

THE USE OF FORCE PROJECT

NOVEMBER 10, 2023



HOLLOMAN
CENTER FOR
SOCIAL JUSTICE

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Holloman Center for Social Justice team would like to express our deepest gratitude to J. Phillip and Gail Holloman, founders of the Holloman Center for Social Justice, for their vision and continued investment to advance justice in Southwestern Ohio.

Thanks to our interns for their work on this report: Edward Morrison and Faith Wright. With contributions, large and small, we value your dedication.

We also thank Sheriff Charmaine McGuffey, the Hamilton County Sheriff's Office, and the Professional Standards Division for providing access to their files and office to collect the data needed to complete this project. We express gratitude to Corporal James High for adjusting his schedule to be present and answering questions about the data we collected.

Finally, we thank the Urban Institute and Microsoft for their investment in sustaining this critical work.



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“COLLABORATING WITH COMMUNITY MEMBERS WILL FURTHER STRENGTHEN RELATIONSHIPS AND GRANT GREATER ACCESS TO THE EXPERTISE ESTABLISHED THROUGH THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF THOSE IMPACTED MOST.”

LETTER FROM THE AUTHORS

The Use of Force Project was born from the deep passion and resilience displayed during the civil uprising that occurred in 2020 to protest the murders of unarmed Black people. We believe data is a powerful tool for storytelling and the pages to follow showcase how data evaluation is necessary to enhance our understanding of how force influences community relations.

Studies show that Black people disproportionately experience incidents of force.¹ We are grateful to the Hamilton County Sheriff's Office, under the leadership of Sheriff McGuffey, for their support of our vision of a more transparent policing model throughout Hamilton County. Given that the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) only began tracking use of force data in 2019, we hope this partnership will introduce a new era of improved community and police relations. Transparency with police data is important because we cannot change what we do not know. The Use of Force Project is not just a collection of reports; it is a message to community members and administrators alike about the lived experience of individuals interacting with HCSO.

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BACKGROUND

“Black males between the ages of 21 -29 reported the highest incidents of force.”



About the Holloman Center for Social Justice

The Holloman Center for Social Justice (CSJ) is a Black-led initiative housed at the Urban League of Greater Southwestern Ohio – an anchor institution serving African American communities in Southwestern Ohio since 1948. CSJ is the regional catalyst for collaborative police reform efforts between communities and police departments in Southwestern Ohio. In addition to police reform, CSJ advocates for voting rights, education, health equity, and other issues related to social justice. Established in 2020 in response to the nationwide protests, CSJ collaborates with local communities and policymakers to advocate for police reforms to address racial profiling and bias, police misconduct, excessive force, accountability, and oversight of law enforcement throughout Greater Southwestern Ohio. The CSJ engages in policy and practice advocacy, data collection and reporting, community education, restoration of rights and criminal records relief, and organizing to advance equity and transparency in our region.

Background of the Use of Force Project

In 2022, CSJ was a recipient of the Urban Institute and the Microsoft Justice Reform Initiative Catalyst Grant Program. The grant provided funds to use data and technology to advance racial equity in the criminal legal system. CSJ, through its Use of Force project, worked with the Hamilton County Sheriff's Office (HCSO) to increase transparency in law enforcement data, specifically use of force incidents that occurred on the Patrol Unit in districts they patrol. The use of force data collected tells a story of what types of force are used with residents while deputies are on patrol.

About the Hamilton County Sheriff's Office

The HCSO, led by Sheriff Charmaine McGuffey, is the agency in charge of the Hamilton County Justice Center and patrols four districts in the County:

- District One: HCSO Headquarters, the Village of Lincoln Heights, and the Village of Cleves
- District Two: Greene Township
- District Three: Symmes Township
- District Four: the Village of Silverton
- District Five: Anderson Township.

The department employs over 900 staff and officers who contribute to the mission of the HCSO.

The Patrol Section¹ of the HCSO is responsible for providing primary police service for 12 jurisdictions around the City of Cincinnati – Anderson Township, Sycamore Township, Symmes Township, Columbia Township, Whitewater Township, Harrison Township, Crosby Township, Miami Township, Village of North Bend, the Village of Cleves, the Village of Silverton, and the Village of Lincoln Heights. Additionally, the Patrol Section oversees several units that work in conjunction with the officers on the road – Aviation, Canine Unit, Heavy Weapons, Hamilton County Police Association Honor Guard, Hamilton County Police Association SWAT, Underwater Search & Rescue, Hazardous Devices Unit, and Marine Patrol.

Within the HCSO lies the Professional Standards Division (PSD). The PSD is responsible for maintaining the highest professional conduct within the Sheriff’s Office. The division investigates complaints of officer misconduct, investigates use of force incidents, and sets the professional standards by which the agency will operate. The PSD has the responsibility of investigating the following:

- Allegations of unnecessary force used by a member of the agency in the performance of duty
- Any allegation of criminal conduct by a member of the department
- Allegations of false arrest
- Allegations of bias-based policing
- Internal complaints of all personnel

1 All information was pulled from the HCSO’s website: <https://www.hcso.org/>.





DATA & METHODS

“Use of force encompasses a spectrum of actions and responses that law enforcement may employ when confronted with situations that necessitate control, compliance, or protection.”



