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**Prevalence and Use of Guns in Perpetration of Intimate Partner Violence**

By

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## **Abstract**

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a social problem and public health issue in the United States that various states and the federal government have taken special precautions to alleviate. Two studies were conducted to address the problem. Study 1 examined archival data from a study that administered the Revised Conflict Tactic Scale to students taking psychology courses at Portland State University. The majority of students within the sample perpetrated psychological aggression but not physical assault. It was inconclusive whether more male than female college students perpetrated in physical assault against their partners. Lastly, less than 1% of students had ever physically assaulted their partner using a weapon. In study 2, using research from scientific literature databases, I conducted a review of studies that examined whether there is a difference in the prevalence of IPV perpetration between people who possess a firearm and those who do not, as well as whether gun repossession laws have proven to be effective in reducing IPV. The review yielded mixed findings for both questions. There is a consensus that gun confiscation laws are effective at preventing IPV among people with restraining orders, but not those with domestic violence misdemeanor convictions. Implications for both studies of social policy and future research on use of guns in perpetrating IPV are discussed.

*Keywords:* Intimate Partner Violence, Gun Violence, Intimate Partner Homicide, Gun Law Efficacy

## **Introduction**

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a social problem and public health issue we are facing worldwide, with about 1 in 4 females in the United States and 1 in 7 males in the United States reporting a lifetime prevalence of IPV victimization, as of 2005 (Breiding, Black, & Ryan, 2008). For the purposes of this research, IPV is defined as “physical violence, sexual violence, stalking and psychological aggression (including coercive acts) by a current or former intimate partner. This type of violence can occur among heterosexual or same-sex couples and does not require sexual intimacy” (Breiding, Basile, Smith, Black, & Mahendra, 2015). It is important to note that this type of violence includes both homicidal and non-homicidal acts.

In order to address this problem, the first step is to gain an understanding of the prevalence of IPV and how it is perpetrated. Researchers have done so in various ways, such as the creation of the Revised Conflict Tactic Scale, which has people self-report personal perpetration and victimization of the various forms of IPV (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy & Sugarman, 1996). Additionally, there are federal reports that disclose the yearly rates of intimate partner homicides. These homicides typically involve gun or other weapon usage and help inform the relationship between IPV and gun violence. These steps have been successful at understanding the extent of the problem in various environments. Using this knowledge, policy makers and community based workers could then implement laws that reduce likelihood of both perpetration and victimization of IPV. Legislators have attempted to do so over the past 20 years, such as through the implementation of gun restrictions for known perpetrators of IPV and domestic violence. The success of these efforts is still under investigation.

To better inform such efforts I conducted two research studies. The first study aims to contribute to the knowledge about the prevalence of IPV among university students. By looking at rates of perpetration of physical assault and psychological aggression by students at Portland State University against their intimate partners, we can understand the extent to which various kinds of IPV are committed. Additionally, looking into whether there is a difference in rates of perpetration of physical assault by men and women, we can gain insight into whether gender may serve as a predictor of IPV perpetration, as this has been found in previous studies. Another issue examined was the prevalence of physical assault perpetration with the use of a weapon, which may help us further understand the extent to which these specific acts involve weapons. The second study examined the extent to which weapons are used in IPV perpetration in the general population. I evaluated efforts to reduce this usage by conducting a literature review of state and federal gun law repossession efficacy. Together, findings from both studies may yield implications for legislative policies to address use of weapons in the perpetration of IPV.

### **Study 1**

IPV is prominent among college students, with 85.4% of women and 55.0% of men reporting perpetration of sexual, emotional and/or physical violence against their partners in one particularly well-conducted study (Forke, Myers, Catalozzi, & Schwarz, 2008). However, people tend to overlook the fact that IPV can involve more than just physical violence. Developers of the Revised Conflict Tactic Scale (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy & Sugarman, 1996) identified five categories of IPV: psychological aggression, physical assault, injury, negotiation and sexual coercion. Realizing and acknowledging that IPV can be defined as such a broad range of unhealthy actions, we can spread awareness and create more healthy relationships among college students. To better address questions about this range of forms of IPV in college students and to determine the prevalence of weapon use in perpetration of IPV, I conducted a study to address the following questions and hypotheses:

**Research Question 1.** Is psychological aggression more prevalent than physical assault against intimate partners among college students?

