

# Officer Involved Shootings: Incident Executive Summary

by Darrel W. Stephens

NATIONAL POLICE FOUNDATION – MCCA



## Introduction

Several high-profile officer involved shootings (OIS) in 2014 and 2015 stimulated a national debate and exposed the absence of reliable national data on police use of deadly force.<sup>1</sup> To begin exploring this issue, Major Cities Chiefs Association (MCCA) first asked their members to provide the number of OIS for their agencies for the years 2005-15 (Figure 1).<sup>2</sup>

While helpful in understanding the trends and frequency of these incidents, this data alone provides no insight into the circumstances of the encounters between officers and members of the public. To help develop a better understanding of these interactions, MCCA and the National Police Foundation (NPF) entered into a partnership in 2015 to collect more detailed OIS data.

The partnership had two primary objectives. The first was to provide a basis for a more accurate and reliable estimate of firearm use by police officers in major cities. The second was to provide better insight into OIS situations and, through the analysis of the data, improve officer safety and accountability. After developing a tool and a process, OIS data collection was launched in late March 2015.

The NPF and the MCCA have developed three executive summaries on this project to share the information with practitioners on 1006 cases involving 1605 officers<sup>3</sup> in 47 MCCA US agencies for the years 2015 to 2017.<sup>4</sup> The first summary focuses on OIS incident characteristics. The second examines the officer(s) and subject(s) involved in the incidents. The third is a broader discussion of OIS incidents, how their data are captured within law enforcement, and the gaps in our understanding of these encounters.

<sup>1</sup> The FBI kicked off its National Use of Force Data Collection initiative in January 2019. Police agencies across the country have been asked to submit data on all officer involved shooting situations and where there is a serious injury from other uses of force. This initiative will provide much greater insight into police use of force on a national level.

<sup>2</sup> Since 40 US MCCA agencies provided data for all 13 years (2005-2017), Figure 1 data has now been updated to reflect data through 2017.

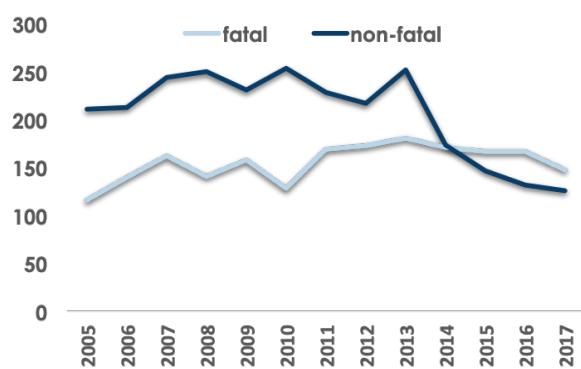
<sup>3</sup> Although 1,605 officers are included in the OIS dataset, approximately 600 officers were included in the regression analysis due to missing data in several key variables.

<sup>4</sup> In-depth report is available at the National Police Foundation website ([www.policefoundation.org](http://www.policefoundation.org))

## Officer Involved Shooting (OIS) Incident Characteristics

Law enforcement officers have the authority to use deadly force to protect their own lives, the lives of others, and under certain circumstances, stop the flight of felons. It is a tremendous authority, and its use generates intense public interest and

**Figure 1 OIS Incidents – MCCA Agencies\***



\* See footnote 2

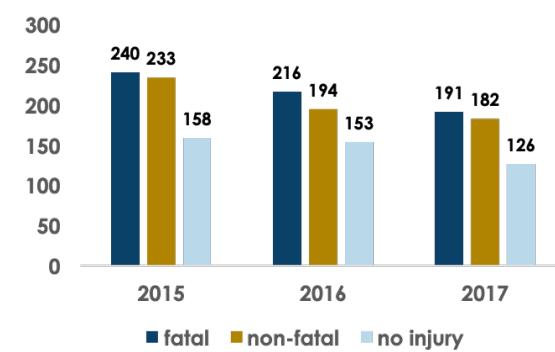
scrutiny - particularly in a world where camera footage of an incident can be made immediately available, and on occasion, live-streamed as it is taking place. Incidents in which police officers use deadly force have led to protests and civil unrest in many communities. Yet, we are still not in a position to know how many OIS incidents take place each year or how many results in deaths.<sup>5</sup>

The NPF/MCCA data collection partnership was launched in an effort to improve our understanding of the circumstances of these incidents and

perhaps provide insight into how they might be prevented. Figure

**2** shows that overall OIS incidents declined by 21% from 2015 to 2017.<sup>6</sup> Although the reason for the decline is not clear, several potential contributors could possibly be that

**Figure 2 MCCA Agency OIS\*\***



\*\* MCCA Survey. 2018. Data is from 64 MCCA agencies.