DATA COLLECTION

Over eight weeks (September 15 – November 3, 2022), CSJ and HCSO worked together to collect all use of force incidents on patrol. The following information provides a detailed account of the data collection process.

The data collection process intended to understand what use of force looks like across the areas that the Patrol Section is responsible for. The data was collected from the PSD unit for the HCSO Patrol Section from January 1, 2020, to July 31, 2022. The original goal was to collect data for one year; however, given the global pandemic, the timeframe was extended to account for the lockdown that occurred in 2020. The total number of force cases within this timeframe was 100. The total number of officers on patrol for those three years is 511, 191 in 2020, 166 in 2021, and 154 in 2022.

After the initial meeting with the HCSO and learning about the available data, an exploratory approach was taken for the use of force data. Specifically, the focus was narrowed down to answering the following questions:

- How does the Sheriff's Office define use of force?
- What types of force are used with residents while deputies are on patrol?
- What is the racial and gender breakdown of residents related to use used by deputies on patrol?
- What times of year are residents experiencing force by the deputies on patrol?
- What areas of the county are residents experiencing force by the deputies on patrol?

The data pulled were from use of force investigation reports. The data includes age, gender, race, charging offense, level of offense, type of force used, officer's age, race, gender, injuries incurred from the incident, the disposition of the investigation into the force, and the narrative of the incident. The narrative provides a description from the officer(s) involved of what occurred leading up to, during, and after the incident. The data also include use of force incidents that were both 'concur,' supervisors agreed with the force used in the incident, and 'non-concur,' supervisors did not agree with the force used in the incident.

TYPES OF FORCE

Use of force encompasses a spectrum of actions and responses that law enforcement may employ when confronted with situations that necessitate control, compliance, or protection. Each type of use of force carries distinct implications, considerations, and potential consequences. The HCSO has five definitions of force: use of force, physical/nonphysical force, chemical irritant/pepper ball, conducted² energy weapon (CEW), and canine use of force. Each type of force, highlighted in Table 1, has a section in the HCSO's policy manual that clearly explains the rules and regulations and what is expected when this type of force occurs. The table only focuses on the definitions of force.

TABLE 1. TYPES OF FORCE DEFINED

HAMILTON COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE TYPES OF FORCE ²	
USE OF FORCE ³	Involves the actual physical bodily contact with a person and beyond reasonable restraint force and forcibly subduing that individual until resistance is overcome. Physical force excludes the use of weapons or objects which could be considered as weapons such as CEW, baton, flashlight, etc.
PHYSICAL/NON-PHYSICAL FORCE ⁴	Involves the direct laying on of hands, or the bodily contact, in exercising control of a person(s) by a Deputy Sheriff, which is beyond reasonable restraint force and forcibly subduing that individual until resistance is overcome. Physical force excludes using weapons or objects that could be considered weapons, such as CEW, baton, flashlight, etc.
CHEMICAL IRRITANT/PEPPER BALL	A non-lethal chemical agent delivery system that uses high-pressure air launchers to deliver pelargonic acid vanillylamide (PAVA) powder projectiles from a distance, thus increasing officer safety.
CEW	An electrical control device that is a non-lethal force alternative used to assist officers in the performance of their duties. The TASER X-26 and X-2 is designed for self-defense or to temporarily immobilize a subject who is actively resisting arrest.
CANINE USE OF FORCE	The police service dog is a tool that can be used for a variety of law enforcement functions. The primary purpose of the canine is a detection tool, and not as an apprehension nor as an extraction tool. Due to the dog's physical capabilities, he can also be used as a method of force, when reasonable, against criminals or suicidal subjects. Force, including use of a canine, is never to be used against a complaint subject who is submitting to arrest.

² All definitions were pulled from HCSO's Policy Manual

³ For the purposes of this report, we refer to this type of force as 'physical force.'

⁴ For the purposes of this report, we refer to this type of force as 'non-injury force.'

TYPES OF DUTY

Officers are classified by duty in one of seven ways: outside employment, off duty details, off duty uniform, off duty non-uniform employment, private employer (private), scheduling officer, and outside employment/off detail coordinator. Each classification, explained in Table 2, carries a certain level of responsibility and expectation of response.

