engel, Violence Free Minnesota; and Rosario de la Torre, Esperanza United.

The Role of Media and Community in Discussing Public Safety

Dear Changemakers:

I have had a lot of media jobs, including at Time Inc. and *The New York Times*. Never have I been able to apply the sacredness of personal narratives to key social issues the way I do at Minnesota Women's Press. The ongoing focal points of our Changemakers Alliance content-and-conversations series are an example of how media can aim to make a difference.

I believe journalists should offer sustained coverage about needs and potential solutions in community safety, more than simply covering police reports. This guide, from our continuing coverage of gender-based violence, is how story development can lead to discussions. Thank you for being part of it.

Gender-based violence is one of the most pervasive crimes. In order to have impact, media institutions could write more about the mindsets that enable it, centering valuable first-person narratives to illustrate and explain the issues.

How are community members working collectively to offer access to affordable housing, trauma recovery, mental and physical health care, reproductive choices, gun safety, political and legal systems that represent the needs of diverse citizens, and behavioral reform for perpetrators of gender-based violence? How are these efforts funded *before* crisis requires law enforcement intervention?

Thanks to underwriting from the Minneapolis Foundation, we are able to begin deeper work on connecting our media with community to talk about solutions. We hope this discussion guide — our first in a public safety series — will inspire you to participate in self-reflection and group discussions to build stronger consensus about how to address gender-based violence in much more effective ways. We will build statewide conversations. If you create something on your own, please let us know how it went; we will be fine-tuning this guide based on feedback from pilot discussions in 2024.

— Mikki Morrissette, publisher, Minnesota Women's Press, Spring 2024

Thanks to our collaborative partners for their participation and feedback in the development of this first discussion guide.

MNCASA:
PaHoua Vang, Becca Gilbuena, Pogi del Rosario, Hunter Beckstrom

Violence Free Minnesota:
Guadalupe Lopez, Nikki Engel

Global Rights for Women:
Patricia Cumbie

Esperanza United:
Rosario de la Torre

Ramsey County Attorney:
Erica Schumacher

Patricia Cumbie, Global Rights for Women

From Violence Free Minnesota

excerpt of commentary after news coverage of three emergency responders in Burnsville died during a domestic violence call

For over 30 years, Violence Free Minnesota has documented intimate partner homicides in our annual *Homicide Report: Relationship Abuse in Minnesota*. At least 830 victims, the vast majority women, have been killed due to relationship abuse in our state since 1989. Of the 261 people killed since 2014, 46 were bystanders/intervenors. Of those 46, only four were police, including two officers and a first responder killed in Burnsville on February 18, 2024.

We do not aim to minimize their deaths, but to expand public narratives of domestic violence in Minnesota, who it most impacts, and who it most endangers. The Burnsville shooting comes on the heels of at least 39 lives lost due to relationship abuse in 2023, the highest number we have recorded since 1989.

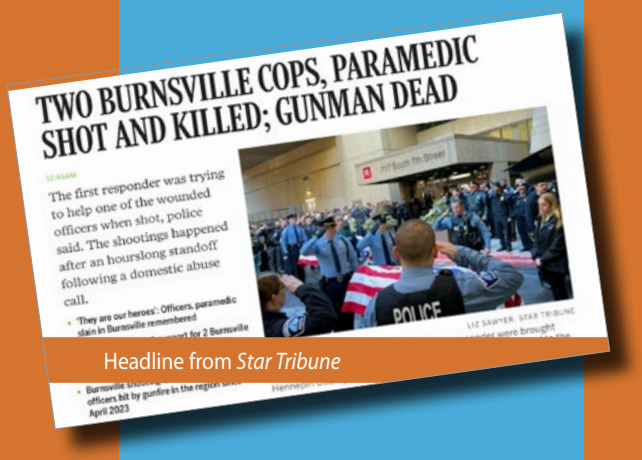
There is a profound tiredness in recognizing that every year domestic violence victims in our state are murdered brutally and with little public outcry, and that we continue to call for the same policy recommendations to prevent these deaths year after year.

