

ANCHORAGE POLICE DEPARTMENT
OFFICER-INVOLVED SHOOTING REVIEW
2009-2023



SUMMARY

In July 2024, the Anchorage Police Department (APD) began a 15-year review of officer-involved shootings (OIS) to answer three (3) primary questions:

1. First, what **trends** exist longitudinally regarding OIS?
2. Second, are there **policy recommendations** that may impact OIS events?
3. Third, are there **training recommendations** that may impact OIS events?

Forty-five (45) OIS were included in the dataset. The information in this report was analyzed from a statistical perspective and included 28 data points. OIS were also qualitatively analyzed after reviewing police reports, video evidence, criminal interviews and administrative interviews.

The following are recommendations based on the review:

- **Increase the use of team tactics** when responding to incidents where there is an elevated risk to the public or officers.
- **Enhance the department's less lethal capabilities** to increase stand-off distance and effectiveness increasing reaction time.
- **Emphasize the role of on-scene leadership** and communication during high-risk responses.
- **Ensure adequate tools and resources** are being utilized in the field of operation.

INTRODUCTION

DATA DESCRIPTION

The Anchorage Police Department (APD) analyzed circumstances, officers and subjects involved in 45 incidents in which APD officers discharged a weapon under the color of authority while on-duty or off-duty, irrespective of injuries to subjects, officers or third parties (OIS)¹ from Jan. 1, 2009, through Dec. 31, 2023. The eight (8) OIS that occurred in 2024 were not included in this report as they are a part of on-going investigations.

USE OF FORCE OVERVIEW

Police are given needed legal latitude and justification to perform their duties under the color of authority.² Government departments that fall under the umbrella of law enforcement are set apart from other areas of the government in that they can use physical force to influence compliance when enforcing laws.

The decision to use force is complicated, as it often occurs in circumstances that are tense, uncertain and rapidly evolving. An individual officer's decision to use force is even more complex. Additionally, data police collect to measure the use of force is sparse for several reasons. One reason is the lack of mandated reporting. Secondly, among those departments that do keep use of force data, there is not a universally accepted method of reporting, making it difficult for national comparisons to take place.

Two landmark Supreme Court decisions govern police use of force. The first case is *Tennessee v. Garner*, in which the Supreme Court ruled that using deadly force to prevent the escape of a suspected felon violates the Fourth Amendment's prohibition against unreasonable seizures, especially if the suspect is unarmed and non-violent.³

The Court further stated that deadly force may only be employed against an offender who has attempted or committed an offense involving the infliction or threatened infliction of great bodily harm. Additionally, officers may not use deadly force against unarmed, non-violent offenders who commit property crimes. Furthermore, if an officer is justified in using deadly force, they are required to provide a verbal warning, if it is feasible to do so.

The second case is *Graham v. Connor*. In this case, the Court emphasized that when analyzing the use of force, it is essential to recognize officers must often make split-second decisions in circumstances that are tense, uncertain and rapidly evolving. Thus, the amount of force used must be measured by what the officer knew at the scene rather than through the lens of hindsight. The standard of reasonableness cannot be defined precisely or applied mechanically; instead, it requires careful consideration of the specific facts and circumstances of each case, which include:

- Severity of the crime.
- The immediate threat of the suspect to the safety of the officer or others.
- Whether the suspect is actively resisting arrest or attempting to evade arrest by flight.⁴

¹APD. [APD Policy PI 3.05.030](#)

²That semblance or presumption of authority sustaining the acts of a public officer which is derived from his apparent title to the office or from a writ or other process in his hands apparently valid and regular. *State v. Oates*, 80 Wis. 634, 57 N. W. 290, 39 Am. St. Rep. 912; *Wyatt v. Monroe*, 27 Tex. 208 ([Black's Law Dictionary, 2nd ed.](#))

³ *Tennessee v. Garner*, 471 U.S.1, 85 (1985).

⁴ *Graham v. Connor*, 490 U.S. 386 (1989).

THE LAW VS. POLICY

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The legal boundaries affecting an officer's use of force are determined by the legal standard established in *Graham v. Connor*. The most significant of these standards is the immediate threat to the safety of officers or others.⁵

The standard establishes a balancing test where one side of the scale represents the protection against unreasonable searches and seizures guaranteed by the Fourth Amendment of the federal Constitution. On the opposite side is the government's interest in seizing a person.

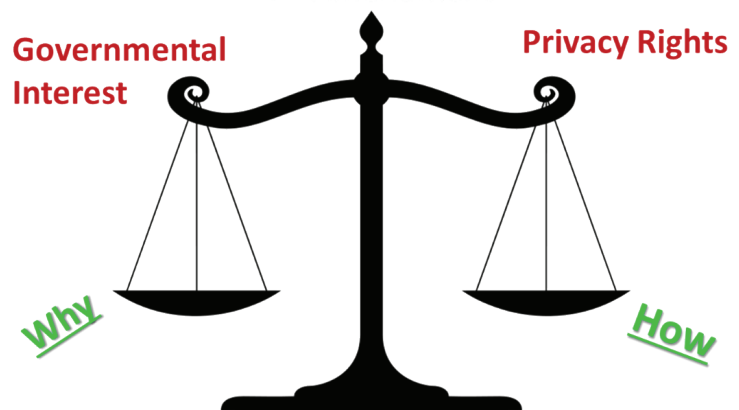
For instance, seizing a homicide suspect involves a greater governmental interest, as it aims to protect public safety, compared to seizing someone for a traffic violation. The greater the governmental interest, the less stringent the protections against an unreasonable seizure become, although these rights are never completely eliminated.

A simpler way to think about this is to consider the governmental interest as the rationale for using force (such as in the case of a low-level crime offender) balanced against how the force was applied (whether significant or minimal force was used).

There are policy and legal considerations that fall outside of the federal legal requirement that may not accomplish a desired outcome. For example, legally there is no requirement for an officer to de-escalate, only to provide a warning prior to using force, if feasible.⁶

De-escalation is a tactic designed to place officers in a position to better address irrational, unpredictable or suicidal individuals. De-escalation helps officers remain focused and calm during crisis situations with the goal of bringing chaotic incidents to as peaceful a resolution as the suspect will afford.

The limitation on mandating de-escalation by policy or law is that de-escalation can only occur when feasible or safe to do so. The immediacy of a threat outlined in *Graham v. Connor* will always take priority over attempts to mitigate the use of force. In other words, officers can be required to attempt to mitigate lethal force up to the point where an immediate response is required by an officer to protect life, including their own. Laws or policies that require the use, or attempted use, of less-than-lethal options before applying force in a given situation have the same limitations. Fundamentally, the urgency of a threat may necessitate an immediate force response by an officer.



⁵ *Bryan v. McPherson*, 630 F.3d 805 (9th Circuit, 2009).

⁶ *Roell v. Hamilton*, 870 F.3d 471 (6th Circuit 2017).

THE LAW VS. POLICY

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Federal law serves as the primary standard for police use of force training, application, and investigation. In addition to this federal standard, there are several enhancements to policy and training that exceed the legal requirements.