TABLE 2. TYPES OF DUTY DEFINED

HAMILTON COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE TYPES OF DUTY	
OUTSIDE EMPLOYMENT	Any non-law enforcement employment for profit or consideration by deputies who are not working under color of the Sheriff's Office and are not paid for through the Sheriff's Office budget.
OFF DUTY DETAILS	Any off-duty law enforcement employment for profit or consideration by deputies working under the color of the Sheriff's Office and not paid through the Sheriff's Office budget.
	Any off-duty law enforcement volunteer services, or any other off duty law enforcement activity, provided by deputies working under the color of the Sheriff's Office.
OFF DUTY UNIFORM EMPLOYMENT	Any off-duty detail that requires the deputy to work under the color of the Sheriff's Office. Often referred to as an off-duty detail.
OFF DUTY NON-UNIFORM EMPLOYMENT	Any off-duty detail that requires the deputy to work under the color of the Sheriff's Office while wearing civilian clothing. Often referred to as an off-duty detail.
PRIVATE EMPLOYER (CLIENT)	Any person, organization or entity utilizing deputies for outside or off duty details that is for compensation or is a volunteer service.
SCHEDULING OFFICER	The deputy responsible for scheduling an off-duty detail, acting as the primary contact for an off-duty detail, and responsible for entry and maintenance of the detail into RollKall.
OUTSIDE EMPLOYMENT/OFF DETAIL COORDINATOR	The person designated by the Sheriff to be responsible for compliance of all outside employment and off duty details policies and procedures.

RESULTS

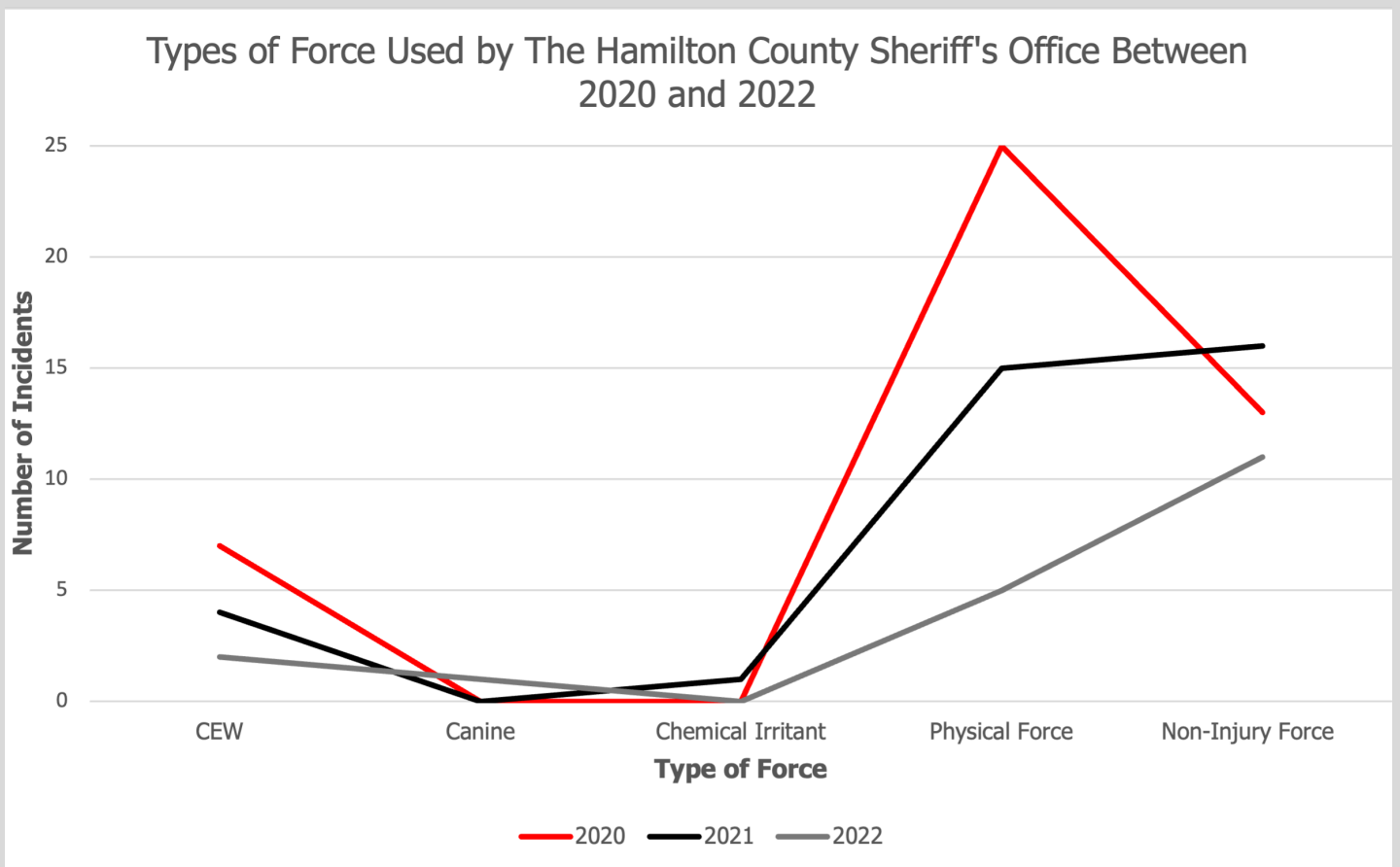


“Despite the lockdown in 2020, there were 45 cases of use of force, the highest number for this timeframe.”