**Hypothesis 1.** Because psychological aggression may predict future perpetration of physical assault (Murphy & O'Leary, 1989), I hypothesize that psychological aggression is more prevalent than physical assault against intimate partners among college students.

**Research Question 2.** Do more male than female college students commit physical assault against their intimate partners?

**Hypothesis 2.** Because past studies have generally found that men are more likely to perpetrate multiple forms of IPV than women (Hamby & Sugarman, 1999), I hypothesize that more male than female college students commit physical assault against their intimate partners.

**Research Question 3.** What is the prevalence of weapon use in assaults against intimate partners among college students?

## **Methods**

### **Participants**

The participants in the study were students at Portland State University who were enrolled in one of fourteen different psychology classes in the summer of 2006. Out of 556 eligible participants, 547 filled out the survey during their psychology course, but 14 were missing data, so the analysis consisted of 533 completed surveys. Of the respondents ( $n=533$ ), 138 (25.9%) were male, 392 (73.5%) were female, and 3 (0.6%) preferred to not answer the questions about gender. The age of respondents ranged from 17 to 59, with an average age of 24.4 and standard deviation of 7.6. Lastly, 195 (36.6%) were single at the time of the survey, 191 (35.8%) were single but in a relationship, 116 (21.8%) were living as married or married, 4 (0.8%) were separated, 8 (1.5%) were divorced, 11 (2.1%) identified as other and 8 (1.5%) preferred to not answer.

### **Measures**

To address the hypotheses, I analyzed archival survey data that had been collected by my adviser and his former students. The Human Subject Review Committee at Portland State University had approved this study. The study relied upon data from a self-report survey, the Revised Conflict Tactic Scale (CTS-2), which consists of 78 questions divided into five subscales: psychological aggression, physical assault, injury, negotiation, and sexual coercion. For my study, the subscales I focused on were psychological aggression and physical assault. Examples of questions for the psychological aggression subscale included: "I accused my partner of being a lousy lover" and "I insulted or swore at my partner." Examples of questions for the physical assault subscale included: "I kicked, bit, or punched my partner" and "I slammed my partner against the wall" (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy & Sugarman, 1996). Participants were asked to report how many times a specific event occurred in the past six months. They were given eight response options: never happened, once in the past six months, twice in the past six months, three to five times in the past six months, six to ten times in the past six months, eleven to twenty times in the past six months, over twenty times in the past six months, and not in past six months but it has happened before. All responses that indicated one or more instances of perpetration were combined and coded as a 1, whereas all responses that indicated no instances of perpetration were coded as a 0. The reliability and validity of the instrument are well-documented by other scholars (Straus et al., 1996).

## **Analysis**

For all analyses, I used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 22. To address the first research question, I used a McNemar test because I was comparing the prevalence of two dependent variables in one sample, psychological aggression and physical assault perpetration by college students. For the second research question, I used a chi square test because I was comparing the prevalence of a single variable in two different samples, physical assault perpetration by males versus physical assault perpetration by females. For the third research question, I used a descriptive frequency analysis because I wanted to compute how many respondents reported at least one perpetration of physical assault with a weapon against their intimate partners.

## **Results**

### **Hypothesis 1**

When comparing prevalence rates of psychological aggression to prevalence rates of physical assault in of a sample of college students (n=533): 197 (37%) did not report a single occurrence of psychological aggression or physical assault, 224 (42%) reported at least one occurrence of psychological aggression but no occurrences of physical assault, nine (1.7%) reported at least one occurrence of physical assault but no occurrences of psychological aggression, and 103 (19.3%) reported at least one occurrence of physical assault and at least one occurrence of psychological aggression (see Table 1). The difference between these observed and the expected counts was statistically significant,  $X^2(2, n=533) = 56.04, p < 0.05$ .