De-escalation is one of the most suggested additions to police policy and training. De-escalation should be added to policy as a requirement if it is reasonable, safe and practicable. Additionally, policies should add specific examples of de-escalation use, creating clear expectations of officer behavior.

Some examples include:

- Using a non-threatening, non-confrontational tone of voice.
- Listening carefully and expressing empathy.
- Slowing down the pace of an incident.
- Waiting to engage the subject(s) until the threat subsides.
- Placing additional space or barriers between the officer and a subject(s).
- Permitting a subject to move about as long as it is safe.
- Permitting a subject to ask questions or engage in conversation.
- Tactical repositioning or seeking cover.
- Requesting additional resources.

As previously stated, officers are legally required to provide warnings before using force, if it is tactically feasible. When possible, officers should give a subject the opportunity to comply with these commands. However, a verbal warning is not required when an officer must make a split-second decision or reasonably believes that issuing the warning could endanger their safety or that of others.

The use of less lethal tools should be available to officers in high-risk situations to reduce the likelihood of resorting to lethal force before it becomes necessary for immediate self-defense. Warning shots should be prohibited, and shooting from or at moving vehicles should be limited to circumstances where the vehicle is being used as a weapon against an officer or another person. Both warning shots and shooting from moving vehicles increase the risk to the public while having limited effectiveness in stopping the threat.

Additionally, aiming a firearm should only occur in situations where it is objectively reasonable to believe that the circumstances may escalate to a point where deadly force could be justified. As the National Institute of Justice states, “An officer’s goal is to regain control as soon as possible while protecting the community. Use of force is an officer’s last option — a necessary course of action to restore safety in a community when other practices are ineffective.”⁷

Chokeholds, or vascular restraints, are not exclusively classified as deadly force in federal cases. However, it has become common practice to limit their use in situations where lethal force is authorized to reduce the risk to the public. Vascular restraint techniques require significant initial and continued training to ensure the techniques are applied properly, preventing any obstruction of airflow or the subject’s ability to breathe.

⁷ National Institute of Justice. “Overview of police use of force.” National Institute of Justice, U.S., Department of Justice, March 5, 2020.

NATIONAL DATA

NATIONAL RESEARCH ON POLICE USE OF DEADLY FORCE

Despite public interest in lethal force, less than 200 peer-reviewed articles have been written examining its use. Of those studies, citizens possessing a weapon present the most consistent risk factor in decisions to use deadly force.⁸

Many factors influence an officer's decision to use deadly force beyond just the presence of a weapon. An officer's perception of a threat, compared to the actual threat, plays a crucial role in understanding the decision to use force. Incidents involving a gun are perceived differently by officers. For example, a suspect holding a firearm is more dangerous than one reaching for it, which is more dangerous than simply having a firearm on their person.

Officer-based characteristics (age, gender, race, etc.) do not have a significant effect on their perception of danger or threat. However, several factors can influence how dangerous officers perceive a situation, including a subject's impairment, their level of agitation or history of violence, whether backup officers are present, the presence of bystanders and the severity of the crime.⁹

While data exists that highlights the factors increasing safety risks to officers, it should not be used to compare why one officer chooses to use force while another does not in similar circumstances. Both police officers and the public interpret and determine how to respond to each other during their interactions. This interpretive process affects the levels of resistance from the subject and the levels of force used by the officer. Some of this response is influenced by the perceived seriousness of the incident.¹⁰ Calls that are perceived as high-risk, or if they involve the commission of a more serious crime, have a higher likelihood of resulting in force. Conversely, when a subject perceives a crime or incident as less severe, such as an infraction or a low-risk event, they are more likely to be resistant.

When examining nationally represented research, it is also important to analyze force frequency. In 2022, more than 49 million people aged 16 and older were contacted by police. Of those contacts, 1.5% were subject to the threat of force or the use of non-lethal force,¹¹ making the use of force by police extremely rare.

Examining national data on police use of force, especially deadly force, is crucial for improving policies, training and practices within law enforcement. Additionally, this data helps lawmakers and the public understand the frequency of force used by the police, including APD.

⁸ Mora, D.O., Terrill, W., * Foster, J. (2023). A decade of police use of deadly force research (2011-2020). *Homicide Studies*. 27(1); 6-33.

⁹ Terrill, W., & Somers, L. (2023). Viewing firearm danger through the lens of police officers. *Homicide Studies*. 27(1); 55-76.

¹⁰ Alpert, G., Dunham, R., & MacDonald, J. (2004). Interactive police-citizen encounters that result in force. *Police Quarterly*. 7(4); 475-488.

¹¹ Tapp, S., & Dave, E. (October 2024). Contact between the police and the public, 2022. Bureau of Justice Statistics, NCJ 308847.

NATIONAL DATA

OTHER FACTORS

The influence of social media and the consolidation of media outlets plays a critical role shaping the opinion of the public regarding police use of deadly force, particularly in its frequency and instances of force applied to Black, Indigenous (and) People of Color (BIPOC)¹² individuals. However, at the same time, it is imperative to acknowledge the role of policing in an historical context to better understand the nuances and implications of working in partnership with BIPOC communities, and the response those communities may have when engaging officers based on that historical understanding and lived experience.

Mental health, alcohol and other substance use by the subject can impact officer decisions regarding the use of force. There is a 3% to 16% variance when determining the total percentage of call volume that has a mental health nexus.¹³ One of the key challenges surrounding mental health and police responses is the terminology used to describe incidents. Various terms such as, “individuals in crisis,” “people with behavioral health challenges,” “persons with mental illness,” “the mentally ill,” “distressed persons,” “consumers,” “apprehended mental health patients,” “emotionally disturbed persons,” “people with mental health problems,” and “people with mental disturbances” have all been employed when explaining police interactions with this population.

“Individuals” (or “people in crisis”) is the term that APD prefers because it effectively describes the population that APD encounters. Not everyone experiencing a crisis has a diagnosable mental illness, and not all people with diagnosable mental illnesses encountering the police are in a state of crisis.

In this context, “crisis” refers to a situation where an individual is struggling to cope with a personal problem, event or interpersonal situation, which is considered a critical or decisive point in their life. The moment can be emotionally overwhelming and traumatizing for the individual experiencing it, and understanding the emotional state of a subject is critical information for the responding officer. The term “crisis,” therefore, as used by APD, is a more inclusive term.¹⁴

There is very little data available that examines the involvement of people in crisis regarding OIS. Some data from national media outlets originated from independently collected data by the Washington Post and the Guardian. According to that data, 23% of individuals killed during interactions with police in 2015 displayed signs of a mental illness.¹⁵

Substance use by a subject is a significant anecdotal indicator of force. The true numbers of substance use involvement are not well known, and connections between usage and force may be even less understood than the connection to mental health issues. In 2001, the International Associations of Chiefs of Police (IACP) indicated that 46% of all use of force incidents occurred where the subject was intoxicated or under the influence of drugs.¹⁶

¹² Dierenfeldy, R., Jackson, E., Rosenberger, J., & Burgason, K. (2024). (Mis)Perceptions of the use of deadly force by police: Exploring the role of social media consumption. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 1(23).