The results section aims to provide a clear and objective overview of the patterns, trends, and key insights derived from the use of force incidents. Use of force is complex and multifaceted, encompassing a range of factors such as incident circumstances, officer involvement, escalation techniques, and outcomes. Due to the qualitative nature of the use of force incident reports, the results focus on the quantitative aspects of the incidents that may influence use of force decisions and outcomes.

The figure below shows 100 cases separated into the years they occurred, and the type of force used. Most of the cases in this study occurred in 2020 and the fewest were reported in 2022. This is likely because the collection only included half of the year. The most frequently reported type of force was physical force (45), with a close second being non-injury force (40).

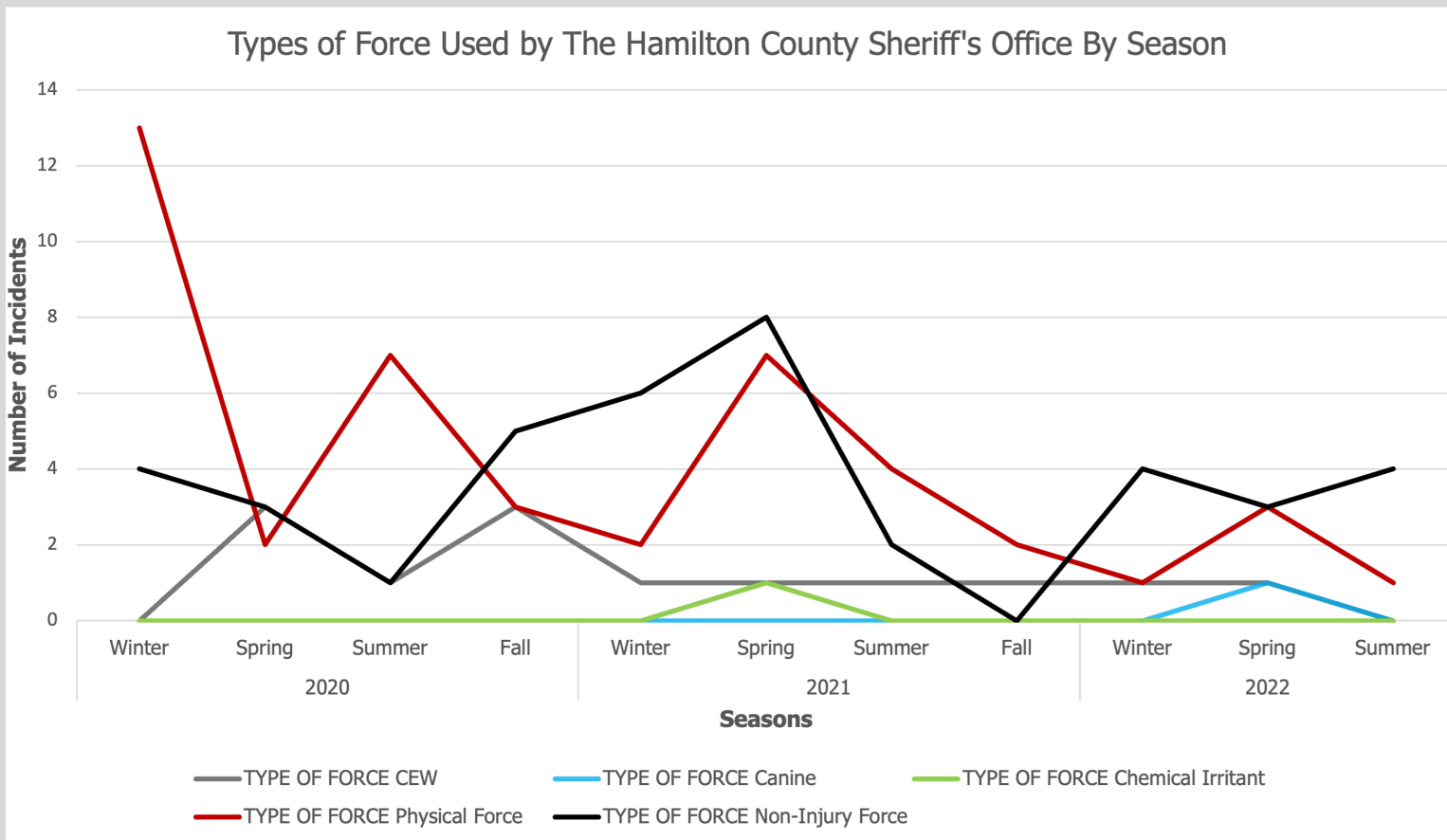
FIGURE 1. TYPE OF FORCE BY YEAR



The seasons listed in figure 2 are based on the lunar calendar and are separated into the categories of Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall. The season with the highest number of incidents in all three years was Spring. A total of 33 incidents occurred with the highest rate in 2021 with 17 reports. The next highest was the Winter season with 32 incidents most of which occurred in 2020. Next was Summer with a total of 21 reports and most occurred in 2020.

