

Offense Context in Victimization

This one-page report focuses on victimization trends in Washington State from 2013 to 2023 using NIBRS data. The analysis examines differences in victimization patterns across demographic groups and offense types, including violent, interpersonal, property, and economically motivated crimes. Particular attention is given to how victimization varies by characteristics such as sex, age, and race across different categories of offenses.

Data Parameters

This one-page report analyzes publicly available National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) data from 2013–2023 to examine victimization trends across demographic factors, using incident-level data compiled by the monthly reported incident-based offense statistics from participating law enforcement agencies and accessed via the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR). Because NIBRS differs methodologically from the legacy Summary Reporting System and participation is voluntary, findings are not intended to be generalized, and comparisons with other datasets should be made cautiously. The dataset includes over 4.6 million incidents:

- Due to the missing or incomplete demographic data, the final dataset varied depending on the missing or incomplete demographic data. For example, the final dataset included:
 - 3,410,564 unique and valid sex data (73.9% of all unique NIBRS offense events) for victims.
 - 2,995,861 unique and valid race data (64.9% of all unique NIBRS offense events) for victims.
 - 3,396,428 unique and valid age data (73.6% of all unique NIBRS offense events) for victims.
- “Offenses” include violent vs non-violent (i.e., involving vs not involving physical harm/threat), contact vs non-contact (i.e., involving vs not involving direct physical contact with a victim), and interpersonal vs instrumental (i.e., offenses driven by personal emotions or conflict between individuals vs offenses committed to achieve a goal, such as money or power) victimization types.

Limitations

All data comes with its limitations. This report identifies a few major limitations, and there are likely more not listed that could impact work that utilizes this data. Limitations include:

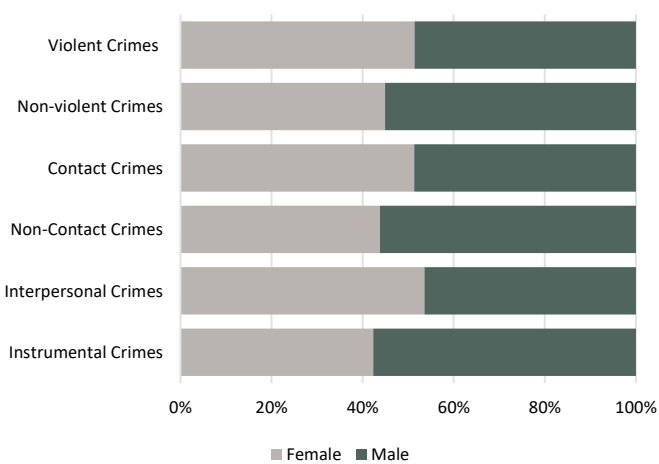
- Analyses are descriptive and non-generalizable. Any inferences and implications are limited, and results are modest. Further analyses must be completed for causal relationships to be determined.
- Administrative data and the lack of detail or richness significantly limits any conclusions yielded from this work.
- In terms of demographic assessment, these results must be interpreted with caution. As race data can be misclassified, any analysis of race across criminal justice decision-points is negatively impacted by true reliability and validity. Only records for individuals with clearly defined, unduplicated race, sex, and date of birth were utilized to ensure data quality, so results may be underreported. Additionally, this brief was limited to values collected by the NIBRS.
- The dataset includes exclusively NIBRS victim records and may be subject to underreporting, as it reflects only participating jurisdictions and does not represent all law enforcement agencies nationwide.
- NIBRS reporting variability (i.e., voluntary participation, updates over time, or uneven county/jurisdiction coverage) creates inconsistencies and potentially skews the data.
- Due to the impacts of COVID-19, trends might be skewed and misreported.

Research on victimization patterns suggests that crime exposure is shaped by social context, opportunity structures, and the nature of interpersonal interaction rather than by demographic characteristics alone. Prior studies indicate that differences across sex, age, and race are often reflected less in overall victimization rates and more in the types of offenses individuals are likely to experience, including violent, interpersonal, property, and economically motivated crimes. Existing literature further emphasizes the importance of routine activities, life-course transitions, and environmental exposure in influencing victimization risk.