¹³ Marcus, N., & Stergiopoulos, V. (2022). Re-examining mental health crisis intervention: A rapid review comparing outcomes across police, co-responder and nonpolice models. *Health and Social Care in the Community*, 30; 1665-1679.

¹⁴ Frederick, T., O'Connor, C., & Koziarski, J. (2018). Police interactions with people perceived to have a mental health problem: A critical review of frames, terminology, and definitions. *Victims & Offenders*, 13(8); 1037-1054.

¹⁵ Saleh, A., Appelbaum, P., Liu, X., Stroup, T., & Wall, M. (2018). Deaths of people with mental illness during interactions with law enforcement. *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, 58; 110-116.

¹⁶ International Association of Chiefs of Police. (2001). Police use of force in America. www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/2018-08/2001useofforce.pdf

ANCHORAGE POLICE DEPARTMENT DATA

INCIDENT CHARACTERISTICS

OVERALL TREND

APD's annual number of OIS ranged from one (1) to six (6) in a given year from 2009 to 2023 for an average of three (3) per year. There are no clear annual crime data trends that determined annual OIS frequency, and there are some years with more incidents (2012, 2013, and 2020) which are often preceded or followed by years with fewer incidents.

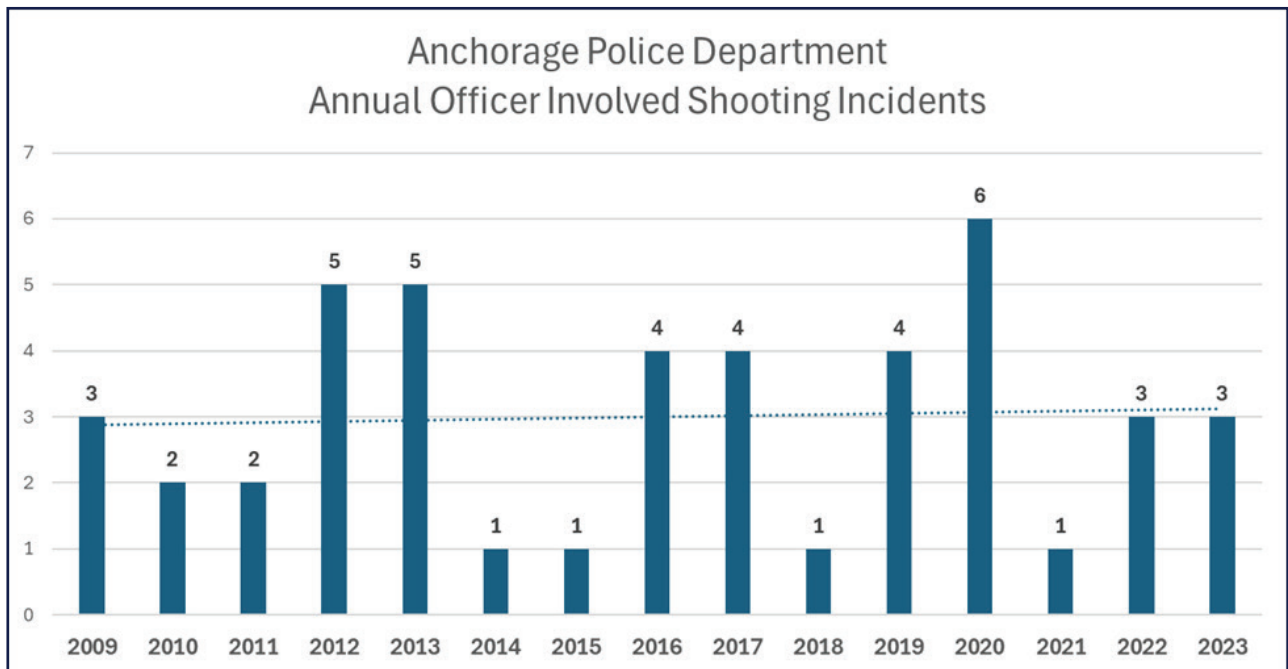


Figure 1: Annual Officer-involved Shooting Incidents

DAY OF WEEK AND TIME OF DAY

KEY FINDING: The probability of an OIS occurring on a particular day of week was less significant than time of day. More than a third (~37%) of the shootings occurred on Sunday and Monday. However, ~66.7% of OIS included in the data set occurred between 18:00 and 05:59.

When analyzing the data, day of week was not a significant factor. OIS occurred on every day of the week. However, incidents appear to be less likely to occur from early morning (06:00 to 11:59) through midday (12:00 to 17:59) than in the evening (18:00 to 23:59) and overnight hours (00:00 to 05:59). Approximately 66.7% of OIS occur from 18:00 to 05:59. It should be noted that most time patterns related to misuse involving a weapon frequency mirror occurrence of OIS.

INCIDENT CHARACTERISTICS, CONT.

DAY OF WEEK AND TIME OF DAY

Hour	Day of Week							Total
	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	
12:00am-5:59am	4	2	1	2	4	1	1	15
6:00am-11:59am	2	2	1	0	3	1	1	10
12:00pm-5:59pm	0	0	0	3	1	1	0	5
6:00pm-11:59pm	3	3	2	2	0	2	3	15
Total	9	7	4	7	8	5	5	45

Table 1: Hour of Day and Day of Week, Jan. 1, 2009, through Dec. 31, 2023

DEPARTMENT AND OFFICER CHARACTERISTICS

YEARS OF SERVICE VS. AGE OF OFFICER

KEY FINDING: An officer's years in service matter more than chronological age. Notably, 70% of the recorded OIS occurred within the officers' first eight (8) years of service, while over half—53.6%—occurred within the initial five (5) years of their careers. Officers early in their career are assigned to patrol and may be disproportionately represented for that reason.

The APD dataset showcased the involvement of 84 officers, spanning in age from 23-years-old to 52 years. Interestingly, a substantial portion (52.4%) of these officers fell within the age range of 30-years-old to 38 years, highlighting a particular demographic concentration.¹⁷

When examining their professional backgrounds, the officers had varying experience levels, from one (1) year to 26 years of service. Notably, 70% of the recorded OIS occurred within the officers' first eight (8) years of service, while over half (53.6%) occurred within the initial five (5) years of their careers.

When examining the data, it becomes clear that experience plays a more critical role in influencing an officer's decision to utilize deadly force than age alone. For instance, when analyzing the pattern beyond nine (9) years of service, no more than two (2) officers were involved in an OIS for each subsequent year of experience, except for the 13-year mark, where six (6) incidents were recorded, a notable outlier.

The insights indicate that the likelihood of an officer employing deadly force correlates more closely with their on-the-job experience rather than their chronological age. For example, 11 officers with three (3) years of experience resorted to deadly force. Yet, this statistic does not suggest that younger officers are necessarily more predisposed to such actions. The officers who were 38-years-old recorded the highest involvement in OIS during this study period, with a total of six (6) incidents.