The Fall season accounted for only 14 of the total occurrences. However, the dataset does not include cases from Fall and Winter 2022. Non-injury physical force occurred consistently across each Winter season but increased in the Summer of 2022. Most CEW incidents occurred during the year 2020 and continued at a consistent rate for each season until the Summer 2022.

FIGURE 2. TYPE OF FORCE BY THE SEASON



The majority of people included in this dataset were either Black or white (Table 3). An estimated 67% of Hamilton County residents are white and account for a majority of the population.ⁱⁱ The second largest group is Black people, accounting for 26.6% of the population. However, Black people represent 48% of those reporting incidents of force. The males accounted for 80% of the incidents reported. Combined, the age groups 21 to 29 and 30 to 39 account for a majority of reports analyzed. In contrast, the 60 to 69 age demographics had only one occurrence. Notably, adolescents under 18 reported use of force at a rate comparable the 40 to 49 age group.

TABLE 3. DEMOGRAPHICS BY TYPE OF FORCE

DEMOGRAPHICS		POPULATION BY COUNTY*	TYPES OF FORCE					TOTALS
			CEW	CANINE	CHEMICAL IRRITANT	PHYSICAL FORCE	NON-INJURY FORCE	
RACE	BLACK	26.6%	5	0	1	20	22	48
	WHITE	67.6%	8	1	0	25	18	52
	TOTALS	94.2%*	13	1	1	45	40	100
SEX	MALE	48.6%	12	1	0	37	30	80
	FEMALE	51.4%	1	0	1	8	10	20
	TOTALS	100%	13	1	1	45	40	100
AGE GROUPS	UNDER 18	19%	0	0	0	6	8	14
	18 TO 20	7%	2	0	0	3	1	6
	21 TO 29	14%	3	0	0	14	12	29
	30 TO 39	14%	5	0	1	10	7	23
	40 TO 49	11%	2	1	0	7	4	14
	50 TO 59	13%	1	0	0	5	7	13
	60 TO 69	12%	0	0	0	0	1	1
	TOTALS	90%*	13	1	1	45	40	100

*The Hamilton County population percentages may not equal 100% due to the individuals who experienced force during this timeframe.

The use of force incidents seen throughout the HCSO included a primary officer – the person directly involved in the incident – however, there were instances when multiple officers were involved. Research has shown that use of force is more likely to occur when there is a difference of race or gender between the individual and the officer. Because most people who experienced force by the HCSO patrol officers were Blackⁱⁱⁱ (Table 3), it is not an anomaly to see that most officers involved in these incidents were white (Table 4). The breakdown for the other races were as follows: cases with Hispanic primary officers did not use CEWs, canines, or chemical irritants, and incidents with Black primary officers did not use canine and chemical irritants. Across all demographics, force was most likely to be used with physical force, resulting in non-injury as a close second.

TABLE 4. TYPE OF FORCE BY RACE OF PRIMARY OFFICER

TYPE OF FORCE	PRIMARY OFFICER RACE			
	WHITE	BLACK	HISPANIC	TOTALS
CEW	11	2	0	13
CANINE	1	0	0	1
CHEMICAL IRRITANT	1	0	0	1
PHYSICAL FORCE	37	6	2	45
NON-INJURY FORCE	34	5	1	40
TOTALS	84	13	3	100

The HCSO operates within units and districts. In the 100 cases, the Court Services Unit, responsible for court operations, only reported one incident (Figure 3). Most force incidents occurred in District 1, home to HCSO headquarters. Comparatively, District 3, which is a majority white community^{iv}, reported 17 incidents of force. Districts 4 and 5 accounted for 20 reports each with the majority of types of force used being non-injury force and physical force, respectively. The type of force most frequently reported in District 3 was physical force. While District 2 did not exist post-Spring 2021, the data was included since three force incidents occurred during the data collection timeframe.

The majority of force incidents occurred in District 1. Notably, District 1 has a population with a high poverty rate. Studies have shown that use of force incidents are more likely to occur across race and gender when lower socioeconomic status is a contributing factor.^v It is not unreasonable to see that two of the villages within District 1 (Village of Cleves with 17.2%^{vi} and the Village of Lincoln Heights with 62.2%)^{vii} have poverty rates higher than the national rate (11.9%)^{viii} during this timeframe.