### **Hypothesis 2**

When comparing prevalence rates of physical assault perpetration by male college student against intimate partners to female college student physical assault perpetration, out of a sample of men (n=138) and women (n=392): 113 (81.9%) men reported never perpetrating physical assault against their intimate partners and the remaining 25 (18.1%) men reported perpetrating physical assault at least once; whereas 305 (77.8%) of women reported never perpetrating physical assault against their intimate partners and the remaining 87 (22.2%) women reported perpetrating physical assault at least once (see Table 2). The observed and expected counts were not statistically different,  $X^2(2, n=530) = 1.02, p > 0.05$ .

### **Hypothesis 3**

When computing the frequency of reported physical assaults with a weapon against intimate partner among the college students (n=532), 528 (99.2%) reported never using a knife or gun to assault their partner and the remaining four (0.8%) reported using a knife or gun to assault their partner at least once.

## **Discussion**

IPV can take on various forms, including psychological aggression, injury, physical assault and sexual coercion. Studies of IPV focus on both psychological aggression and physical assault, thus the Revised Conflict Tactic Scale incorporated these scales into the survey. From analysis of the responses of the students, we can see that students more commonly engaged in psychological aggression than physical assault. The second highest majority refrains from engaging in both forms of IPV and a relatively small number (but still more than 20%) engage in physical assault alone or physical assault combined with psychological assault. We can conclude that within this sample, psychological aggression is more prevalent than physical assault against intimate partners. This

conclusion is not surprising as previous research studies claim that perpetration of psychological aggression in a marriage serves as a strong predictor of future perpetration of physical assault (Murphy & O'Leary, 1989). This assertion holds true for the college students within this study, revealing a similarity in relationship behaviors between both samples. However, it is important to note that this study found no evidence that men are more likely to report engaging in physical assault than women. Men are often assumed to be more physically aggressive than women but at least according to self-reports, this was not found within the sample. This is not to say that this hypothesis is not true but we cannot reject nor accept the hypothesis based on these data. Lastly, only a small percentage of the college students physically assaulted their intimate partners with a weapon. This is not surprising, as there are few reported incidents of homicidal and non-homicidal IPV with the use of a weapon.

The study methods used to investigate the research questions had limitations that need to be considered when interpreting these data. First, the data used were from a self-reported survey and there is a likelihood of underreporting of IPV. This underreporting can be attributed to the fact that IPV is a sensitive subject and, while participants were given a letter that explained confidentiality, they may have been fearful to honestly report more violent and criminal behavior (i.e., questions on the physical assault scale). Additionally, there could have been unintentional underreporting and/or over reporting because accurately reporting an exact number of occurrences in the past six months may be difficult. This is especially true for the psychological aggression scale because it is difficult to remember every conversation with a partner over a six month period. Another limitation is related to the demographics of the participants. The findings may not be generalizable to the general public, as the population sample was college students in select psychology classes at one university. The sample is not reflective of the overall population in the world, as it does not take into account personal values, cultural background, and other important identifiers that may shape a person's behavior in interpersonal relationships.

The study does tell us about the prevalence of IPV perpetration by a sample of Portland State University students in 2006. Psychological aggression and physical assault against intimate partners was occurring within the student population at a troubling rate. Additionally, while IPV rarely involves weapons, the incidents that do are likely very impactful for not only the victim and their families, but the surrounding community as well. The impact is likely even greater when the weapon usage leads to a fatality and the act is considered an intimate partner homicide. Therefore, it is important to decrease the perpetration of non-homicidal and homicidal acts of IPV. One strategy for preventing IPV is the implementation and enforcement of policies that remove weapons from those who are identified through their prior actions as being at high risk for future perpetration of IPV. A second study was conducted to specifically evaluate the effectiveness of such policies.

## **Study 2**

### **Introduction**

In the United States, 33% of female homicides and 4% of male homicides are committed by intimate partners (Zeoli & Webster, 2010). Additionally, 60% of intimate partner homicides are committed with firearms (Vigdor & Mercy, 2006). In response to these alarming statistics, states have taken legislative action. For example, Oregon recently enacted a new senate bill which gives state officers the ability to seize guns from perpetrators of intimate partner violence. Specifically, police officers are now able to confiscate guns of both convicted domestic violence offenders, as well as people with active restraining orders (Templeton, 2015). Some legislators have pushed to make it easier for victims of IPV to obtain weapons. Despite all these efforts, the majority of homicides involving intimate partners are a result of gun violence (Vigdor & Mercy, 2006). Researchers use these data to advocate for limitations on gun accessibility for domestic violence



perpetrators, but often do not address whether current gun confiscation laws have caused a substantial decrease in homicidal and non-homicidal IPV rates. Therefore, I conducted a review to determine whether and to what extent current gun seizure laws have achieved the goal of alleviating homicidal and non-homicidal IPV. The review also addressed whether there is a relationship between weapon possession and reported occurrences of homicidal and/or non-homicidal IPV.