¹⁷ The University of Alaska, Anchorage (UAA) released an assessment and case file review of Alaska Police Officer use of deadly force from 2010-2020. Although this data covers the entire state, it still serves as a comparison tool with the data collected for this report. Between 2009 and 2023, UAA's statewide comprehensive analysis of OIS revealed a total of 45 incidents. Of these, a significant 50% of the subjects involved succumbed to injuries sustained during these encounters. Notably, a report from the UAA study estimated a slightly higher mortality rate of 55%.

DEPARTMENT AND OFFICER CHARACTERISTICS

YEARS OF SERVICE VS. AGE OF OFFICER, CONT.

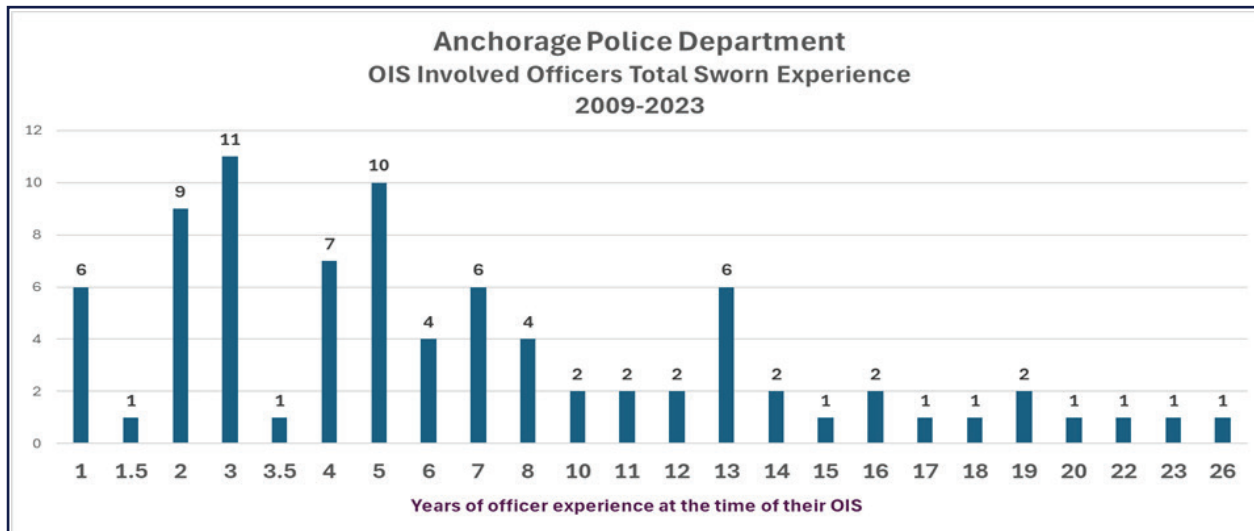


Figure 2: Officer Years of Experience with APD

COMMAND AND CONTROL

Effective supervisory oversight can have an impact on unreasonable use of force, particularly when the supervisors are educated and properly trained.¹⁸ Sometimes oversight is the mere presence of a supervisor. Oversight can also mean taking direct command of a call or controlling the actions of officers. Officers are expected to manage very complex and complicated scenes. The more complex the scene, the more the possibility of making a mistake or overlooking something exists. The risk of violence adds to already stressful interactions. Supervisory involvement in calls that are high-stress or high-risk allows officers to focus on threat assessment and tactical execution while the supervisor's attention is on operational forecasting, preparation and resource management. Increasing command and control in known high-risk calls, when time allows, will place officers in an advantageous position to utilize time, distance, tools and personnel to safely resolve volatile incidents.

ROUNDS FIRED PER INCIDENT

KEY FINDING: Officers fire approximately 10.3 rounds per incident with a 40.7% hit ratio. After removing two outlier incidents, the number of rounds fired per incident for the testing period was 8.4 rounds per incident with a 46% hit ratio.

The number of rounds an officer fires during an OIS is a variable. Two significant incidents, 2016 and 2022, had a high number of rounds fired while officers were attempting to extract an injured victim. These incidents resulted in an anomalous number of rounds fired to affect a safe extraction. After removing these outliers, the number of rounds fired per incident for the study period was 8.4 rounds per incident with a 46% hit ratio.

¹⁸ Lim, H., & Lee, H. (2015). The effects of supervisor education and training on police use of force. *Criminal Justice Studies*; 28(4), 444-463.

ROUNDS FIRED PER INCIDENT, CONT.

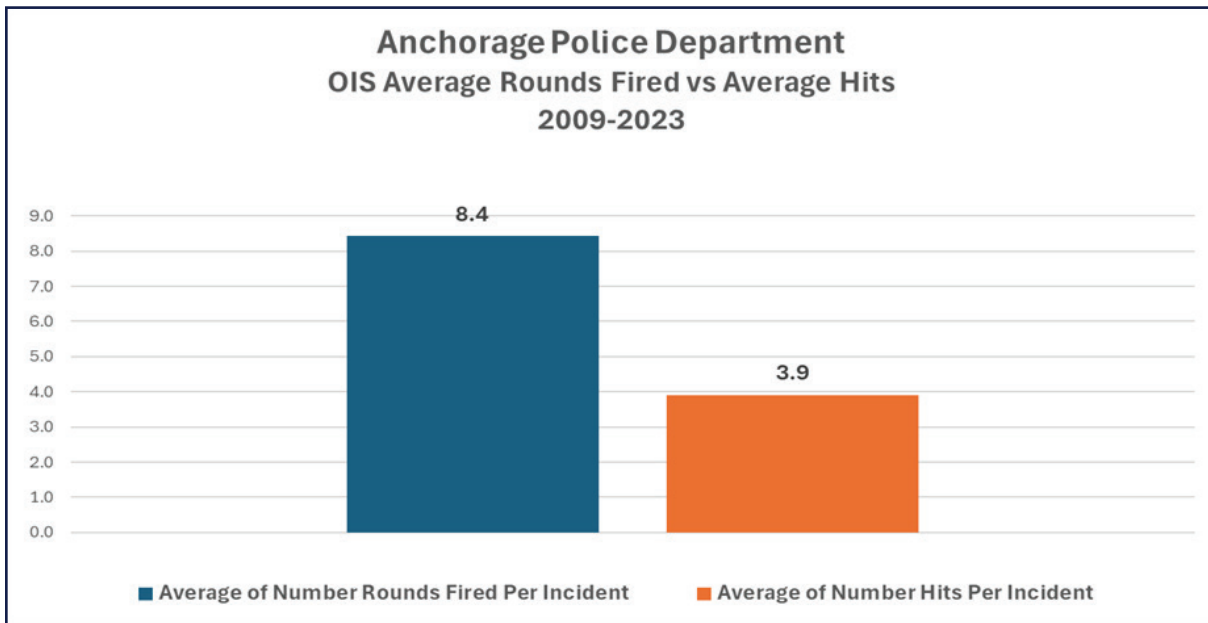


Figure 3: Average Number of Rounds Fired vs. Hits

LETHAL VS. NON-LETHAL OPTIONS

Officers attempted to use less-lethal weapons such as 37/40mm launchers, conducted energy devices (TASERs) and trained K9s in nine (9) incidents, or 17.0% of the total. The attempts may be explained, in part, by how quickly many of these incidents escalated.

