

# One in five homicides of children two to 14 years of age is related to intimate partner violence

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Approximately 20 percent of homicides of children 2 to 14 years of age in the United States may be related to intimate partner violence (IPV), a fact that is currently underreported by the National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS), according to a new study from the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health published in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*. The findings will be presented at the American Public Health Association's Annual Meeting in San Diego on November 12, 2018.

"We know that the burden of IPV extends beyond the partners involved. Our study documents that one in five child homicides are related to IPV. These crimes are often triggered by divorce or custody issues. Over 60 percent involved firearms and most incidents took place at home," explained lead investigator Avanti Adhia, ScD, who is currently a Senior Fellow at the Harborview Injury Prevention and Research Center at the University of Washington in Seattle, WA.

The investigators used the National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS) to examine 1,386 child homicide victims (aged 2 to 14) whose death occurred from 2005-14 in 16 US states. They compared the data with accompanying narratives from coroner/medical examiner and [law enforcement](#) reports to characterize the incidents for victim and perpetrator demographics, weapon type, and immediate stressors. Through this analysis they uncovered discrepancies that pointed to a

significant undercount of IPV incidents. The details in the narratives led investigators to identify nearly twice as many IPV-related cases than NVDRS had identified by its quantitative variable: 280 (20.2 percent of the sample), up from 144 (10 percent), were related to IPV. They also determined that IPV-related child homicide cases were often triggered by stressors such as separations, divorce proceedings, and custody issues and were often perpetrated at home by a male using a firearm, who then committed suicide.

Violence against women is part of the current national conversation in unprecedented ways but has been consistently underfunded. The adverse health outcomes of children who witness IPV have been well documented, but less attention has been paid to the children who are physically harmed. The investigators believe that research that helps uncover and quantify the effects of IPV can lend crucial support that directs attention and resources towards this major [public health](#) concern.

"We hope that this study provides additional urgency to focus attention and resources to prevent IPV and save children's lives by helping people cope with stressors before they lead to deadly incidents and limiting access to firearms. We also hope to contribute to the improvement of NVDRS, a critical surveillance system that enables law enforcement, policy makers, and researchers to monitor [violent deaths](#) over time, across the country," commented Dr. Adhia. She noted that NVDRS integrates diverse sources of information that provide rich information on violent deaths, but is relatively new and can be improved to become an even more valuable tool.

**More information:** "The Role of Intimate Partner Violence in Homicides of Children Aged 2-14 Years," *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* (2018). [DOI: 10.1016/j.amepre.2018.08.028](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2018.08.028)

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