



Extreme Risk Protection Orders: An Evidence-based Approach to Preventing Suicide

Suicide has become a national crisis with rates increasing by more than 30% in half of U.S. States (CDC, 2019). Emerging evidence demonstrate that Extreme Risk Protection Order (ERPOs) laws have the potential to save lives and lower suicide rates while preserving an individual's due process and second amendment rights (Martin, 2020). ERPOs are state laws that provide communities and law enforcement with an opportunity to petition the courts to intervene, and temporarily remove a firearm from an individual who is a possible risk to themselves or others without legal repercussions. In fact, data shows almost 80% of individuals suffering from suicidal thoughts show warning signs emphasizing the need for prevention measures that can intervene early when risk is detected (Hollaway, 2007).

- Currently, there are 19 states plus the District of Columbia that have ERPO laws in place. The various jurisdictions for each state allow for multiple groups of people to file for an ERPO such as family members and law enforcement.
- Suicide attempts made with a firearm have been shown to be fatal in 90% of individuals (Conner, Azrael, & Miller, 2019). A large amount of research has linked higher suicide rates in states with higher firearm ownerships per household (Miller et al., 2013).
- Past research has identified states with ERPO laws as having lower gun-related suicide rates (Anestis, 2019).
- About 90% of individuals contemplating suicide by firearm will not choose another lethal mean (e.g. pills, knives, etc.) if the firearm is unavailable. (Owens, 2002); (Anestis, 2016).
 - o An average of 70% of suicides are carried out less than an hour from when the individual decides to attempt suicide (Simon, 2001).
- Individuals who are at risk for suicide can typically pass a background check in order to obtain a firearm (Swanson et al., 2017).
- A study in 2019 examining the effect of ERPO laws in Indiana showed one life being saved from suicide for every 10-gun removals (Swanson et al).
- A Connecticut study's analysis examining over 700 gun removals between 1999 and 2013, found that for every 10 to 20 firearms removed by implementation of an ERPO, there was one suicide related death avoided (Swanson, Norko, Lin, et al., 2017).
- There is an increased need for medical professionals to be adequately trained in identifying suicide risk (Gondi, Pomerantz, & Sacks, 2019). Many providers do not feel comfortable inquiring about firearm possession due to lack of knowledge of the benefits of ERPO's or not wanting to discomfort their patient (Wintemute, 2016). Moreover, a study found that 55% of patients with suicidal thoughts or attempts were not assessed for firearm access before release (Betz et al., 2016).

Recommendations

- ERPO laws should be enacted in all 50 states and territories in the United States.
- Congress should expand federal funding for gun violence prevention research at the Department of Justice (DOJ) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Moreover research on ERPO laws should be funded to assess their implementation as well as their impacts on preventing suicide, homicides and other acts of violence as well as protecting gun owners' rights.
- APA recommends increased state and federal funding to enact and implement ERPO laws throughout the nation.
- The Department of Justice should implement a national strategy to provide states with ERPO technical assistance and support including psychology-informed, evidence-based training of judges and court employees on suicide and ERPO laws.
- Additional funding should be made available for training for health care providers on assessing suicide risk, intervening and the benefits of ERPO laws.

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