Additionally, the less-lethal use figure may be misleading, as it does not capture all the incidents where a less-lethal option was used effectively, eliminating the need for the use of deadly force. In total, 126 less-lethal uses of force were employed by officers in 2023 and not represented in the report's calculation. A calculation of less-lethal uses for the entire data set is not possible. The best data available indicates that police departments utilizing less-lethal tools can reduce injuries to subjects by 25% - 62%.¹⁹ Moving forward, it will be imperative to better understand incidents in which less-lethal options are leveraged successfully in high-risk situations, providing APD with opportunities to improve both the academy and continuous training.

¹⁹ MacDonald, J., Kaminski, R., & Smith, M. (2009). The effect of less-lethal weapons on injuries in police use-of-force events. *American Journal of Public Health*, 12; 2268-2274.

TIME TO ENGAGEMENT

Another crucial variable to consider is the amount of time an officer is engaged in an incident before firing their weapon. Table 2 articulates the timing from officer presence on-scene to the first officer firing a weapon. In nearly half (46.7%) of incidents, officers fire their weapons within three minutes of arriving on scene.

Minutes	Incidents	Percent
1-3	21	46.7%
4-10	8	17.8%
11-59	11	24.4%
60+	5	11.1%
Total	45	100.0%

Note: Data set from 2009 to 2023.

Table 2: Approximate time from officer on-scene to officer firing weapon.

OIS AND OFFICER ATTRITION

Out of the 84 officers' reviewed, 76.8% did not leave the department after being involved in an OIS.

CALL TYPES

KEY FINDING: Misconduct involving a weapon represents 35.6% of all calls resulting in OIS. Domestic violence incidents are the second highest call category (13.3%).

For 45 incidents that occurred from 2009-2023, the nature of the incidents, or why police were on the scene, was varied. All incident types are articulated in Table 3. As the brief summaries of incidents in the following paragraphs indicate, the type of incident alone is not enough to fully capture the nature of the subject's behavior before APD officers used a firearm.

The most common type of OIS incident reported is misconduct involving a weapon (MIW). This broad category includes a variety of behaviors related to any weapon or items that the public or officers perceive to be weapons. From 2009 to 2023, 16 incidents, accounting for 35.6% of the total, fell within this category. As an example, on average APD responded to 313 weapons-related calls for service each month in 2023; meaning that APD responded to approximately 56,000 weapons calls for service within the study period.

MIW incidents discussed included an incident in which an officer observed a subject with a rifle pointed at a group of people,²⁰ multiple incidents where the subject fired a firearm at officers,²¹ multiple incidents where the subject had previously fired a firearm at other members of the public prior to officers arriving,²² multiple incidents where the subject pointed a firearm or an object that reasonably looked like a firearm at officers or members of the public in the presence of officers,²³ multiple incidents where the subject was threatening officers with a knife,²⁴ an incident where the subject pointed a crossbow at officers,²⁵ an incident in which a subject suspected of MIW reached into their waistband,²⁶ and one incident in which an officer was injured by another officer's firearm during a physical struggle with a MIW suspect.²⁷

²⁰APD case number 09-29404. Subsequent investigation found that the rifle fired pellets but was indistinguishable from a firearm.

²¹APD case numbers 16-39809, 17-52216, 22-08770, 23-21082.

²²APD case numbers 17-52216, 19-30597, 20-23596,

²³APD case numbers 19-11598, 19-27848 were firearms. APD case number 23-37915 involved a pepper spray pistol that resembled a firearm.

²⁴APD case numbers 18-12113 and 11-21320.

²⁵APD case number 20-01384.

²⁶APD case number 20-04478.

²⁷APD case number 21-28414.

CALL TYPES, CONT.

The second most common incident type was domestic violence. Officers were responding to domestic violence calls in six (6) incidents or 13.3% of all incidents in the data set. These included four (4) incidents in which the subject pointed a firearm at responding officers,²⁸ one (1) in which the subject rushed at officers with a knife during their investigation,²⁹ and one (1) in which the subject advanced on officers and other members of the public with a blunt object.³⁰

The third most common type of incident in the data set was traffic stops, with a total of four (4) recorded incidents. In one case, a vehicle occupant shot an officer with a firearm.³¹ In another incident, a vehicle occupant brandished a firearm.³² Additionally, in another, a vehicle occupant exited the vehicle with a hatchet and ran toward an officer.³³ In the remaining incident, a vehicle was stopped for reckless driving. The driver attempted to ram their way out of being blocked by patrol cars, and in doing so drove toward officers.³⁴

Each of the three (3) robbery incidents involved robbery subjects who offered substantial resistance to officers. In one of these incidents, the subject threatened officers with a hatchet.³⁵ In another, the subject fired from a moving vehicle at officers.³⁶ In the third, officers blocked the subject's vehicle with their patrol cars. The subject attempted to ram their way out, and in the process attempted to run over officers.³⁷

There were two Assault III incidents involving subjects. In one case, the subject displayed a firearm when approached by officers.³⁸ In the other incident, the subject pointed a flashlight at officers, leading them to believe it was a firearm.³⁹

Call Type	Incidents	Percent
Misconduct involving a weapon	16	35.6%
Domestic violence	6	13.3%
Traffic stop	4	8.9%
Robbery	3	6.7%
Assault III	2	4.4%
Eluding locate vehicle	2	4.4%
Stolen vehicle	2	4.4%
Vehicle prowler	2	4.4%
Burglary alarm	1	2.2%
Burglary	1	2.2%
Driving under the influence	1	2.2%
Drugs	1	2.2%
Reckless driver	1	2.2%
Suicidal threats	1	2.2%
Theft/Fraud	1	2.2%
Warrant	1	2.2%
Total	45	100.0
Note: Excludes eight incidents that occurred in 2024		

Table 3: Incident Type

²⁸APD case numbers 10-09964, 20-33440, 22-27757 were firearms. APD case 12-30469 was an airsoft pistol indistinguishable from a firearm.

²⁹APD case number 16-01694.

³⁰APD case number 12-26605.

³¹APD case number 13-27231.

³²APD case number 12-55056.

³³APD case number 13-27231.

³⁴APD case number 09-19388.

³⁵APD case number 16-29209.

³⁶APD case number 17-39264.

³⁷APD case number 12-12969.

³⁸APD case number 11-51567.

³⁹APD case number 19-08474.

CALL TYPES, CONT.

Two vehicle prowler incidents involved armed subjects. In one case, the prowler used pepper spray and threatened an officer with a hatchet.⁴⁰ In the other, the subject brandished a firearm when approached by officers.⁴¹ Additionally, during a burglary alarm and a separate burglary incident, the subject was also armed with a firearm.⁴²

APD officers were responding to a public request for service in

77%

of incidents in which an officer fired a firearm.