We call attention to the incredible importance of community-based advocates, who work tirelessly 24/7, 365 days a year to provide lifesaving support to victims and survivors — even after systems professionals cease to be involved and even as their work receives a fraction of the funding and recognition of law enforcement. As experts on domestic violence, their prevention and intervention work is critical, yet their expertise is often left unconsidered.

The gravity of investing in alternative responses to the criminal legal system cannot be understated and has remained a call to action for decades now, particularly from Black and indigenous leaders in our movement. When community-based advocacy is adequately funded and resourced, survivor and community safety increase and domestic violence calls to police decrease.

Achieving a violence-free Minnesota demands that we explicitly name domestic violence when and where it occurs, and that it remains a matter of community action before, during, and after tragedies like these — not just when first responders are killed in their attempts to assist.

Reflections from Minnesota Women's Press


TWO BURNSVILLE COPS, PARAMEDIC SHOT AND KILLED; GUNMAN DEAD

The first responder was trying to help one of the wounded officers when shot, police said. The shootings happened after an hourslong standoff following a domestic abuse call.

'They are our heroes': Officers, paramedic slain in Burnsville remembered

Burnsville officers hit by gunfire in the region since April 2023

POLICE

Headline from *Star Tribune*

The instinct of traditional news is to cover breaking events, reveal fault lines in government, and dedicate real estate to subscribers who care about sports, business, lifestyle stories, obituaries, and puzzles. When a large headline announces the very tragic news that three emergency responders were killed in Burnsville while dealing with a domestic violence call, what is not being covered in that moment is:

"Man Who Terrorized Women and Children for Years Kills Three Emergency Responders in Burnsville"

"Who Steps Up to Care for the Seven Children Who Witnessed This Violence?"

"Judge Dannia Edwards Rejected Plea by Violent Man to Own Guns Legally: A Story of Coercive Control"

"Judge Gave Violent Man Primary Custody of Children"

THE PREVALENCE AND PREDICTABILITY

"In 1994 I said this kind of violence is so predictable as to be preventable. And 25 years later, I'm still saying the same thing."

— Diane Rosenfeld

Global Rights for Women produced a 140-page report titled *An Institutional Analysis of the Minneapolis Police Response to Domestic Violence.* One particular concern noted in the report is that offenders who have simply left the scene before police arrive — referred to as Gone On Arrival (GOA) — tend not to be held accountable. The Hennepin County Domestic Fatality Review Team revealed that in 9 of the 14 recent domestic violence homicides, the "perpetrator had previously avoided arrest for domestic violence."

Despite a lack of follow-up, from January 2019 to December 2022, one-third of all aggravated assaults in Minneapolis were related to intimate partner violence. Second only to drug cases, the highest caseloads with the Hennepin County Attorney General's office were related to domestic assaults.

In January 2023, we talked with Diane Rosenfeld, director of the Gender Violence Program at Harvard Law School and author of *The Bonobo Sisterhood: Revolution Through Female Alliance*, about domestic violence — especially solutions for the dangerous time when someone is trying to leave a perpetrator.

A majority of Minnesotan deaths due to intimate partner homicide happen when the woman is trying to leave. In 2021, 12 children were present when their parent was killed.

"If police and the courts understood the danger and difficulty separation presents to a victim, resources could be focused on safely separating the parties. ... Often, she considers herself to be a victim only to the extent that society considers him to be a criminal."

After a woman in Latvia was killed in front of her children in 2023 by her ex-partner, the country implemented new standards for law enforcement, including a questionnaire that details physical evidence at the scene. The survey is sent to social services, which immediately connects the victim to support, and becomes evidence for the court to provide temporary protection services.

201 murders in Minnesota per year (.55 per day)
— 2021, Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension

779 carjackings in Minnesota per year (2.13 per day)
— 2021, Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension

2,733 adult and child survivors of domestic violence in Minnesota reached out for program support in one day.
— 2021 National Coalition Against Domestic Violence report

Playwright Deneal Trueblood-Lynch and Violence Free Minnesota director Guadalupe Lopez at a Minnesota Women's Press discussion in 2023

Deneal Trueblood-Lynch said at our 2023 Minnesota Women's Press event: "I'm a survivor of a childhood trauma. And I took that trauma, and I buried it inside. I became a mother, I became a wife, I became a role model. I worked some really good jobs. One day, I came home and learned that my daughter had been sexually violated. I had what they said was tunnel vision — I had buried my secret, and the past met up with the present. I did a lot of harm to my victim [my daughter's abuser]. I was sentenced to 57 months at Shakopee Correctional Center.

