



E60 A Prospective Analysis of the Outcomes of Violent Prone Restraint Incidents in Policing

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The goals of this presentation are to: assess the outcomes of prone positioning of violent subjects by the police, assess the relationship of using restraint techniques and prone positioning of violent subjects, examine the relationship between using electronic control devices and weight applied on the back of a subject by police during restraint and the outcome of the incident, describe the implications of study findings as they impact sudden deaths in custody, and describe recommendations based on the study findings.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by serving to demonstrate the dynamics of safely using the prone restraint position and force devices used by the police in violent use-of-force confrontations.

Placing a violent subject in the prone position by police officers has been debated since the 1980s. It has been postulated that prone positioning may be hazardous when applied with various populations and may contribute to a sudden death-in-custody based on a theory of restraint asphyxia. Although scientific research contradicts the theory, the debate continues over the use of the prone restraint position. What is not known is how many combative persons are placed in the prone restraint position after the use of varying force modalities used by the police and the outcomes of these violent confrontations. The purpose of this study was to examine the outcomes of the police use of force and the use of the prone restraint position with violent subjects.

Using a prospective research design, officers in 17 police agencies in six states documented the use of the prone position, the use of varying force modalities with combative subjects, and the outcomes of these incidents for one year. Documentation of 1,085 prone incidents was analyzed and the majority of the confrontations involved a male subject. Subjects displayed behaviors consistent with alcohol impairment, mental distress, illicit drug use, or a combination of mental distress/illicit drugs in 85% of the incidents. Over 70% of the subjects were placed and restrained in the prone position from one to five minutes. Seven force modalities were commonly used including handcuffs and hobbles, electronic control devices, subject control techniques, an aerosol, and weight applied on the back of the subject during the restraint incident. No subject died and 80% of the subjects did not sustain an injury.

The findings of this field study confirm previous laboratory research performed on this subject which has indicated the safe use of the prone position. The findings showed that the use of the prone position provides a safe method for controlling, restraining, and securing combative individuals. Recommendations for police officers, police administrators, emergency medical personnel, and forensic investigators are presented.

Prone, Police, Restraints