

# An epidemic of murder-suicide in the US

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According to a 2002 report by the Violence Policy Center, at least 662 people died in murder-suicides in the United States over a six-month period the previous year—an average of nearly two murder-suicides each day, every day. Seven states had more than 10 murder-suicides during the study period: Florida (35), California (29) and Texas (29), Pennsylvania (17), New York (14), Virginia (12), and Ohio (11).

No more recent figures are available. Due to political pressure from the gun lobby and other right-wing groups, no government agency compiles centralized statistics on either suicides or homicides involving firearms. According to the VPC, however, more US firearm deaths are suicides than homicides (16,599 compared to 10,828 in 1999).

Three-quarters of murder-suicides involved “intimate partners,” the study found, and of these, 94 percent involved men killing women and then themselves.

The worst recent such incident took place February 20 in rural Loogootee, Indiana, when 36-year-old Arthur Lee Smith entered the trailer home his estranged wife shared with her boyfriend, killing both of them and his wife’s two children, ages 4 and 5. He then walked down the road, telling a neighbor, “Hey ma’am, call 911. I just shot four people in that trailer. They’re dead.”

He continued walking until police overtook him, then ignored their commands to stop and shot himself in the head. Alicia Smith had filed for divorce and obtained a protective order against her husband. The two children were asleep when their father shot them to death. Loogootee is a rural town about 80 miles southwest of Indianapolis.

A cursory web search for murder-suicide yields the following incidents in the last few weeks alone:

**Epping, NH:** A 32-year-old woman drowned her 6-year-old daughter in the bathtub, then hung herself. The woman, who worked at COMAir, was recently divorced and suffered from depression. Her brother,

mother and stepfather had all died in the last four years.

**New York, NY:** A 38-year-old policeman shot his girlfriend to death and then killed himself in the apartment they had shared for the last six years. Aurelia Morales, 32, was a fourth-grade teacher in East Harlem.

**Folcroft, PA:** A 49-year-old man killed his elderly mother and then himself. Jimmy McNeil, a maintenance worker for the borough of Folcroft, had cared for his mother, who suffered from Alzheimer’s, for several years.

**Ironton, OH:** A sheriff’s dispatcher was shot to death by her husband shortly after she left him. Lana Holbrook, 40, was laid off last year after 19 years at the local hospital, after the facility closed.

**Gagetown, MI:** A 52-year-old man killed his wife and then himself with a shotgun after losing his electrician’s job and facing possible foreclosure on his home, where three generations of his family had lived in this village in the Michigan thumb.

**Murray, IA:** A 49-year-old man shot and killed his mother-in-law and wounded his ex-wife, then killed himself. The two women had called 911 when the ex-husband arrived at their home in this rural town 80 miles from Des Moines.

**Lake Ozark, MO:** Apparently despondent over health problems, a man and a woman from Springfield, Illinois traveled to this resort area for a family gathering, then killed themselves in a wooded area.

**Thorn Hill, TN:** A 30-year-old man killed his girlfriend, called police to report the crime and then killed himself. Terry Miller had been charged several times with spousal abuse. Three children survive.

**Roanoke, VA:** A 30-year-old pipefitter killed his 29-year-old wife and then himself. The couple had recently bought the house in which they died, after the husband was promoted to foreman.

**Pilot Mountain, NC:** A 34-year-old man killed his wife inside the tanning salon at which they both

worked, then barricaded himself in the basement and was besieged by police, before killing himself. The couple's two children were unharmed.

**Tamarac, FL:** A 33-year-old man strangled his longtime girlfriend, walked their two children, ages 2 and 9, to a neighbor's house, then returned to his home and suffocated himself.

**Canton, MS:** Henry Handy, 44, shot his girlfriend in their apartment in this Jackson suburb, then set fire to the apartment and shot himself.

**Tulsa, OK:** A 33-year-old man walked into the Lowrance Electronics plant, killed his ex-wife, a plant office worker, with a shotgun blast, and then himself.

**Texoma, OK:** A 61-year-old man shot and killed his 57-year-old wife after she filed for divorce and moved out, then turned his .22 caliber gun on himself.

**Tyler, TX:** A man being sued for child support murdered his ex-wife on the courthouse steps, then killed a bystander and fled, before being cornered by police after a brief car chase and shot to death. David Hernandez Arroyo, 43, arrived at the courthouse dressed in a flak jacket and opened fire with an AK-47 assault rifle, wounding his son David junior and a sheriff's deputy as well.

**Lea County, NM:** Jose Reyes Garcia killed his estranged wife, stabbing her multiple times and then shooting her and himself. The couple had several previous reports of domestic violence.

**Snowmass Village, CO:** A man and a woman were found dead in a housing complex for city employees in the wealthy resort area. Neighbors heard a loud argument beforehand.

**Loveland, CO:** A 25-year-old man killed his 30-year-old girlfriend and then himself, in her apartment. The woman's five-year-old daughter was at her grandparents at the time.

**Sacramento, CA:** A few hours after police responded to a 911 call over a domestic dispute, the man who placed the call, Uswaldo Carrera, shot and killed his wife and her aunt, then turned the gun on himself.

**Fairfield, CA:** A 39-year-old man with a history of domestic violence shot and killed his wife, who was nine months pregnant, before fatally shooting himself. The woman's two teenage daughters witnessed the shootings.

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