<sup>5</sup> The FBI National Use of Force Data Collection will help provide this information. The Washington Post national database on fatal OIS incidents initiated in 2015 has been helpful in understanding frequencies and contexts of the incidents that result in a subject death, but more information is needed overall.

<sup>6</sup> MCCA Survey. 2018. Data is from 64 MCCA agencies.

39% of MCCA agencies revised their use of force policy in 2015-16. According to MCCA, training was also changed to include more scenario-based exercises and de-escalation techniques.

The Washington Post undertook an analysis of all fatal shootings in the U.S., and found a 3% decline in OIS deaths from 2015 to 2016 but an increase of 2.5% from 2016 to 2017.<sup>7</sup>

To better understand and describe the circumstances of these shootings, data was collected on a wide range of variables. Fifty-five percent of the OIS encounters came from citizen-initiated calls and 45% were officer-initiated. Seventeen percent of officer-initiated incidents resulted in an officer injury, compared to 12% of those initiated by citizens.

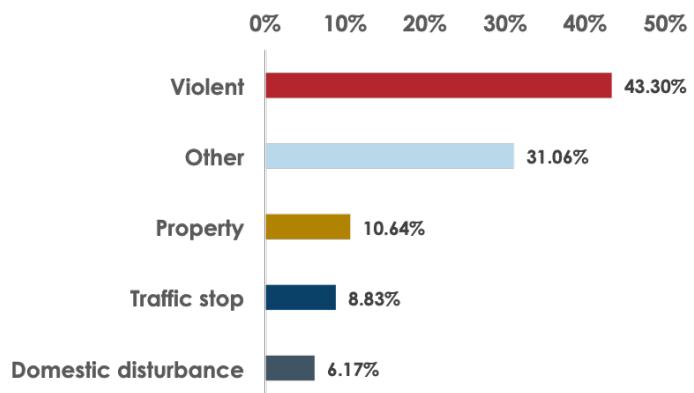
---

**The odds of officer injuries decreased by 43% when more than one officer was present.**

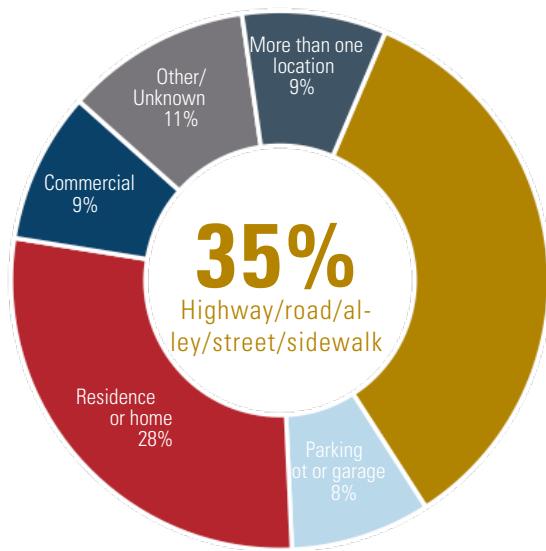
---

The study collected data on the nature of the call resulting in officer involved shootings. These were then classified into violent, property, traffic, domestic, and 'other' call types. **Figure 3** shows the nature of these calls that ended as OIS situations. Violent calls account for 43% of the interactions and include armed person, homicide, assault, shots fired, and robbery. These types of calls resulted in an increase in the rate of rounds fired by 49%. Calls classified as 'other' include mental illness, suicide, trespassing, disorderly conduct, drug, and sex offenses. Domestic disturbance accounts for 6% of the calls and traffic stops almost 9% of the OIS incidents. As a point of comparison, 52 officers were killed in firearms related incidents in 2018 - 12% of those incidents were domestic disturbance situations and 7% were traffic stops.<sup>8</sup>