Before beginning, however, it is important to review the history of gun laws in response to domestic violence and intimate partner violence homicides. In 1968, Congress passed the Gun Control Act, which was the first step towards imposing firearm regulations in the United States. The law included several restrictions, such as outlawing interstate firearm transfers among private parties. However, domestic and intimate partner violence was not a pressing issue during the enactment period so it had gaps in its efficiency towards alleviating gun violence within domestic and intimate partner relationships. To include domestic violence language into the law, the 1996 Lautenberg Amendment was passed, which was a revision of the 1968 Gun Control Act. Most importantly, the amendment "makes it unlawful for an individual convicted of a misdemeanor crime of domestic violence to ship, transport, possess, or receive firearms or ammunition in or affecting commerce" (Browning, 2010). The purpose of the amendment was to include convicted misdemeanor domestic violence offenders into the demographic of those who cannot possess firearms because records show that these acts are frequently prosecuted at the misdemeanor level instead of as felonies. Furthermore, the amendment revises the law to include crimes with attempted use of physical force. This revised language used in the law caused extensive ambiguity between jurisdictions and have been problematic to implement, as there is no clear definition of what physical force entails and if threats should be included into the definition. However, it is important to note that, over a 16 year period, the law denied over 109,000 people from purchasing a gun because of previous domestic violence misdemeanor crimes or restraining orders ("Domestic Violence & Firearms Policy Summary," 2014). This statistic suggests that the law has worked to decrease the likelihood of access to firearms for violent offenders, but fails to prove whether the law has specifically caused a decrease in the actual homicidal and non-homicidal IPV crime rates.

Various states have also addressed the issue of gun violence within intimate and domestic partnerships. For example, sixteen states prohibit misdemeanor domestic violence offenders from purchasing or possessing firearms, with five of the states requiring the surrender of all firearms when convicted of domestic violence misdemeanors (See Table 3). An even larger number of states (n= 36) prohibit firearm possession and purchase for people who have active restraining orders against them with 31 of the states requiring the seizure of all firearms by either the court or police officers (See Table 4). Lastly, three states require the reporting of misdemeanor domestic violence offenses to background check databases, to ensure the prohibition of future firearm purchases for these offenders ("Domestic Violence & Firearms Policy Summary," 2014). All of these states passed laws to address the issue of intimate partner and domestic violence, but whether these laws effectively reduce IPV perpetrated with firearms needs to be evaluated.

Past research on the relationship between gun possession and intimate partner and domestic violence takes various psychological approaches, some of which claim that gun confiscation laws should be enacted. For example, some researchers take a behaviorist approach, as displayed by Berkowitz and LePage (1967), and argue that even the presence of a gun in the immediate environment serves as a stimulus cue for violence and/or aggression. They state that simply having a gun or other weapon in visible sight can amplify aggressive behavior. Thus, they take the stance that gun access should be limited, as ownership or possession can increase the probability of perpetrating violent acts.

Gun possession may be a risk factor for lethal IPV. Researchers have developed a tool called the Danger Assessment instrument which "helps to determine the level of danger an abused woman

has of being killed by her intimate partner” (Roehl, O’Sullivan, Webster, & Campbell, 2005). The instrument consists of 20 questions that assess various risk factors related to the level of danger of a victim. One of the most predictive items is whether the perpetrator has access to a gun, but also includes various other items such as employment and past threats. The researchers take a multi-faceted approach and state that simple access to a gun does not mean someone will commit homicidal IPV, but primarily argue that gun possession is the best predictor of fatal IPV occurrences.

