

RESEARCH BRIEF

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CRIME REDUCTIONS AFTER ENHANCED IMPLEMENTATION OF WASHINGTON STATE'S DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROTECTION ORDER FIREARM RELINQUISHMENT LAW

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BACKGROUND

Domestic violence (DV) includes psychological, physical, and sexual abuse, as well as other abusive behaviors like stalking and coercive control. Prior research shows that Domestic Violence Protection Orders (DVPOs), can **reduce both fatal and non-fatal harm**, especially when the restrained person is **required to relinquish firearms**. DVPOs are civil legal orders restraining a person using DV, most commonly against an intimate partner, from harming the person protected by the order. Federal law prohibits firearm possession for any person subject to a DVPO. Only some states have enacted similar laws with mechanisms to support relinquishment, and implementation of those state laws has varied tremendously by jurisdiction, including in WA.

STUDY GOAL

This study examined the impact of **coordinated implementation** of Washington State's law requiring firearm relinquishment by a dedicated unit on subsequent alleged criminal behavior committed by individuals restrained by DVPOs. The study focused on the work of the Regional Domestic Violence Firearms Enforcement Unit (RDVFEU), a multi-agency unit based in King County, WA that helps **facilitate firearm relinquishment in eligible orders** such as DVPOs with the primary goal of **reducing risk of harm to protected people and other family members**.

APPROACH

C-FIP researchers examined the unit's effect on **subsequent crime in the 24-month period following the issuance of a DVPO** by linking information from court records to administrative records on arrests (a proxy for crime). The researchers compared individuals restrained by a DVPO when the unit was actively working to support implementation of the law (2018-2020) to individuals restrained by a DVPO when the law was in effect but not implemented by a dedicated unit (2014-2016). They studied both **whether crimes occurred** as well as the **severity of crimes that were committed**.

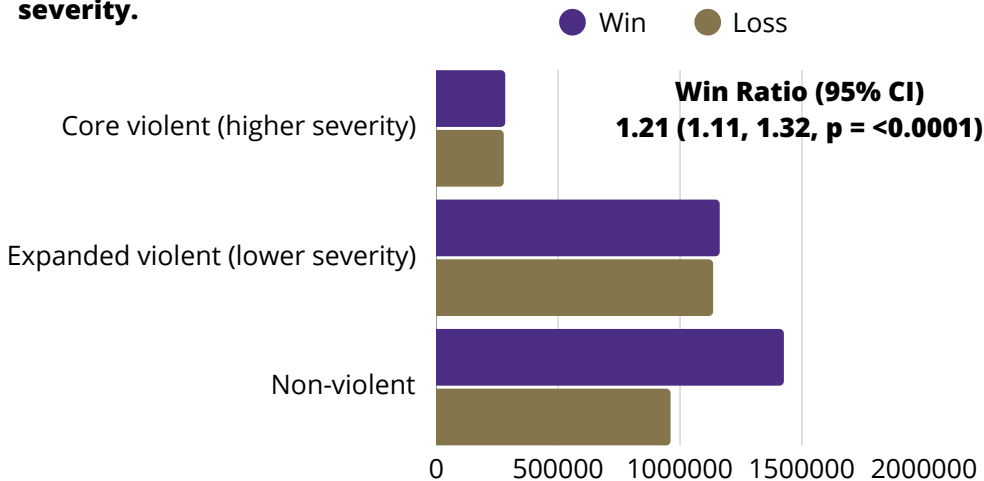
RESULTS

During the 24-month follow-up period, **only 31% of restrained people had a subsequent crime with unit implementation** of the firearm relinquishment law compared to about 37% of restrained people before the unit was implementing the law.

Key findings of RDVFEU implementation on subsequent crime included that:

- After adjusting for things like the age of the restrained person, their prior criminal history, and the violence they inflicted that led to the issued DVPO, there was a **27% decrease** (Hazard Ratio = 0.73 [95% Confidence Interval (CI): 0.79, 0.90]) in the risk of a subsequent crime by a restrained person when the unit was supporting the implementation of the law compared to a person restrained before the unit was active.
- There were reductions in crime even when the case involved the additional risks of stalking or substance use by individuals restrained by court orders and among individuals prohibited from owning a firearm because of a prior criminal history.

Figure 1. Outcome comparisons of randomly selected respondent pairs by non-violent and violent crime severity.



The unit's work was also associated with reductions in the severity of crimes that were committed. Following implementation of the unit, respondents **were 1.2 times more likely to have no subsequent crime or a less severe subsequent crime** compared to respondents before implementation.

IMPLICATIONS

Findings from this work highlight a **reduction in crime** and the **severity of crimes** following the issuance of DVPOs when supported by the RDVFEU's work to **enhance implementation of firearm relinquishment laws**. These crime reduction findings are notable because (1) neither perfect enforcement nor perfect compliance were required to achieve these crime reductions, (2) it can be difficult to intervene with DV offenders, and (3) these crime reductions are facilitated in a civil setting which can address safety and crime without involvement in the criminal system. In addition to prior research showing firearm relinquishment laws reduce intimate partner homicide, these findings suggest that coordinated implementation of firearm relinquishment laws by a dedicated unit may also provide the benefit of **addressing broader patterns of crime** in the community.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, REFER TO:

Ellyson AM, Kafka J, Adhia A, Shanahan S, Bowen D, Rowhani-Rahbar A. Crime reductions after enhanced implementation of Washington state's domestic violence protection order firearm relinquishment law. *Journal of Criminal Justice*. 2026 Jan 1;102:102591.

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