**Figure 3 Nature of OIS Calls**



**Figure 4 Location of OIS Incidents**




---

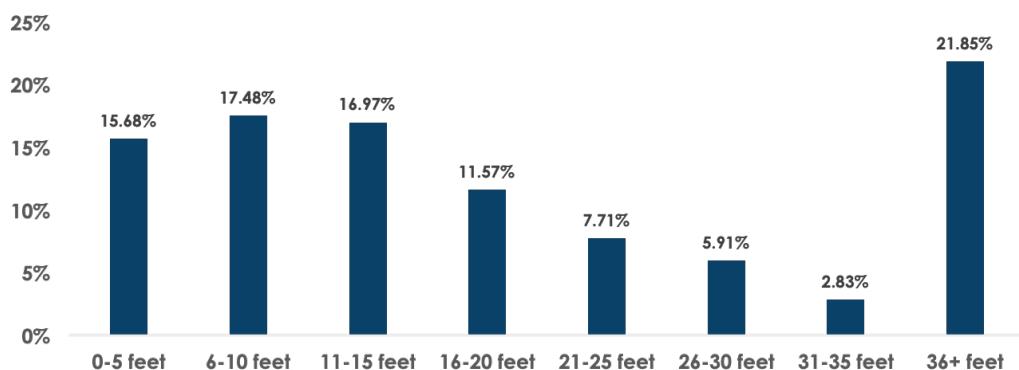
**Dispatchers play an important role in officer safety through the information they provide when dispatching a call. Of the dispatched calls in OIS encounters, 70% included information that a subject was armed.**

---

As shown in **Figure 4**, the majority of OIS encounters occurred on the highway, alley or street followed closely by a residence or home. When an incident occurred in a commercial building, officers were more likely to use less lethal force than in other types of locations. Officers were also 52% less likely to fire more than three rounds in a residence. While these findings are not indicative of a causal relationship, they may present context for executives considering how training or less lethal force policies may take location type into consideration.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/national/police-shootings-2017/>

<sup>8</sup> National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund. 2019. 2018 End of Year. Preliminary Law Enforcement Officers Fatalities Report. <https://view.joomag.com/2018-end-of-year-preliminary-law-enforcement-officers-fatality-report-2018-end-of-year-report/0160170001545883698>

**Figure 5 OIS Distance Between Officer and Subject When First Round was Fired**

Time, distance, and cover are key de-escalation techniques for police officers to manage an interaction without the use of force. **Figure 5** reveals that 50% of the OIS were within 15 feet of the subject - 61% within 20 feet. In almost 22% of the cases, the distance was 36 feet or more.

---

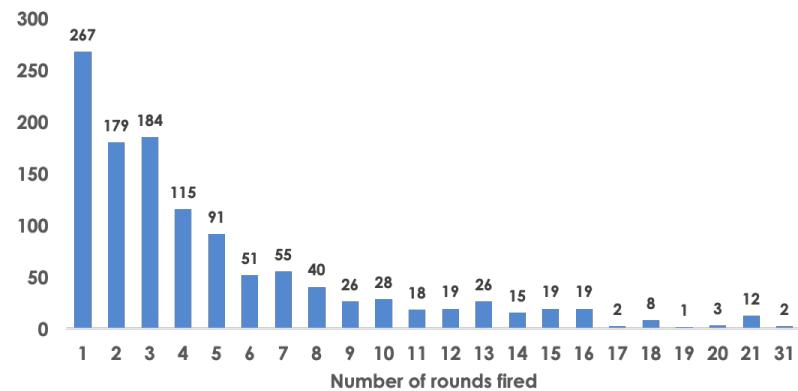
**Forty-three percent of the officers injured in the dataset were within 10 feet of the subject - 26% were less than 4 feet.**

---

The public frequently expresses concern over the number of rounds fired in OIS situations. The average number of rounds fired across incidents in this dataset was 7.59. **Figure 6** shows the number of rounds fired by officers ( $n = 1180$ ). Many departments train officers to fire 2 or 3 shot bursts then reassess the threat; in this dataset, 53% of the officers fired 3 or fewer rounds.

Both number of officers on scene and number of officers discharging their weapon were captured in the study.