Another approach, which takes a feminist/socio-cognitive approach, is the Duluth curriculum of domestic violence intervention. These researchers assert that power imbalances that perpetuate traditional gender roles contribute to the initiation of violence (Pence & Paymar, 1993). Currently, the Duluth curriculum is used in various domestic violence intervention programs as a way to restructure cognitive beliefs, in regards to gender roles in society. By doing so, the model assuages the need to engage in power-triggered violent behavior, which often includes gun threats and/or gun usage.

On the other hand, other researchers argue that gun confiscation laws should not be enacted and gun possession and/or purchasing of firearms should not be deemed unlawful. One major argument is that, by enacting legislation that restricts gun availability within a home, it will violate citizens’ constitutional right to bear arms. They argue that the effectiveness of current laws is inconclusive, thus it cannot be legally justified to impose laws that impede upon our right to possess a gun (Klein, Mitchell & Carbon, 2006). Additionally, some argue that previous victims of IPV need to have access to guns within their own home in order to protect themselves. By giving victims the ability to have a gun to protect themselves, it will create a more equal environment between members in a domestic or intimate partnership, as victims would then be capable of defending themselves in extreme circumstances. Lastly, gun access within a home may be necessary to protect members of a household from an outside intruder. For example, when a household is located in a gang-related or other crime-prone neighborhood, owning a gun may put the family at ease and decrease stress about possible intrusions.

Clearly researchers acknowledge the problem of IPV, but some fail to use primary data to support their hypotheses and current research evaluating effects of legal interventions is often conflicting. However, there are federal reports of IPV rates that can give insight into whether the gun laws have been effective at addressing the issue of homicidal and non-homicidal acts of IPV. Additionally, these data can discern whether a relationship exists between weapon possession and IPV. Because a lack of gun possession and immediate access could be overcome by individuals who are sufficiently motivated to obtain access to a gun, I hypothesize that current gun seizure laws have not achieved the goal of reducing both homicidal and non-homicidal intimate partner violence. Furthermore, because only a small percentage of IPV is committed with a weapon, I hypothesize that there is no relationship between weapon possession and reported occurrences of homicidal and non-homicidal IPV.

## **Methods**

To address my hypotheses, I conducted a scientific literature review. I first searched for literature that discussed current federal and state laws which specifically address domestic and intimate partner violence. Specifically, I focused on literature published within the past ten years. To determine which studies were most relevant, I conducted a literature search in three databases, including Google Scholar, Med Line and Psych Info. The keywords I used in my search of the databases included “domestic violence and gun”, “gun law efficacy”, and “domestic violence and homicide”. From the search, I found seven studies that focus on IPV gun laws, but only included those that examine the rates IPV after the implementation of the IPV laws. Additionally, I looked at studies that included federal data on homicidal and non-homicidal data to explore previous acts of

intimate partner violence and the trend of intimate partner violence rates before and after the implementation of legal remedies. One major database these studies relied on was compiled by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, which just recently released a report about intimate partner homicides in the United States (Catalano, 2013). From this, I compared the reported rates of IPV before and after implementation of gun repossession laws in several states. The goal of doing so was to yield additional findings, in order to help present implications for more effective legislative policies, in regards to effective preventative intervention strategies and programs.

## Results

One study I found determined if and how rates of domestic and intimate partner violence change when state laws are passed that prohibit people with active restraining orders or domestic violence misdemeanor convictions from purchasing guns and allow officers to confiscate guns from these individuals (Vigdor & Mercy, 2006). The researchers compared rates of intimate partner homicides, as reported by the Federal Bureau of Investigation Supplementary Homicide Report, in states with and without these laws and examined changes in these 46 states over a 20 year period (1982-2002). The victims were 10 years old or older and labeled as a spouse, ex-spouse, common-law spouse, boyfriend, girlfriend, or partner of the offender, and included both US citizens and non-US citizens. The results indicated that over the 20 year period, gun purchase prohibition for people with restraining orders leads to a 10% decrease in intimate partner homicides and 12% decrease in intimate partner homicides with firearms. When looking at this effect for year state averages, it was found that the passing of the law was concurrent with a decrease of about four intimate partner homicides within a year, with three of those homicides including firearms. Additionally, screening for misdemeanor domestic violence convictions or restraining orders showed a 9-13% decrease in intimate partner homicides. On the other hand, they found no significant decrease in reported incidents for states with misdemeanor domestic violence laws. Furthermore, laws with possession-only restrictions do not show significant impact, nor do gun purchasing laws for misdemeanor domestic violence offenders or gun confiscation laws. Lastly, gun possession restrictions for those with restraining orders led to an 8% decrease in intimate partner homicides and 9% decrease in intimate partner homicides with a firearm.

