

Prior DUIs predict future criminal activity among firearm owners

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Among individuals who legally purchased handguns in California, prior convictions for driving under the influence (DUI) and other alcohol-related crimes were associated with a substantial increase in risk for subsequent violent or firearm-related crime, according to a study published Jan. 30 in *Injury Prevention* by the UC Davis Violence Prevention Research Program.

Many prior studies of the general population have established strong associations between acute alcohol intoxication or a history of alcohol abuse and an increased risk for suicide, homicide and other forms of [violence](#) using firearms. They also have shown that DUI offenders have a high prevalence of excessive alcohol consumption and alcohol-use disorders and are more likely to engage in criminal activity, including violence and weapon-related crimes.

The UC Davis study, however, is the first to associate the misuse of alcohol with future criminal activity among legal firearm owners, a group that is also more likely than others to report [excessive alcohol consumption](#). The research, along with similar studies now under way that are larger and rely on more current data, may help inform the development of [violence prevention](#) measures focused on access to firearms by high-risk individuals.

"We found prior DUI and other alcohol-related [convictions](#) among legal handgun owners in California increased the risk of arrest for a violent or firearm-related crime fourfold to fivefold," said Garen Wintemute, professor of emergency medicine and director of the UC Davis Violence Prevention Research Program. "The increase in risk was large and independent of other well-known risk factors for future violence. This suggests that prior convictions for alcohol-related crime may be an important predictor of risk for future criminal activity among firearm owners."

Contrary to the results of some previously published studies, the extent of the increase in risk of future arrest was not related to the number of prior alcohol-related convictions. The relative increase in risk associated with alcohol-related convictions was greater than those associated with younger age, male sex, and a prior history of violence.

For the current study, the researchers conducted a secondary analysis of data originally published in 1998 that assessed prior criminal activity as a predictor of future violence among handgun purchasers. They studied a random sample of individuals under age 50 who purchased a handgun from a licensed retailer in California in 1977, stratifying the group according to the presence or absence of an arrest record at the time of purchase.

Using criminal records from the California Department of Justice, the researchers identified individuals having prior convictions for DUI and other alcohol-related crimes and compared them with purchasers who had no criminal history. They tracked [criminal activity](#) from 15 days after the handgun purchase (California had a 15-day waiting period at the time) up through December 31, 1991.

The study population included an oversample of persons with an arrest history. Of the 4,066 individuals studied, 31.3 percent (1,272) had alcohol-related convictions at the time of purchase, 77.8 percent of which were for DUI. Sixty-eight percent (2,794) had no prior criminal history. By 1991, 32.8 percent of those with prior alcohol-related convictions and 5.7 percent of those with no prior criminal history were arrested for a violent or firearm-related crime. Nearly 16 percent of those with prior alcohol-related convictions and 2.7 percent of those with no prior criminal history were arrested for murder, rape, robbery, or aggravated assault.

In a subset analysis, handgun purchasers with only one DUI conviction and no arrests or convictions for crimes of other types were 4.2 times as likely as those with no prior criminal record to be arrested subsequently for a firearm-related or violent crime, and 3.8 times as likely to be arrested for murder, rape, robbery, or aggravated assault.

"Understanding risk factors for violence is obviously of interest in a population that by definition has universal access to firearms," Wintemute explained. "In essence, we've learned that a history of alcohol-related crimes such as DUI has the same type of predictive significance among firearm owners that it does in the general population."

More information: *Injury Prevention*, [DOI: 10.1136/injuryprev-2016-042181](https://doi.org/10.1136/injuryprev-2016-042181)

Provided by UC Davis

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