More than one officer was present in 75% of the incidents, whereas only 33% of incidents involved more than one officer firing a weapon. For incidents in which multiple officers fired their weapons, 59% resulted in the death of one or more subjects.

**Figure 6 Rounds Fired by the Officer**


---

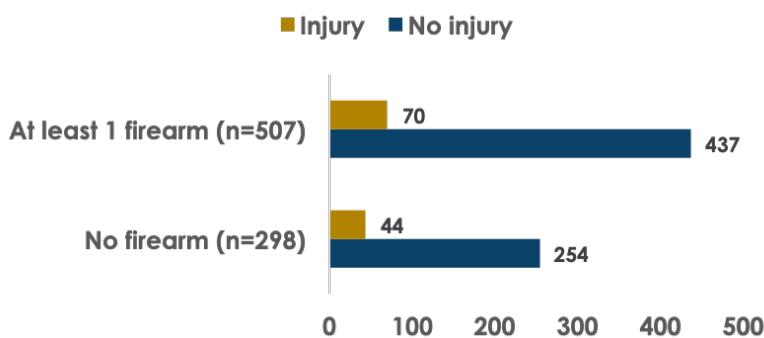
**In 96% of incidents, police encountered subjects that were armed with some type of weapon, and in 63% of the incidents, the weapon was a firearm.\***

\* Of the incidents in which subject weapon was provided ( $n = 819$ )

The experience of major cities contributing to the OIS research was only slightly different than the Washington Post national fatal force data base.<sup>9</sup> The Washington Post data for fatal shootings in the years 2015 to 2017 indicated that 93% were armed with some type of weapon and in 2016-2017, the weapon was a firearm 56% of the time.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/national/police-shootings-2017/>

<sup>10</sup> The Washington Post data collection also only captures fatal incidents, whereas the MCCA data collection collects all use of deadly force despite outcomes.

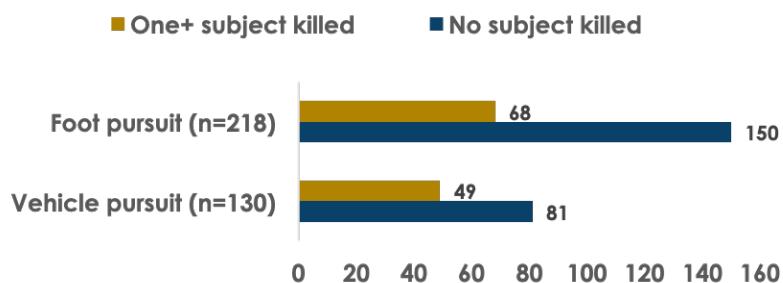
**Figure 7 Officer Injuries and Armed Subjects**

Examining officer injuries among incidents with at least one armed subject versus no armed subject, the study found that officers were injured more frequently when encountering an armed subject (**Figure 7**). However, this data in general showed a high proportion of incidents involving one or more subject with a firearm (63.1%).

Police pursuits also played a role in OIS. In 375 incidents, a pursuit was involved in the encounter. In 104 (33.4%) of the pursuit incidents, one or more

subjects were killed. For those incidents that did not involve a pursuit, 53.7% resulted in the death of one or more subjects.

Data on pursuit type and subject death are available for 348 incidents. **Figure 8** depicts the OIS subject death broken out into foot (31.2%) and vehicle (37.7%) pursuits.<sup>11</sup>

**Figure 8 Pursuit Type and Subject Death**

<sup>11</sup> Pursuit types are not exclusive of one another; 45 incidents included both types of pursuit.

## Conclusion

The National Police Foundation and Major Cities Chiefs Association research of OIS represents a comprehensive effort to obtain detailed information on these incidents. The research has made an important contribution to our understanding of OIS, but more needs to be done to improve the quality of the data. Data on important variables was missing from many cases because agencies simply did not collect the information, so many cases were excluded from statistical analysis.<sup>12</sup>

The FBI National Use of Force Data Collection initiative is a significant step forward and will improve our understanding of these events but may not provide the level of detail required to inform training and policy development. Independent OIS research with a view toward prevention should continue with the full cooperation of police agencies across America.

<sup>12</sup> This is discussed in more detail in the "Understanding the Complexities" Executive Summary