Another study reported an evaluation of various practices towards alleviating domestic violence (Klein, Mitchell & Carbon, 2006). One of these practices was the TARGET Program in Montgomery, Alabama. The program established a court system which catalyzes the trial process for high risk batterers who use firearms by minimizing the gap between the arrest date and hearing dates. To determine what qualifies as high risk, police officers get extensive training about how to analyze any arrests, protective orders and warrants related to domestic violence incidents. Additionally, various stakeholders, such as domestic violence programs, judges, citizens and probation officers, were educated about the issue and helped develop a community plan to address the various concerns of domestic violence with firearms. This plan consisted of flagging cases, protecting victims, evaluating offender characteristics and removing guns. The program showed success in the fact that the number of domestic violence homicides decreased from 7 in 2000 to 2 in 2001. Additionally, when officers were trained to look for firearms after a domestic violence incident, only 1-2 percent of future reports involve firearms (Klein, Mitchell, & Carbon, 2006).

Another state approach towards IPV that Klein, Mitchell and Carbon reported on was the implementation of various statutes in New Hampshire on January 1, 2001. These statutes included penalizing people subject to protective orders if they apply for firearms after being served a protective order, notifying the victim of their right to request a protective order and the removal of firearms, permitting officers to seize guns and ammunition while arresting and/or arriving at the scene of a suspected domestic violence incident, and a 15-day period for defendants to request the return of their firearms and ammunition after the expiration of the protective order. In a follow-up study of the success of these statutes, they compared rates of intimate partner homicides before

and after the implementation. Results showed a total of 18 intimate partner homicides in the two years prior to the statutes (1998-2000), whereas in the two years following (2001-2003) there were only 8 reported intimate partner homicides.

Another method used to address my research questions in these studies is to survey women who petitioned for restraining orders. In one study (Vittes, Webster, Frattaroli, Claire, & Wintemute, 2013), detectives within Butte and San Mateo counties were assigned to a pilot program where they were given knowledge about appropriate procedures to take, in regards to removing guns from people as they serve them with restraining orders. Afterwards, the women who requested restraining orders were interviewed via telephone about their experience and perceptions of IPV and firearms. The sample of 17 women were at least 17 years old, spoke English or Spanish, requested a restraining order in the county between October 2007 and June 2010, and their partner had at least one gun confiscated as a result of the restraining order. The survey interview consisted of various demographic questions, as well as examined various aspects of the relationship (i.e., whether the victim and restrained person were married or cohabitating). In the six months preceding the restraining order program, ten of the restraining order petitioners reported fear of safety because the restrained individuals had access to a gun, with three of the women reporting being threatened or abused with a gun in that six month period. At the end of the program, the respondents were asked about their feelings towards gun confiscation effectiveness and necessity, as well as if they were victims of abuse or threats in the follow up period. After evaluating the perceptions and experiences of restraining order petitioners, researchers found that none of the victims reported gun-related abuse in the six month follow-up period, but seven women still reported being fearful of being abused or threatened. One factor that may account for the ruminating fear is the gap between how many guns the petitioners reported the restrained individuals possessed and the actual number of guns that were confiscated by law enforcement. Eight of the petitioners reported a higher number of guns than confiscated, three of the petitioners reported a lower number of guns than confiscated, and five reported an equal amount of guns were confiscated.

An important and comprehensive study by McPhedran and Mauser (2013) focused on gun laws in Canada, searching for a change in trend for female intimate partner homicide incidents. Looking at federal data between 1974 and 2009, the researchers used a sample of homicides between legally married, common-law, separated, and divorced couples who were 15 years old or older. The results revealed a lack of significant change in the already downward trend of firearm homicides, thus implying that these laws had no effect on the pre-existing trend. Any minute changes found were not concurrent with the passing of legislative laws regulating gun possession.