FIGURE 3. TYPE OF FORCE BY DISTRICT/UNITS

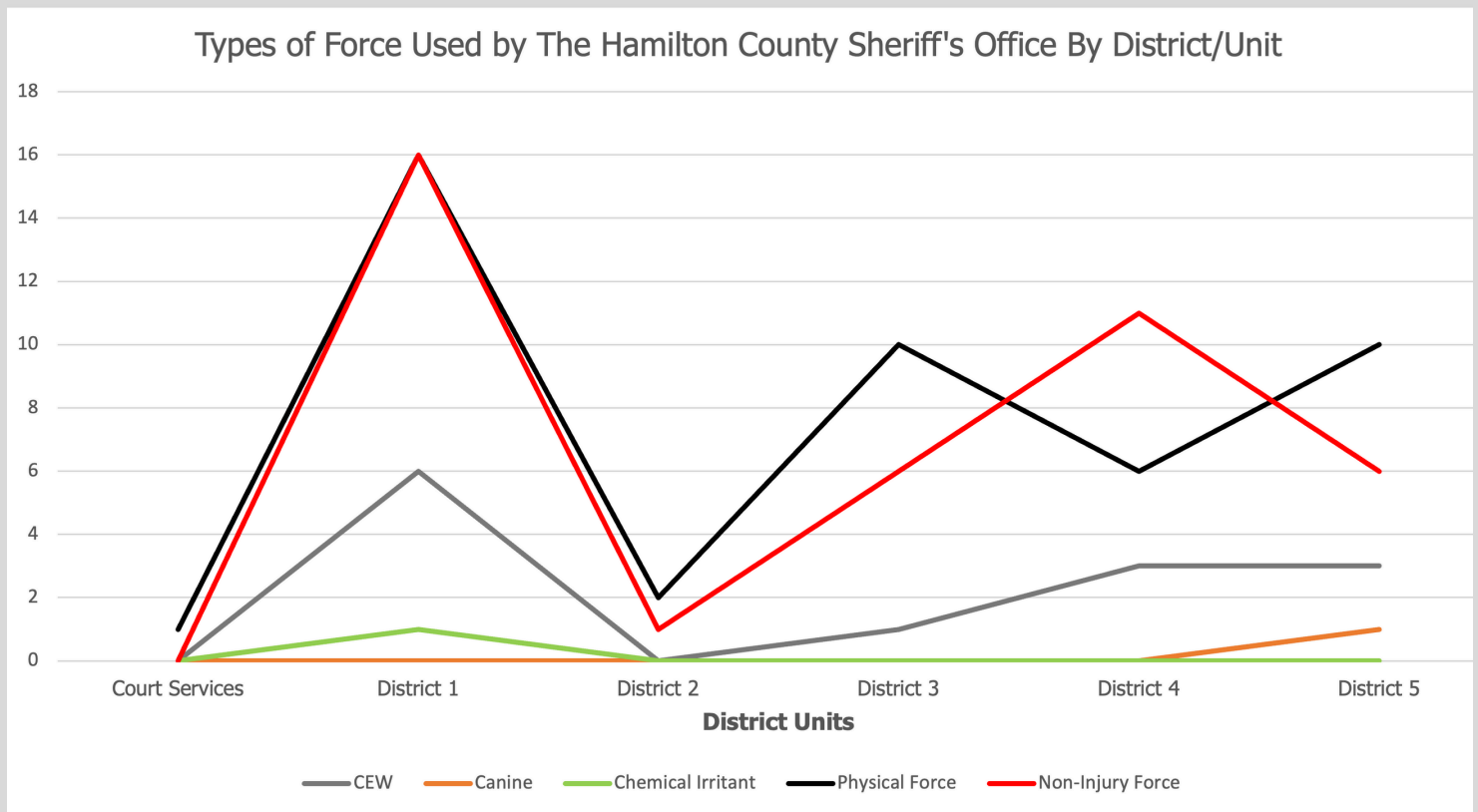
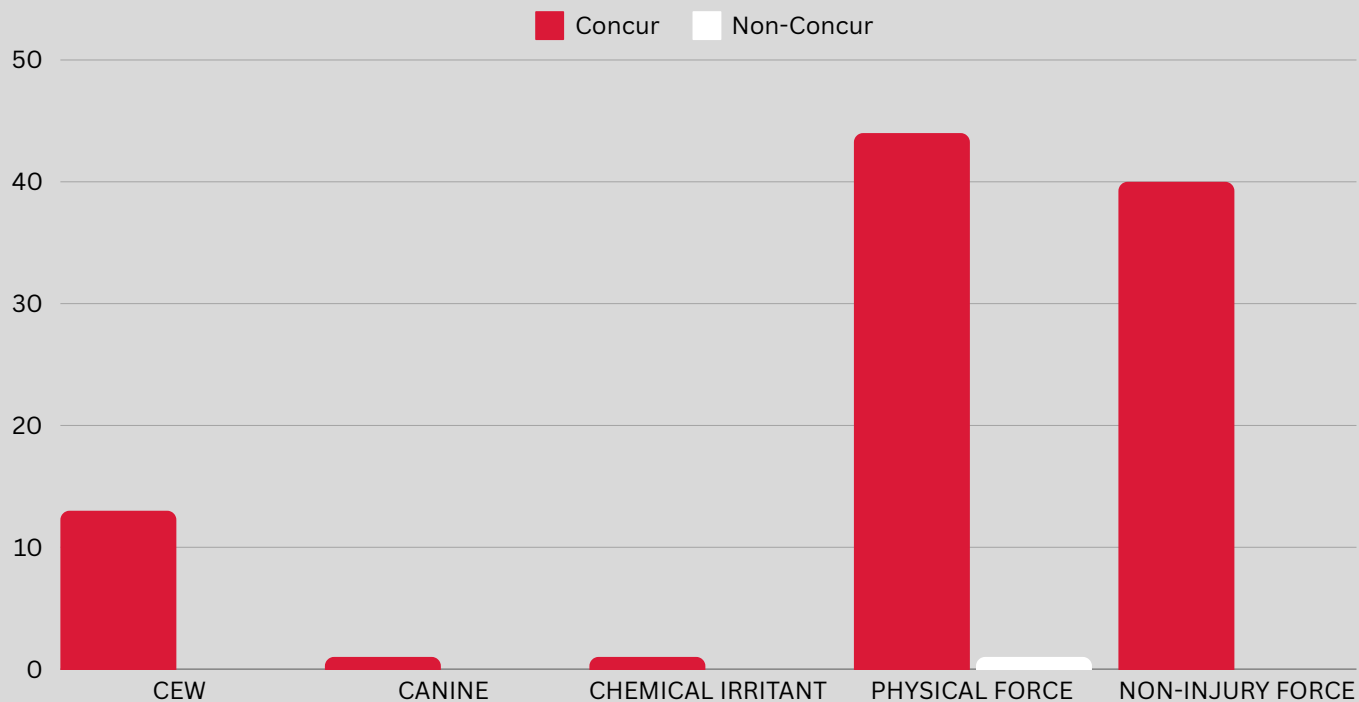


