

RESEARCH BRIEF

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FIREARM RESTRICTIONS IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROTECTION ORDERS

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Domestic violence is a substantial public health and safety problem, and firearms increase risk of harm for victim-survivors, their family members, and the community. Federal law prohibits individuals who are subject to domestic violence protection orders (DVPOs) from possessing or purchasing firearms, but there is no mechanism to enforce this federal law. Many states have enacted laws authorizing or mandating judges to require firearm relinquishment, but actual implementation and enforcement of these state-level laws varies.

THE STUDY

This study **evaluated and quantified the implementation** of Washington State's DVPO-related firearm prohibition law by the **Regional Domestic Violence Firearms Enforcement Unit (RDVFEU)**, which was designed to help facilitate firearm and weapon surrender compliance among individuals subject to DVPOs (i.e., respondents), in King County, WA.

MAIN OUTCOMES

Researchers estimated the association between implementation of the RDVFEU and three outcomes:

1. Judicial order to surrender weapons and firearms granted as part of the DVPO
2. Documented compliance among respondents ordered to surrender weapons and firearms
3. Firearm and/or weapon relinquishment by respondents ordered to surrender weapons and firearms

APPROACH

Researchers used a **55% simple random sample of all granted DVPOs** from 2014-2016 (before RDVFEU implementation) and 2018-2020 (after RDVFEU implementation). The sample included 3,543 unique granted DVPOs, in which all were full protection orders and 98.6% were also granted an emergent or temporary protection order. Researchers **compared granted DVPOs** after the RDVFEU was implemented to granted DVPOs before the RDVFEU was implemented when the law was in effect but not fully implemented nor enforced.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON THIS TOPIC PLEASE REFER TO:

Ellyson, A. M., Adhia, A., Shanahan, S., Alsinai, A., DiMascolo, L., Reygers, M., Bowen, D., & Rowhani-Rahbar, A. (2023). Firearm restrictions in domestic violence protection orders: Implementation, vetting, compliance, and enforcement. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 00, 1-30.
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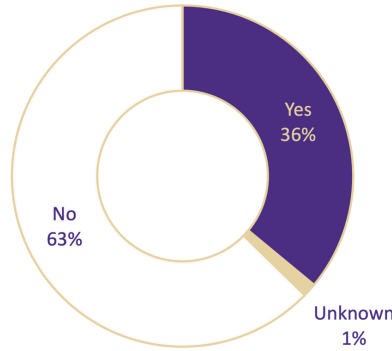
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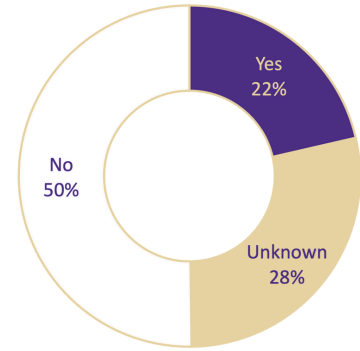
FINDINGS

About 22% of DVPO petitioners reported respondent access to or ownership of firearms, and **36% of DVPO petitioners indicated the respondent used a firearm, weapon, or object to threaten or harm them**. The RDVFEU helps bridge important gaps by vetting firearm access/ownership and sharing this information with victim-survivors to enable more accurate safety planning and with law enforcement to help promote public and first-responder safety.

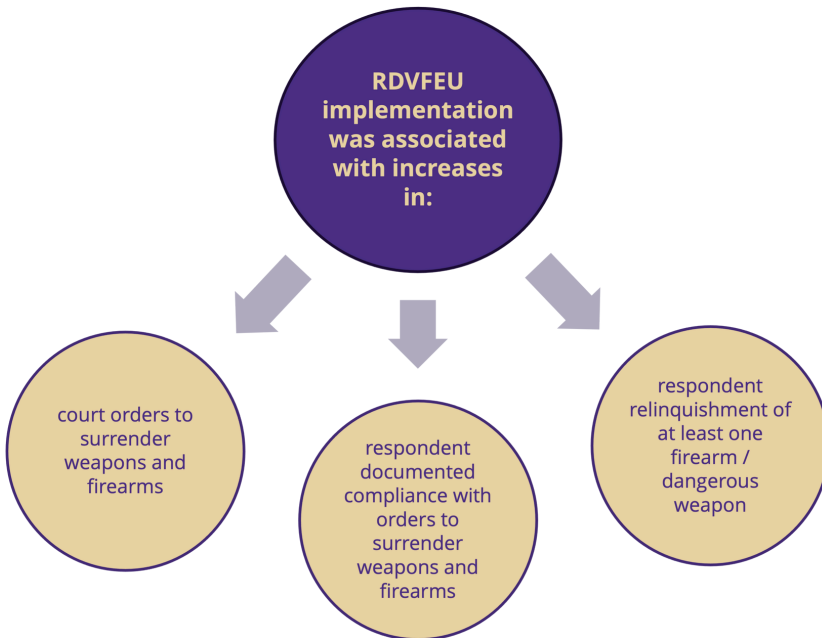
Respondent weapon use



Respondent firearm access



Benefits of RDVFEU Implementation



Compared to DVPOs granted prior to RDVFEU implementation, **granted DVPOs after RDVFEU implementation** were at least 4.5 times more likely to include an OTSW. RDVFEU implementation was also associated with 3.4 times the odds of respondent documented compliance, and 3.3 times the odds of respondent relinquishment of at least one firearm and/or other dangerous weapon. These findings demonstrate RDVFEU implementation was associated with benefits at each stage of the protection order process with improvements in both judicial enforcement and respondent compliance.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

01

Evaluate whether approaches relying heavily on those in the legal system (e.g., judges, police, attorneys) like the RDVFEU is an effective and equitable way to implement DVPO-related firearm restrictions.

02

Clarify when an order to surrender weapons is mandatory, who is responsible for vetting firearm access and enforcing prohibitions, and how individuals subject to these orders should comply.

03

Establish a firearm information vetting process to assess firearm access among individuals subject to domestic violence protection orders.

04

Improve firearm purchase records to help facilitate firearm access vetting.

05

Incorporate judicial education into policy as a part of robust practice given improvements in court officer compliance with the law after RDVFEU implementation.