In a Driving Under the Influence (DUI) situation, an subject was found slumped over the wheel of a parked vehicle. When officers approached, he opened the car door and pointed a firearm at them.⁴³

In a drug incident, officers surrounded a subject's vehicle with patrol cars. The subject tried to ram the vehicles to escape and nearly hit an officer.⁴⁴

A reckless driver incident started with a report to Dispatch. It escalated when the subject rammed several police and civilian vehicles and fired a gun at officers while fleeing.⁴⁵ Similarly, in a suicidal threat incident, a subject threatened suicide but later pointed a firearm at officers.⁴⁶

During a theft and fraud incident, a subject shot a police officer with a firearm when approached about a suspected theft,⁴⁷ and in a warrant incident, officers stopped a driver wanted on a felony warrant. The driver pointed a firearm at the officers during the encounter.⁴⁸

MOST COMMON WEAPONS

KEY FINDING: ~58% of OIS involved the use of a firearm or a perceived firearm by the suspect.

The most common weapon used by a subject is a gun or something perceived to be a gun, which accounted for 57.7% of officer-involved shootings (OIS). The figure includes the following categories from Figure 4: pistol, rifle, pellet pistol, implied pistol, shotgun, pellet rifle, flashlight mistaken for a gun, gun and airsoft pistol. A vehicle was identified as the primary weapon in seven (7) incidents.

⁴⁰APD case number 17-20676.

⁴¹APD case number 19-08474.

⁴²APD case numbers 09-52454 and 12-43920.

⁴³APD case number 13-14547.

⁴⁴APD case number 13-20042.

⁴⁵APD case number 15-05504.

⁴⁶APD case number 10-17140.

⁴⁷APD case number 16-47382.

⁴⁸APD case number 17-47084.

CALL TYPES, CONT.

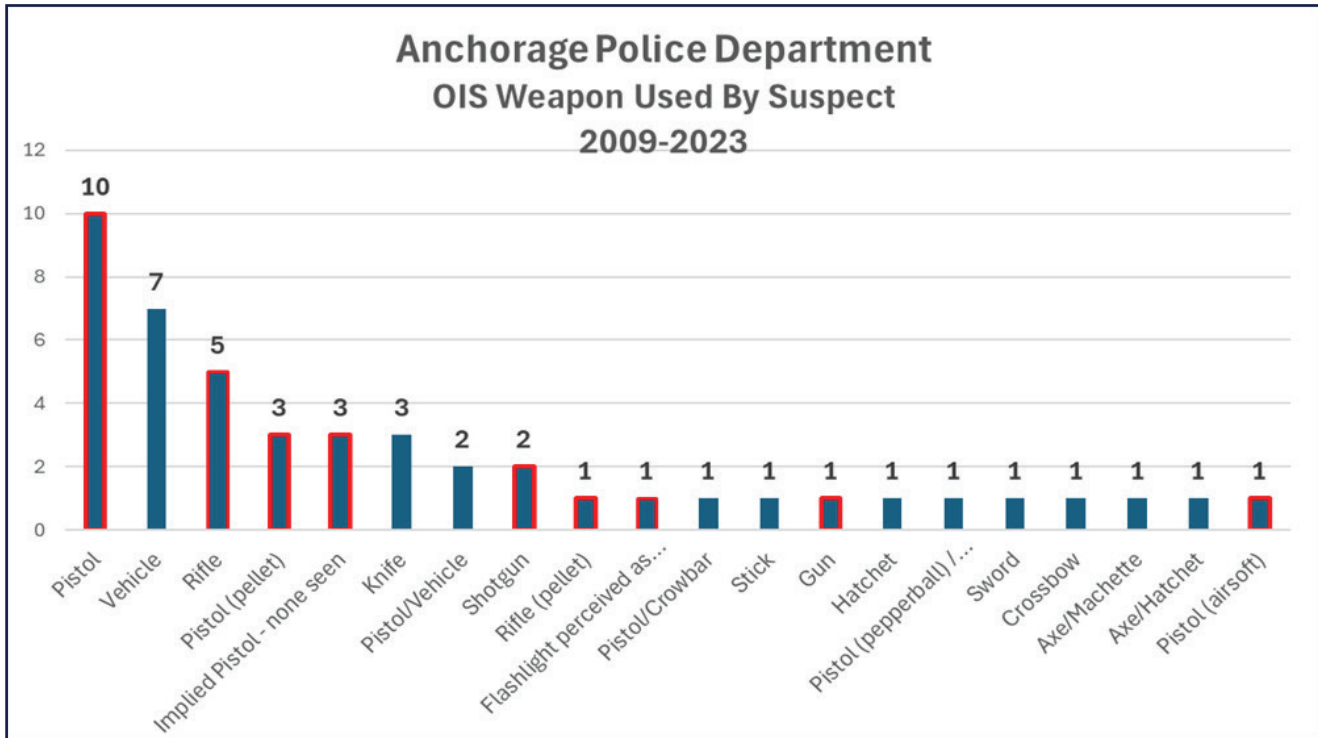


Figure 4: Weapon Used by the Subject. The red box indicates a firearm or an item believed to be a firearm.

SUBJECT CHARACTERISTICS

RACE AND ETHNICITY

KEY FINDING: White subjects are represented proportional to the Anchorage population while Native American/Alaska Native, Asian/Pacific Islander and Black Alaskans are somewhat overrepresented. However, demographic categories as provided in APSIN and by the DMV make the data difficult to fully discern. Better tracking methodologies should be developed.

The race or ethnic background of the subject in an OIS, and the use of force, in general, has become a significant topic of discussion as communities and police departments try to determine if there is a cultural competency issue when force is utilized. According to the APD data set, 63% of the subjects of an OIS were identified through records as White. Thirteen percent (13%) were identified as Native American/Alaska Native, 13% as Asian / Pacific Islander, and 12% as Black. The Department of Motor Vehicle (DMV) and the Alaska Public Safety Information Network (APSIN) databases document race and ethnicity, and are categorically limited, which is beyond the control of APD. Better tracking methodologies should be developed.

SUBJECT CHARACTERISTICS

RACE AND ETHNICITY, CONT.

The racial and ethnic make-up of Anchorage is represented in the in the OIS data as it relates to those subjects who identify as White. However, Native American/Alaska Native, Asian/Pacific Islanders and Black Alaskans are somewhat overrepresented in the OIS data as related to resident population.⁴⁹ Of note, a 2015 UAA statewide study indicated that 55% of subjects were White, 27% Native American/Alaska Native, 4% Asian or Pacific Islander, 6% Black, and 8% unknown.

