Pierce County Sheriff’s Department’s use of force in comparative perspective

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Project Goals

• Research Questions:
  • How does the Pierce County Sheriff’s Department compare to peer agencies nationally and locally in use of force reports?
  • How proportionate or disproportionate is use of force to racial demographics compared to peer agencies?
  • How do use of force tactics compare nationally and in Washington state?
What is Use of Force?

- Pierce County Sheriff’s Department Policy Manual 300.1.1: “Force [is] The application of physical techniques or tactics, chemical agents, or weapons to another person. It is not a use of force when a person allows him/herself to be searched, escorted, handcuffed, or restrained.”

- Per 300.2, “Law Enforcement Officers shall use only that amount of force that reasonably appears necessary, given the facts and circumstances perceived by the LEO at the time of the event, to accomplish a legitimate law enforcement purpose.”

- So far, there is no national database on use of force (there are plans for both the WA Attorney General per SB 5259 and the FBI to create one).

- Academic literature on use of force can only provide local case studies.
Some quick definitional issues

• Use of force constitutes around 4% of arrests
• Use of force reports vs. use of force incidents
• Pierce County Sheriff’s Department is somewhat idiosyncratic in counting compliant handcuffs and verbal commands as use of force reports—point and direct is sometimes not counted for other agencies.
• Some disagreement on how to measure racial disparity, activity based vs. population based models
• Race
• Risk Ratio
Datasets

• Use of force data:
  • PCSD BlueTeam database
  • Open-source use of force data collected by PoliceScorecard.org
  • Open-source data collected from online portals (e.g. Spokane Police Department, Seattle Police Department)

• Crime and arrest data:
  • Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs’ crime and arrest data

• Population data
  • American Community Survey 2015-2019/Census 2020 data
  • Office of Financial Management population data (for determining population of unincorporated areas)
Methodological problems with use of force data

- No national agreement or standard for use of force.
- Different standards for recording use of force (incidents vs. reports)
- Different types of information captured in use of force records
  - Range of data available from a list of tactics used and the date to extremely detailed incidents
- Data can’t necessarily capture the complexities of interactions that create use of force incidents (usually conceptualized as a back and forth of subject resistance and officer response)
- Limited data availability (years not in electronic records and thus unusable, etc.)
- Data was extensively cleaned and simplified for comparison
Modeling suggest that the Pierce County Sheriff’s Department use of force reports per 1000 residents falls broadly in the middle of other Washington agencies in terms of the prevalence of use of force, standardized by population.

Use of force report tactic analysis suggests that the Sheriff’s office uses slightly less control holds/takedowns as a proportion, and about half as much physical force (10.92% vs 20.5%) than comparative agencies. They also use more firearm display, as well as roughly double the amount of carotid restraint control holds (8.05%) vis-à-vis the other Washington agencies (3.73%), and K-9 display or contact proportionally more. They use electronic control devices slightly less.

Use of force incidents per 1000 Pierce County residents by race suggest that Black residents are about 5 times as likely to experience force as white residents, Native residents are about 2.3 times as likely (Latino and Asian American/Pacific Islander residents are somewhat less likely than white residents), but these ratios seem average, if not slightly better than most of the other agencies examined.

Use of force incidents per 100 arrests by race tell a slightly different story, with Black residents about 1.6 times as likely as white residents to experience force in their arrest, and Natives at 1.4 times (Latino and Asian American/Pacific Islander residents are somewhat less likely again), which seems to generally fall in the range of other agencies reviewed here. This change in rate holds true for youth as well.
What drives use of force rates?

- Collected data on population size, number of police officers, violent crime rates, and arrests to try and model the various use of force rates
- Created the use of force reports per 1000 residents variable as a way of standardizing and comparing use of force rates across different departments
- Multiple regression models weigh how much influence a variable has on the model, each step increase in that variable leads to a corresponding increase in the dependent variable (use of force reports per 1000 residents)
- Controlling for a lot of different factors (population, crime rate, etc.), the most significant variable predicting the use of force report rate is the agency itself
- The Pierce County Sheriff’s Department is about average among these reviewed Washington agencies
Use of force reports per 1000 residents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Auburn Police Dept.</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>4.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bellingham Police Dept.</td>
<td>6.98</td>
<td>5.68</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clallam Co. Sheriff</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clark Co. Sheriff</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>2.01</td>
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<tr>
<td>Island Co. Sheriff</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kent Police Dept.</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>3.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King County Sheriff</td>
<td>2.02</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirkland Police Dept.</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Kitsap Co. Sheriff</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasco Police Dept.</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pierce Co. Sheriff</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.15</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.21</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.1</strong></td>
<td><strong>2.55</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seattle Police Dept.</td>
<td>2.37</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>2.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snohomish Co. Sheriff</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>1.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spokane Police Dept.</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vancouver Police Dept.</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yakima Police Dept.</td>
<td>8.36</td>
<td>8.07</td>
<td>7.54</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Comparing Use of Force Incidents

