

Study finds handgun ownership and intimate partner violence history increase risk of violent crime

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Researchers at the UC Davis Violence Prevention Research Program (VPRP) have shown that handgun owners who have been charged with

intimate partner violence (IPV)—abuse or aggression in romantic relationships—are much more likely to commit other violent crimes. That includes crime index offenses, such as murder, rape, robbery and aggravated assault. These results affirm prior research that showed IPV is a major risk for future offenses.

The new study was published in the *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*.

"Compared to handgun purchasers who had no criminal history at the time of [purchase](#), those with an IPV criminal history had significantly increased risk of subsequent [arrest](#) for any violent and IPV crimes," said Liz Tomsich, a researcher at VPRP and first author on the paper. "A history of both IPV and non-IPV, compared to no [criminal history](#), demonstrated the strongest association with post-purchase arrest."

About 33% of women and 28% of men in the U. S. report physical violence by a current or former intimate partner. In addition, one in four women and almost one in seven men are victimized by severe physical [intimate partner violence](#) during their lifetimes. When an offender has access to a [firearm](#), fatal IPV is five times more likely. The severity of nonfatal IPV also increases.

The researchers examined 76,311 California adults who legally purchased a handgun in 2001, following this cohort through 2013. Each member was included if they had one or more arrest, charge or conviction for assault, battery, intimate partner rape or violating a domestic violence restraining order prior to their firearm purchase in 2001. The study focused on charges for violent crime index offenses, any violent crimes and IPV crimes.

One possible concern the study illuminated is that a small number of offenders who should have been banned from owning firearms were still able to obtain them.

"There are implications on improving the background check process," said Tomsich. "We found 27 of the 53 purchasers with prepurchase convictions entered the cohort despite active or lifetime prohibitions related to their offenses."

Intimate partner violence offenders more likely to repeat

The research also showed that people with IPV-only histories were at greater risk of committing a subsequent IPV crime than were those with non-IPV criminal histories. These results show handgun purchasers with IPV histories are at greater risk of re-arrest for IPV than those with non-IPV criminal histories.

While only a minority of [handgun](#) purchasers with IPV histories went on to commit subsequent crimes—12% for violent crime index offenses; 18.9% for any violent crimes; 10.2% for IPVs and 3.1% for firearm violence—these risks tend to multiply.

"This could still be a significant problem. Once scaled to the population of the United States, violent crime perpetrated by those with a history of IPV may impact a substantial number of people," Tomsich said.

Additional authors on this study include Julia Schleimer, Mona A. Wright, Susan L. Stewart, Garen J. Wintemute and Rose M. C. Kagawa from the VPRP.

More information: Elizabeth A. Tomsich et al, Intimate Partner Violence and Subsequent Violent Offending Among Handgun Purchasers, *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* (2021). [DOI: 10.1177/08862605211057268](https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605211057268)

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