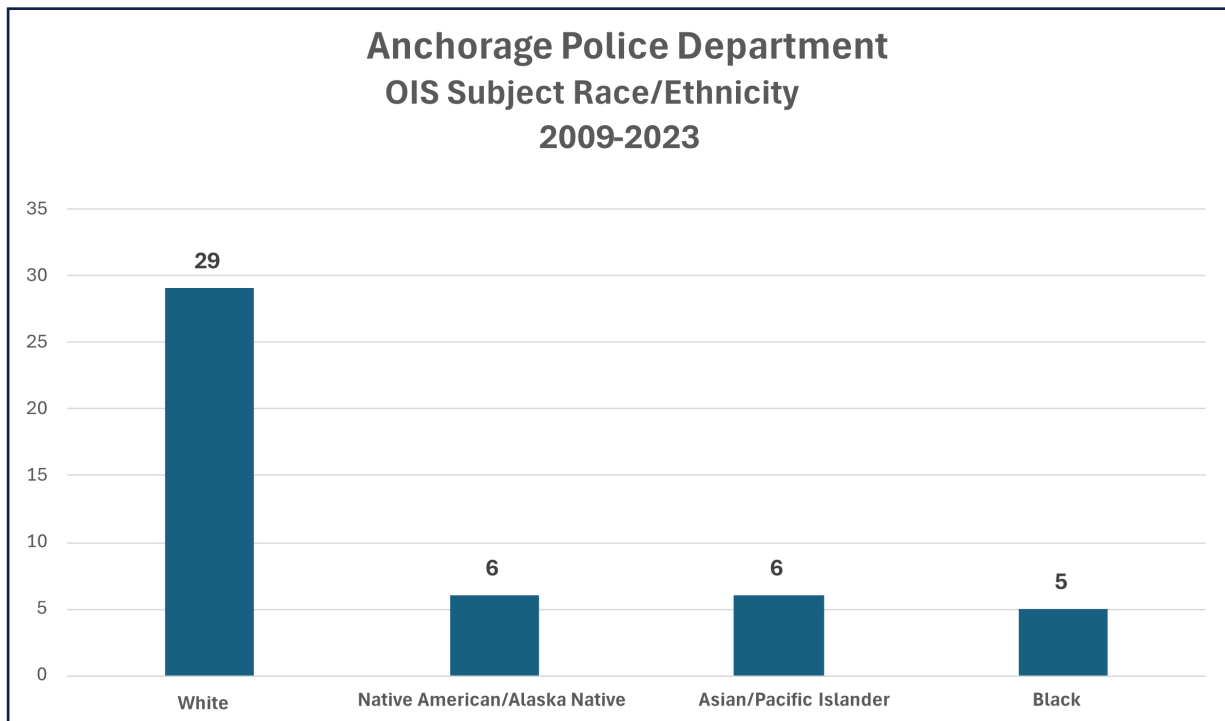


Figure 5: Subject Race & Ethnicity. The number reflects suspects or subjects (46) and not incidents (45).

AGE AND SEX OF SUBJECT

Fifty percent (50%) of the subjects were between the age of 26 and 36 years old.

⁴⁹According to the 2020 Census, Anchorage’s population is 61% White, 11% more than one race, 10% Asian, 8% Alaska Native, 5% black, 3% Pacific Islander, and 2% other.

SUBJECT CHARACTERISTICS

SUBSTANCE USE

KEY FINDING: Alcohol use by the subject was a factor in nearly a third of all OIS in the study.

Alcohol was a factor in approximately 31% of APD OIS. Alcohol was not a factor in approximately 33% of the OIS and substance use was undetermined 36% of the time. It may be reasonable to assume that the overall influence is at least 50% as it is likely that half of the unknowns would involve alcohol. Several years ago, APD looked at the influence of alcohol on overall use of force. Although this data was imperfect for reasons mentioned above, there was a promising correlation between alcohol and use of force in that alcohol predicted force better than any other indicators, including race or mental health crisis. The most recent UAA study found 33.7% of incidents involved alcohol.

SUSPECTED MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

KEY FINDING: 64% of subjects had no discernible mental health issue.

The impact of mental health and substance use are difficult to reliably discern because APD data is based on subjective facts either known or assumed by the officer. Officers make a determination based on information provided to Dispatch or information the officer directly collected regarding the subject's behavior, third-party information or contextual clues.

Even if an officer forms an opinion regarding substance use or mental health influence, they may not record those opinions in official reporting. Mental health information can also be considered medical information which results in careful documentation and necessary disclaimers before releasing such information.

Based on the information recorded related to this study, 25% of subjects were believed to be in some level of mental health crisis. Sixty-four (64%) had no suspected mental health influence, leaving 11% unknown. Mental health crisis is also something that needs to be better defined. The APD data differs significantly from UAA statewide study, which articulated that 68.5% of incidents involved a person with a mental illness.

SUSPECTED MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES, CONT.

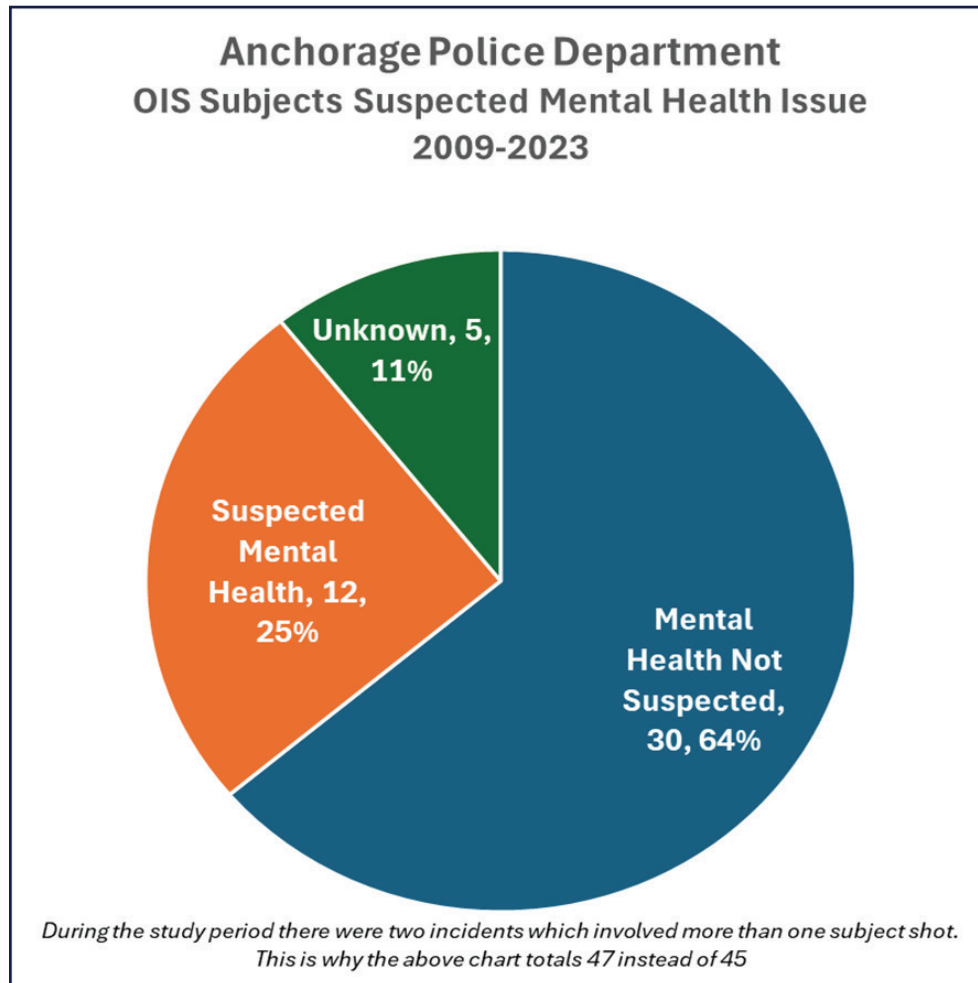


Figure 6: Suspected Mental Health Issues

ADDITIONAL FINDINGS

WEAPONS VS. LETHAL TOOLS

MIW calls are the most common calls that result in an OIS. Even though these calls result in an OIS outcome (44% of the 45 OIS), OIS-related MIW calls still represent a very small percentage of overall MIW call volume at APD. Changing the overall response to more than 56,000 MIW calls in the hopes of changing the outcomes of 20 calls over 15 years is challenging.