"While I was there, this question — even to this day — comes to the surface: How can incarcerating me solve or cure that old childhood trauma? Now I'm adding the trauma of being incarcerated on top of that trauma … and having to deal with the stress of my daughter's trauma. There were no doctors in there I could talk to, to start to unpack the situation. My perpetrator was not sentenced. The guy I assaulted was not sentenced for the sexual trauma [he inflicted on] my daughter.

"I realized it would have to be me to start to unpack things. My purpose was to unpack the secret, because there were other women surrounding me while I was incarcerated who were dealing with the same issue. I wrote a play called *Secrets*. It's about my lived experience. I'm finding out that the more I perform it, there are so many people who share that same trauma and are sitting with their secret."

"We interviewed 62 Native American women who had been incarcerated in Minnesota's women's prison. All but one of those women disclosed histories of domestic abuse and sexual assault prior to incarceration."

— Nikki Engel, Violence Free Minnesota

We will have a video available of part of Deneal's play. If you would like to support a performance in your community, reach out to editor@womenspress.com and we'll put you in touch with her.

Discussion Questions

- **When you hear about domestic violence, is your instinct to wonder why the victim chose to stay in the relationship or is to wonder why the person being abusive chose to behave that way?**
- **What did you learn about roles for men and women from your caregivers?**
- **What are the gender role expectations in your community today? If change is needed, how might that happen?**
- **In times of fear, loss of control, or helplessness — or simply feeling hurt by a friend — what did you need to recover and heal? What did accountability look like for you?**
- **How can we re-envision holding people who cause harm accountable and supporting victims?**

CeMarr Peterson and Artika Roller at a Minnesota Women's Press discussion

Rachel Asproth, of the Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault, told us that calling the police is often not what victims want. If we can develop restorative justice practices for healing, she said, that would serve many survivors. "Many report feeling traumatized or unheard and wish they had more options. Restorative justice can focus on: What does the survivor need to feel safe again? What do accountability, justice, and healing mean to them?"

In 1984, the Minneapolis Intervention Project offered community-coordinated responses to domestic violence cases. Teams of women volunteers were sent alongside paid police to respond to calls. Prior to the program, only 14 percent of abusers were sent into counseling. That number increased to 62 percent during the program. But … the program funding dried up.

Advocates would like to see more financial support paid to peers with lived experience to work alongside survivors. This tends to be under-budgeted at local, county, and state levels. Artika Roller, then director of Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault, said at a Minnesota Women's Press event that people with lived experience can be strong victim service providers. However: "Advocates are leaving the field to work at Walmart, where the benefits and pay are higher. That is inexcusable."

Added CeMarr Peterson of The Link, which works with youth who have been exploited and assaulted, survivors who get the services they need are effective advocates for other victims. "It works."

2020 police budgets:

Minneapolis: $193.3 million
Rochester: $30.4 million
Alexandria: $3.4 million
Crookston: $2.1 million

Discussion Questions

- **How do you define public safety?**
- **Do you believe people can change? Why or why not?**
- **Do you trust policing?**
- **Do you trust therapy?**
- **What do you think leads to behavior changes that improves public safety?**
- **Given that the majority of incarcerated people will eventually be released from prison and returned to society, what role should prison play in rehabilitation and behavior change?**
- **Do you think people are receiving those services?**
- **If you were creating a public safety department, what roles would you fill?**
- **What community organizations would you fund?**
- **What percentage of the city budget would you give them?**

"Cops don't repair harm. We just hopefully stop things from getting worse at the moment. We need to recognize that, then step away and let other services do what is in their lane of expertise."