Finally, a study conducted by Zeoli and Webster (2013) aimed to find a possible interaction between alcohol, abuse, and intimate partner homicide by analyzing IPV policies, alcohol taxes, and police staffing and their effect on intimate partner homicide. The researchers looked at federal data from the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Supplementary Homicide Reports of 46 of the largest cities in the US between 1979 and 2003, studying trends in intimate partner homicides with and without firearms. The criteria for the data used included homicide victims killed with and without firearms who were at 15 years or older and categorized as either current spouses, former spouses, boyfriends, girlfriends or partners of offenders. Results showed that restricting firearm access for people with domestic violence restraining orders led to a 19% decrease in intimate partner homicide risk and 25% decrease in intimate partner homicide with firearm risk at the city-level. Additionally, to address the hypothesis that increasing police staffing leads to a decrease in intimate partner homicides with and without firearms, they compared the rates of the two variables between 1979 and 2003. They found that in 1979, when there were an estimated record-high number of two intimate partner homicides with firearms per thousand people and three intimate partner homicides without firearms per thousand people; there was only one police officer per thousand people. However, in 2003, when there were an estimated record-low number of 0.75

intimate partner homicides with firearms and 1.25 intimate partner homicides without firearms; there were roughly 1.75 police officers per thousand people. Despite these promising findings, the researchers found no significant correlation between firearm confiscation and misdemeanor domestic violence offenses. Also, they found that raising taxes on alcohol alone will not lead to a decrease in intimate partner homicides by people subject to restraining orders or misdemeanor convicts. Lastly, the combined interaction of domestic violence policies, alcohol taxes and police staffing had no effect on those with misdemeanor convictions.

## **Discussion**

The results did not support the hypothesis that gun confiscation laws are ineffective at preventing people with restraining orders from committing acts of IPV with gun involvement. Rather, after the passing of such laws a substantial decrease occurred in reported rates of IPV perpetration by people subject to restraining orders. However, the results did support the hypothesis that gun confiscation laws are ineffective at preventing people with misdemeanor domestic violence offenses from committing acts of IPV with gun involvement. Reported rates of violence in each study did not decrease concurrently following the passing of the laws. Lastly, it is inconclusive whether there is a relationship between weapon possession and reported occurrences of homicidal and non-homicidal acts of IPV. I am unaware of a well-designed study to address this issue. Current studies include only small samples and rely on qualitative data.

The literature used in my review had various limitations. First, various research studies revealed a discrepancy between the intent of domestic violence gun laws and actual implementation. Victims report a lack of removal of all guns from the home, which can be attributed to lack of disclosure from defendants about the number of guns in their possession (Vittes, Webster, Frattaroli, Claire, & Wintemute, 2013). This discrepancy between intent and implementation may have led to skewed estimates about the successfulness of these laws. Secondly, the Zeoli and Webster study failed to explain how they measured the level of risk, thus the findings may have been the result of confounding variables that were not considered. Similarly, the Klein, Mitchell and Carbon study failed to explain whether there was a baseline to determine whether the decrease of intimate partner homicides was concurrent with the implementation of the TARGET program, thus it is inconclusive whether this change was a result of the program or other factors that also varied with time. Lastly, and most importantly, the data used relies on previously reported acts of homicidal and non-homicidal IPV and do not take into account unreported incidents, misdemeanors that never went to trial, and inconclusive deaths of partners. Consequently, the effects found may only be pertinent to these reports. Typically, the reported acts are more serious and there are an extensive number of unreported acts. Therefore, as with many domestic violence studies, I was not able to research all acts of IPV. It is unclear whether future research will have the ability to do so, as people may believe that disclosing this information could put them in legal trouble.