Currently, all officers carry, at minimum, two less-lethal tools on their person - either oleoresin capsicum (OC/pepper spray) and electronic control weapon (ECW/Taser) or a baton. The limitation of these less-lethal options is they are only effective at short distances and overall efficacy is questionable. For example, ECWs have less than a 25% effective deterrent rate, primarily due to clothing failures, which are common in Anchorage because of heavier winter clothing. OC requires the officer to be in close proximity to the subject and may not have an immediate effect on them.

Two additional less-lethal weapons that are effective at longer distances are available to officers. However, there are only two (2) to six (6) of these tools deployed during any given shift in patrol because they are used as fleet weapons as opposed to being permanently assigned to officers.

PepperBall is a type of OC that is deployed similar to a paint ball. PepperBall allows officers to deliver OC from a longer distance creating time, distance and safety. The limitation of Pepper Ball is it works best indoors or areas that are contained, and it does not work immediately. The second long-distance, less-lethal tool is a 40mm baton round launcher. This tool fires a soft tipped 40mm round from a shoulder mounted launcher. The tool effectively allows for distance to deploy; however, the round can be ineffective. Similar tools that are more effective run a higher risk of injury. The decision to utilize tools that create a higher risk of injury comes down to a risk-benefit analysis. Clearly, a higher risk of injury to save a life is worth the benefit. However, it is important to understand that increasing the risk will only have an impact on a maximum of approximately three (3) events a year to prevent an OIS.

SUPERVISION

There has been an increasing trend of insufficient active leadership during incidents, where sergeants are directly involved in resolving issues rather than managing the incident from an overall perspective. This conclusion is drawn from a qualitative review of OIS data, as well as observations of daily activities such as burglaries in progress, securing perimeters at large scenes, and responding to high-risk calls.

Leadership plays a significant role in the performance of employees. For example, supervisors work requirements (e.g., being required to fill out paperwork when an officer uses force) can reduce force.⁵⁰ Supervisors impact the amount of time officers spend on problem-solving when an officer perceives it is important to their supervisor, regardless of an officer's attitudes regarding problem-solving behavior.⁵¹ Highly educated and trained supervisors significantly reduce officers' use of higher levels of force.⁵² Trained and engaged supervisors may contribute to reducing officer use of force.

⁵⁰Alpert, G., & MacDonald, J. (2001). Police use of force; An analysis of organizational characteristics. *Justice Quarterly*, 18(2), 393-409.

⁵¹Engel, R., & Worden, R. (2003). Police officers' attitudes, behavior, and supervisory influences: An analysis of problem solving. *Criminology*, 41(1), 131-166.

⁵²Lim, H., & Lee, H. (2015). The effects of supervisor education and training on police use of force. *Criminal Justice Studies*, 28(4), 444-463.

PLANNED RESPONSE TO HIGHER-RISK CALLS

MIW, domestic violence, assaults involving weapons, robberies, stolen vehicles, and persons in crisis involving weapons are the most frequent calls that have an increased risk to all parties involved. Properly training sergeants and lieutenants to be more critical thinkers, tactical planners and field leaders when going with officers to these types of events will result in better strategic resolutions.

Strategic thinking requires supervisors and officers to anticipate bad outcomes, plan responses to them, and execute a plan that is flexible to all scenarios. Frequently officers rush to the scene to get the best information possible and address the threat. This response is admirable and heroic. However, it can also limit response options by forcing officers into the middle of a scene that is chaotic requiring an immediate officer action.

Strategic responses also anticipate the outcome versus the process of the call. This is a significant change in practices in policing high-risk patrol calls. It is common in a patrol environment to create a systematic and predictable response process to ensure officers respond in a uniform way. Doing things consistently is believed to result in the most fair and safe approach. However, the limitation is unfavorable outcomes from flawed processes, as well as the inability to adapt to a changing environment.

ROUND INTENTIONALITY

Officers that are firing between one (1) and four (4) rounds have a relatively high hit ratio. When officers fire eight (8) or more rounds, particularly when double digit rounds are fired, the hit ratio declines significantly.

There are many reasons why rounds fired and hit ratios are important. The most important reason is all rounds that don't hit their intended target strike an unintended target. APD has not had an incident where an unintended person has been struck by a round. However, the risk is still very real and important. The importance of understanding the number of rounds fired is that every round must be justified. However, the risk is still very real and important. Firing fewer rounds more intentionally would reduce the chances of striking unintended targets.

ADDITIONAL FINDINGS RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Test and adopt less-lethal tools that are effective at longer distances and have a higher success rate so officers are confident when using them. Doing so will not only increase their use but also increase the time a subject is given to respond once the less-lethal tool has been deployed.
2. Limit the number of rifles present during high-risk calls. While rifles are necessary for adequately addressing deadly force threats, not every officer is armed with one. Some officers should be prepared to deploy with less-lethal options, while others need to be ready to handcuff or physically intervene with a subject. Additionally, certain officers should focus solely on communicating with those involved in the situation. Finally, it is crucial for a supervisor or senior officer to take control of the incident.

CONCLUSION

Understanding our past is an essential step in shaping our future. The 15-year retrospective study on OIS and interactions between the Anchorage police and public is our effort to learn from our collective experience and share our findings with the you.

Although OIS incidents represent a small fraction of the hundreds of thousands of calls for service that APD responded to during the study period, we know they significantly impact our community, including the officers who serve it every day. They are a reminder to us all, how every interaction matters.

Communication-led policing is based on the idea that improving interactions between police and diverse communities will lead to a greater understanding of police processes, policies and procedures, as well as significantly enhance trust and confidence in the safety of this place we call home.

This study is one form of engagement, but we have also launched a Use of Force Dashboard on our website where the community can track metrics quarterly on how and when we use force, and hopefully gain a better understanding of why. While we seek to minimize officer-involved shootings, we don't live in a world where eliminating them completely is possible. Officers encounter life-threatening danger every day, on every shift.

However, we know that by enhancing positive interactions with the police and improving communication during routine law enforcement encounters, we are emphasizing the importance of creating a service-oriented environment where citizens feel valued when coming into contact with our department. This transformation is not one-sided and it cannot happen without community support. We are engaging in a new approach because it is to you that we are accountable, and it is you whom we are proud to serve.



POLICE