— Mendota Heights police chief Kelly McCarthy

Links to more information

- Podcast: "A Proven Way to Reduce Violence in Cities," from Next City, nextcity.org/podcast/a-proven-way-to-reduce-violence-in-cities
- Seward Longfellow Restorative Justice, slrj.org
- Minnesota Cooperative Conflict Collaborative, sites.google.com/umn.edu/respect
- Kumbé Healing & Wellness, kumbe2heal.com
- Vera Institute, vera.org
- Conflict Resolution Center in Twin Cities, Duluth, and Saint Cloud, crcminnesota.org
- Vermont Community Justice Network — 20 centers delivering services to youth at risk, victims, communities affected by crime, and those responsible for criminal offenses. vcjn.org
- "I Know Someone Who's Being Abused, What Should I Do?" toolkit, DomesticShelters.org
- Guide about healthy relationships, setting boundaries, understanding consent, conflict resolution, revenge porn and more, loveisrespect.org
- Futures Without Violence Free Bundles for Healthcare Workers and Advocates — for anyone who wants to know more about healthy relationships for the cisgender, trans, and queer communities, as well as adverse childhood experiences and tips for teens on recognizing consensual versus coerced sex, futureswithoutviolence.org
- The SASHA Center Toolkit for African-American Survivors of Sexual Assault, Trauma and Abuse, sashacenter.org/toolkit
- "Kitchen Table Conversations" hosted by the Men & Masculine Folks Network, facebook.com/MMFNetwork

"*Secrets* tells our pasts. It tells our present. I believe it will tell our future. Because these types of secrets are woven into communities, I am trying to get people in the right places to see and hear *Secrets,* to change something, to be able to look at the traumas that haunt our youth."

— Deneal Trueblood-Lynch

Educate children on healthy relationships and gender equity.

Engage legislators and policymakers to improve service, elect representatives who support equity, and support organizations focused on nonviolence.

Challenge victim-blaming narratives from mainstream media.

Check out Revolutionary Emergency Partners or Twin Cities Mutual Aid Project and get involved or donate.

If you and your friend group don't discuss struggles with each other, talk about why that might be. Acknowledge that it might feel awkward at first, but you would like to start. If you do process difficult situations together, thank them.

If you would like to be part of an advocacy team to pass a Survivors Justice Act in Minnesota — which would offer adjustments in sentencing guidelines like those made available to veterans impacted by trauma — contact Jess Palyan and Violence Free Minnesota, jpalyan@vfmn.org

If you are a man who would like to support efforts to talk about healthy masculinity, reach out to editor@womenspress.com and we'll put you in touch with a team.

Discussion Questions

- **Given our society's focus on punitive measures, what services could be made more available in communities to repair and provide healing?**
- **How can we center survivors?**
- **How can we unpack secrets?**

RESOURCES

Stories on womenspress.com

Thanks to Badass members, Minnesota Women's Press has been able to create "Reducing Gender-Based Violence," an ongoing series of stories. A few of the stories:

- Getting Serious About Protecting Survivors of Partner Violence
- Global Rights for Women Announces a Report on Minneapolis Police Response to Domestic Violence
- Deep Dive: Why Doesn't Minnesota Have a Survivor's Justice Act?
- What We Can Do Together About Gender-Based Violence: Highlights from March 25, 2023
- The Reality of Sex Trafficking
- Talking to Boys About Masculinity: A Conversation With Felix Martinez-Paz
- How to Defy Rape Culture
- Gender-Based Violence: Data and Resources
- Deep Dive: Roots of Violence
- Why the Legal System Is Not the Answer for Many Survivors
- My View as a Police Chief
- Red Flags: A Short Personal History of Domestic Abuse
- When Violence Was Considered a Private Matter
- Summary: The Bonobo Sisterhood

womenspress.com/gender-based-violence

If you missed the "Defusing Patriarchal Violence" issue, you can read it online: tinyurl.com/CALLonGBV

If you are experiencing abuse, please contact DayOne at 866-223-1111 to connect with services. A list of domestic abuse transformation programs that serve Minnesotans using harm in their relationships can be found at vfmn.org/find-a-datp-program.