## **Conclusion**

IPV is an ongoing social problem and public health issue we are facing in the United States. Ranging from psychological consequences to physical consequences, people are being victimized by their intimate partners. This phenomenon affects people across a range of ages, including young adults in college, many who are forming their first committed intimate relationships. One way to alleviate this issue is the implementation of laws restricting gun access and possession. However, there is a widespread debate about what is the best approach towards gun laws that maintain safety and protect second amendment rights. Past research studies addressing the concern report conflicting findings and have not necessarily proven the laws to be effective in all realms. There is a consensus that the passing of these laws are concurrent with a decrease in IPV perpetration by people subject to restraining orders, but past research shows no correlation between the restrictive

laws and misdemeanor IPV perpetration rates. Furthermore, they don't necessarily ensure the target individuals do not have immediate access to guns or are restricted from purchasing guns from private sellers. By actively assessing the implementation of these laws, we can derive effective means of intervening and preventing further engagement in IPV. My research aims to do so, by looking at reported acts of IPV among college students and assessing the effects on IPV of the overall public after the implementation of gun laws.

The findings from the first study I conducted imply that there is a high prevalence of psychological aggression against intimate partners of college students and less prevalence of physical assaults. This is not to say that physical assault among college students in intimate partnerships is not a significant problem because the consequences are still detrimental. However, it does imply that we need to find ways to address psychological aggression among intimate partners just as actively as we are trying to reduce physical assault among intimate partners.

In regard to the effectiveness of current gun laws, I found a consensus that restraining orders protect citizens from being victims of IPV. This consistent finding may be the reason that so many states have passed laws to ban gun possession for people with restraining orders, as research shows the widespread success. Additionally, there seems to be a lack of success for laws that ban gun possession for perpetrators of misdemeanor domestic violence. This implies that there is a difference in the likelihood of perpetrating violent behavior between people that commit misdemeanors acts and people who are served restraining orders. Laws addressing acts of domestic violence misdemeanors need to take a different, possibly stricter, approach because research shows the laws are intended for more violent people.

Some of the studies have attributed the success of gun prohibition and/or confiscation laws to various potentially associated factors, such as education of families, children, judges, mandatory reporting of restraining orders and/or domestic violence misdemeanors, and an increase of police staff who have specific training for confiscating guns. Further research should compare groups with and without these factors to determine if it is best practice to include these supplementary techniques into IPV guns laws. The issue IPV is a very sensitive topic, which could account for the conflicting research that exists. However, researchers should not use that reason to deter themselves from analyzing the impact of various legislative measures. IPV is a social problem and public health issue that needs to be addressed sooner than later, for the sake of future potential victims.

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## Tables

Table 1

*Number of Students Reporting Psychological Aggression and Physical Assault Perpetration*

	Physical Assault		Total
	No	Yes	
No	197 (37.0%)	9 (1.7%)	206 (38.7%)
Psychological Aggression			
Yes	224 (42.0%)	103 (19.3%)	327 (61.3%)

Total	421 (79%)	112 (21.0%)	533 (100%)
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Note.  $\chi^2 = 56.04$ ,  $p < .05$ .

Table 2

*Number of Students Reporting Physical Assault Perpetration by Gender*

Physical Assault	Gender	
	Males	Females
Yes	25 (18.1%)	87 (22.2%)
No	113 (81.9%)	305 (77.8%)
Total	138 (100%)	392 (100%)

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Note.  $\chi^2 = 1.02$ ,  $p > .05$

Table 3

Number of States with Gun Laws for Domestic Violence Misdemeanants



Gun Laws for People With Domestic Violence Misdemeanors	Number of States With This Law
Prohibits misdemeanor domestic violence offenders from purchasing or possessing firearms	16
Requires immediate surrender of firearms when convicted of domestic violence misdemeanors	5
Mandatory reporting of domestic violence misdemeanor convictions to the database used for background checks for the purchase of firearms	3

Note: Table constructed with information from "Domestic Violence & Firearms Policy Summary," (2014)

Table 4

Number of States with Gun Laws for People Subject to a Domestic Violence Protective Order

Gun Laws for People With A Domestic Violence Protective Order	Number of States With This Law
Prohibits people who are subject to domestic violence protective orders from purchasing or possessing guns	36
Requires or authorizes law enforcement officials to seize firearms when serving a domestic violence protective order	4
Requires or authorizes the court to seize firearms when granting a domestic violence protective order	27

Note: Table constructed with information from "Domestic Violence & Firearms Policy Summary," (2014)