Table 5 shows the number of officers involved in an incident. This was defined by the number of officers on the scene at the time of the incident. However, this did not always represent the number of officers actively involved in the use of force. The data shows that use of force is more likely to occur when two or less officers were involved. As shown in Figure 4, supervisors reviewed and concurred (agreed) with the reporting officer in all but one use of force incident during the review period.

TABLE 5. NUMBER OF OFFICERS INVOLVED IN THE INCIDENT BY TYPE OF FORCE

TYPE OF FORCE	NUMBER OF OFFICERS INVOLVED							
	ONE	TWO	THREE	FOUR	FIVE	SIX	SEVEN	TOTALS
CEW	1	5	3	2	2	0	0	13
CANINE	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
CHEMICAL IRRITANT	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
PHYSICAL FORCE	9	13	8	11	1	1	1	44
NON-INJURY FORCE	14	10	10	2	5	0	0	41
TOTALS	24	28	23	15	8	1	1	100

FIGURE 4. TYPE OF FORCE BY DISPOSITION





LIMITATIONS

As with any data project, there are limitations that must be addressed. Given that a global pandemic occurred during the selected timeframe for the data collection and the United States had a national lockdown for most of 2020 which likely accounts for the small sample size. Because the data collection began in the fall of 2022, 2022 only includes seven months. As such, the data included in this report does not represent all incidents of force for this year. Additionally, the current report form does not include demographic information for multi-racial, transgender, or gender non-conforming individuals. Therefore, it was impossible to identify any trends in force based on these identities.

The HCSO also manages the Justice Center, which contains use of force data. However, due to the short timeframe for the grant, the capacity of the CSJ team, and the large amount of data from the Justice Center, no force was included from that location in this report. Additionally, District 2's – comprised of Green Township – contract with the HCSO ended on March 31, 2021, to form their own department. As such, data from District 2 only includes 2020 to the end of their contract.

Finally, due to this data's relatively small sample size, we could not run more robust analyses due to the sensitivity to outliers. As such, we could not detect meaningful relationships or effects, statistical significance, or make generalizable inferences on the data.



RECOMMENDATIONS

“Transparency through community involvement will enhance the legitimacy of the policy and reinforce the commitment to building trust between law enforcement and the community.”

Based on national research and the data presented in this report, the CSJ offers the following recommendations to improve use of force in Hamilton County. By embracing these recommendations, the HCSO can take a significant stride toward fostering transparency, accountability, and community trust.

IMPLEMENT A DE-ESCALATION POLICY

De-escalation is an essential technique to promote the reduction of force during law enforcement interactions. The department should develop and implement a well-crafted and properly executed de-escalation policy. The policy should include special populations (i.e., children, pregnant women, people experiencing mental health crises, individuals with disabilities, etc.), which will not only enhance the safety of both the public and officers. Additionally, transparency through community involvement will enhance the legitimacy of the policy and reinforce the commitment to building trust between law enforcement and the community.