- Agencies use different categories than you will see here
- These are a somewhat condensed version of force tactics drawn from California’s Use of Force database, which are:
  - Blunt/impact weapon, Carotid restraint control hold, Chemical spray, Firearm Discharge, Firearm Display, Electronic control device, K-9, Officer vehicle contact, Other control hold/takedown, Other, Other physical contact (Use of hands, fists, feet, etc.)
- California use of force data only includes tactics when there is an injury or a firearm is discharged
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Force tactic rank</th>
<th>New Jersey Agencies</th>
<th>Other WA Agencies</th>
<th>Pierce County Sheriff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Other control hold/takedown 52.53%</td>
<td>Other control hold/takedown 48.06%</td>
<td>Other control hold/takedown 43.17%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Other physical contact (hands, fist, feet, etc.) 33.65%</td>
<td>Other physical contact (hands, fist, feet, etc.) 20.5%</td>
<td>Firearm display 17.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Other 10.22%</td>
<td>Electronic control device (discharge or display) 11.9%</td>
<td>Other physical contact (hands, fist, feet, etc.) 10.92 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Chemical spray (e.g. OC/CS) 2.8%</td>
<td>Firearm display 4.3%</td>
<td>Electronic control device (discharge or display) 9.99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Electronic control device (discharge or display) 0.48%</td>
<td>Carotid restraint control hold 3.55%</td>
<td>Carotid restraint control hold 8.05%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Racial Disproportionality Metrics

• This section looks at use of force incidents, rather than use of force reports
• Method 1: look at use of force incidents per racial group using Census data. This is used to identify racial disparities in use of force application and is expressed as a rate per thousand residents
• Method 2: look at use of force incidents per racial group using arrest data, which is expressed as rate of use of force incidents per 100 arrests, as this reflects those who are in contact with law enforcement, as not everyone has the same likelihood of being arrested
• These slides use those different rates to generate risk ratios that non-white people will experience force, relative to white people, e.g. they are x time more likely (or less likely) to experience force
Risk Ratios of Use of Force per 1000 Residents by Race

- **White**: 1.0
- **Hispanic or Latino**: 0.9
- **Black or African American**: 5.1, 6.4
- **Asian American or Pacific Islander**: 0.9
- **American Indian and Alaska Native**: 3.6, 9.0

Ratios per Police Department:
- Auburn Police Department
- Bellingham Police Department
- Clallam County Sheriff’s Department
- Kent Police Department
- King County Sheriff’s Department
- Kitsap County Sheriff’s Department
- Pierce County Sheriff’s Department
- Renton Police Department
- Seattle Police Department
- Snohomish County Sheriff’s Department
- Spokane Police Department
- Vancouver Police Department
- Yakima Police Department
Risk Ratios of Use of Force per 100 Arrests by Race

White

Hispanic or Latino

Black or African American

Asian American or Pacific Islander

American Indian and Alaska Native

Auburn Police Department
Bellingham Police Department
Clallam County Sheriff's Department
Kent Police Department
King County Sheriff's Department
Kitsap County Sheriff's Department
Pierce County Sheriff's Department
Renton Police Department
Seattle Police Department
Spokane Police Department
Vancouver Police Department
Yakima Police Department
Comparing various metrics of racial disproportionality
Next Steps

• Performance Audit Committee:
  • 911 Calls Analysis
  • Follow up on any use of force questions
• Pierce County Criminal Justice Work Group:
  • Legislation Impact Analysis
  • Comparative Analysis (as more data becomes available)
  • Incident Outcome Analysis (see how use of force incidents affect broader justice system outcomes)
  • Body Camera Context
Questions?