“CHANGE IS SUSTAINED WHEN WE CREATE SPACE FOR THOSE MOST IMPACTED.”

ESTABLISH COMMUNITY OVERSIGHT BOARDS

Community oversight boards are essential to bridge the gap between policing and the communities they serve. Community oversight boards must have the authority to conduct unbiased investigations into allegations of police misconduct and review use-of-force incidents to ensure impartiality. It is important they be composed of diverse members representing various backgrounds, demographics, and perspectives within the community, recognize change is sustained when we create space for those most impacted. By establishing an independent and transparent avenue for addressing misconduct, promoting accountability, and fostering dialogue, these boards play a pivotal role in enhancing the effectiveness of community policing.

USE OF FORCE AND SUSCEPTIBLE POPULATIONS

It is important to adopt a comprehensive strategy to address use of force concerning marginalized populations, with a specific focus on age and race. Trainings that emphasize cultural sensitivity and unbiased communication to aid in de-escalation should be used to better equip officers for interactions with youth, elderly populations and historically marginalized racial groups. It is imperative that proactive measures to prevent unnecessary force and ensure the equitable treatment of all individuals in Hamilton County are in place

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY OF OFFICERS

CSJ encourages the Sheriff's Office to avoid hiring and/or promoting officers with a demonstrated history of bad judgment, poor decision-making, and/or misconduct.

INCLUSIVE DEMOGRAPHIC OPTIONS

Ensuring that the use of force reports are inclusive of demographic data, including multi-racial and non-conforming gender options, allows for identifying patterns and impacts of force.

PRIORITIZING DATA QUALITY AND INTEGRITY

In alignment with our recommendation in the Policing in Hamilton County, Ohio report published in 2022, we encourage HCSO to become a participating agency in the Police Data Initiative for Open Data Policing. Use of force data being publicly accessible is essential. Establishing a platform will allow citizens, researchers, and community organizations to analyze use-of-force incidents and other law enforcement events. Having this information available encourages critical analysis from individuals as diverse as those the HCSO serves.

Collaborating with community members will further strengthen relationships and grant greater access to the expertise established through the lived experience of those impacted most. In turn, this increases the effectiveness of our strategies for a more equitable policing model throughout Hamilton County.



CONCLUSION

“Collaborating with community members will further strengthen relationships and grant greater access to the expertise established through the lived experience of those impacted most.”



The results show that the profile of the person who was the typical recipient of the HCSO's use of force during 2020 and 2022 was a Black male between the ages of 21-29 during the Spring months in District 1 who experienced physical force by a maximum of two white officers. While generalizations cannot be made, this aligns with the national trends,^{ix} indicating that what is seen in Hamilton County is not unique. Other inferences can be made from the data collected for this report. It was surprising to see that 2020 had the highest number of cases given that the nation was on lockdown for most of the year. However, violent crime increased by 5.2%^x in 2020, which might account for increased use of force incidents by patrol.

It was also interesting that Winter was the second highest season to experience the most use of force cases (Table 4). While the data is unclear why this occurred, the rest of the data was on par with the temperature aggression hypothesis (a total of 38 cases for both Spring and Summer). The temperature aggression hypothesis is the idea that as temperatures increase so do aggressive and violent behaviors.^{xi} Given that most of the use of force incidents occurred during the warmer seasons, there may be a need for more strategic and intentional seasonal variation in de-escalation tactics to reduce force incidents.

Given the disparities among racial groups, diminishing racial bias as it relates to use of force outcomes should be a priority for the HCSO. Additionally, closer consideration should be given to age related trends and gender disparities, with special attention to the population at the highest risk intersection – Black males aged 21 to 39. Use of force incidents are more likely to occur across race and gender when lower socioeconomic status is a contributing factor.^{xii} The association between use of force and those living in poverty and the intersections of race should be more closely considered as HCSO continues to be more strategic about its interactions with the community.

For centuries, organizers, activists, and community members have worked to dismantle systems like the criminal legal system. As we aim toward a more equitable policing model across Hamilton County and the Southwestern Ohio region, we must always recognize the work that progressed historically marginalized peoples and informs our mission today. In the same vein, we have a responsibility to consider when these solutions have not created desirable outcomes.^{xiii} Therefore, we must always create space for nontraditional remedies such as allocation of resources and transformative institutional change.



Follow up with HCSO: It should be noted that the CSJ team has been in conversations with HCSO about moving from a traditional paper-based record keeping. Based on our last conversation, the HCSO transitioned from paper to electronic records in Fall of 2023. This move will benefit not only the department but also residents of the County as it will provide easier access to this information to keep updated on what force looks like at the HCSO. We have also been updated in a language shift from “use of force” to “response to resistance”. Additionally, we contemplated incorporating a recommendation for the Duty to Render Aid. However, the HCSO is in the process of updating its policies with an evidenced-based public safety management tool, Lexipol. This will automate the policy development process in accordance with current legal standards with the state and federal authorities.

ENDNOTES

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