Sex shapes offense victimization context

Figure 1 shows the average frequency distribution by sex and victimization type. The data shows relatively balanced sex representation across all victimization types, though several noticeable patterns emerge. Males were more represented as a victim in instrumental crimes (57.7%), non-contact crimes (56.2%), and non-violent crimes (55.1%), suggesting that male victims were more likely to be involved in offenses involving indirect actions, property-related motives, or goal-oriented behavior. In contrast, females were slightly more represented as a victim in interpersonal crimes (53.6%), contact crimes (51.3%), and violent crimes (51.4%), indicating a greater involvement in offenses involving direct interaction or confrontation with others. However, the differences between males and females were generally modest, with most categories showing only small percentage gaps. Findings suggest that gender differences are present but not extreme, with participation across victimization type remaining evenly distributed between males and females. These differences may point to variation in the contexts or circumstances under which victimization occurs across genders.

Figure 1. Distribution by sex and victimization type



For more information contact:

Vasiliki Georgoulas-Sherry, PhD | vasiliki.georgoulas-sherry@ofm.wa.gov | Hanna Hernandez, MA | hanna.hernandez@ofm.wa.gov

Life course patterns structure victimization exposure

Figure 2 shows the average frequency distribution by age at time of victimization and victimization type. Victimization patterns varied across the life course, with individuals aged 46 and older making up the largest proportion of victims in instrumental crimes (39%), interpersonal crimes (40.5%), and non-violent crimes (42%). In contrast, contact crimes (24.4%), non-contact crimes (24.5%), and violent crimes (24.5%) showed a more even distribution across adult age groups, with the highest percentages occurring among victims aged 26 to 35 (24.9%). Victims aged 0 to 17 consistently represented the smallest proportion across all victimization types, specifically, in instrumental, interpersonal, and non-violent crimes, but accounted for a much larger share in contact, non-contact, and violent crimes (13.3%). Results suggest that older adults were more frequently victimized in indirect or non-violent offenses, while violent and contact-related crimes affected a broader range of age groups more evenly. The relatively similar percentages across several adult age groups indicate that victimization was not limited to one specific stage of adulthood. Patterns also suggest that the type of victimization influences which age groups are more likely to be targeted.

Figure 2. Distribution by age at time of victimization and victimization type

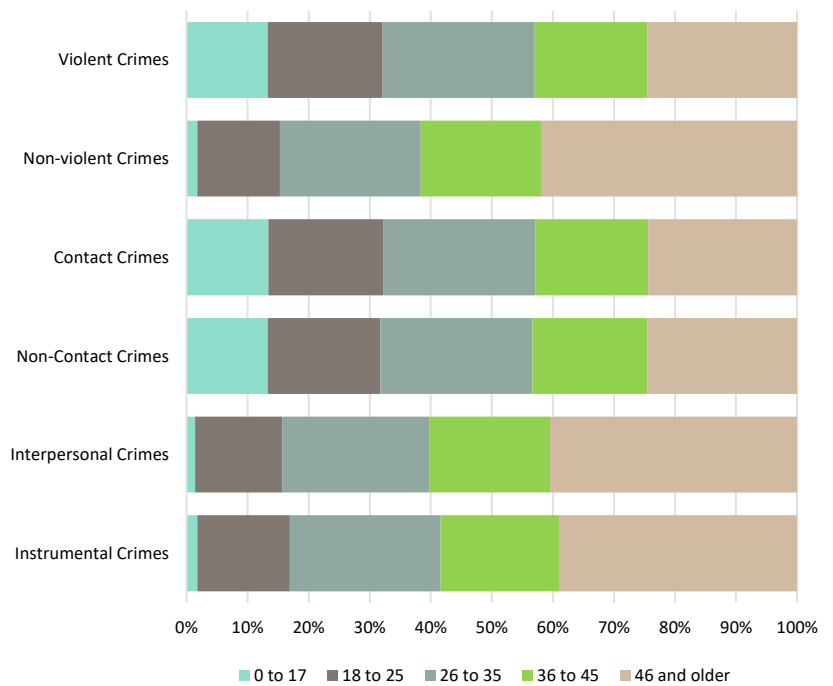
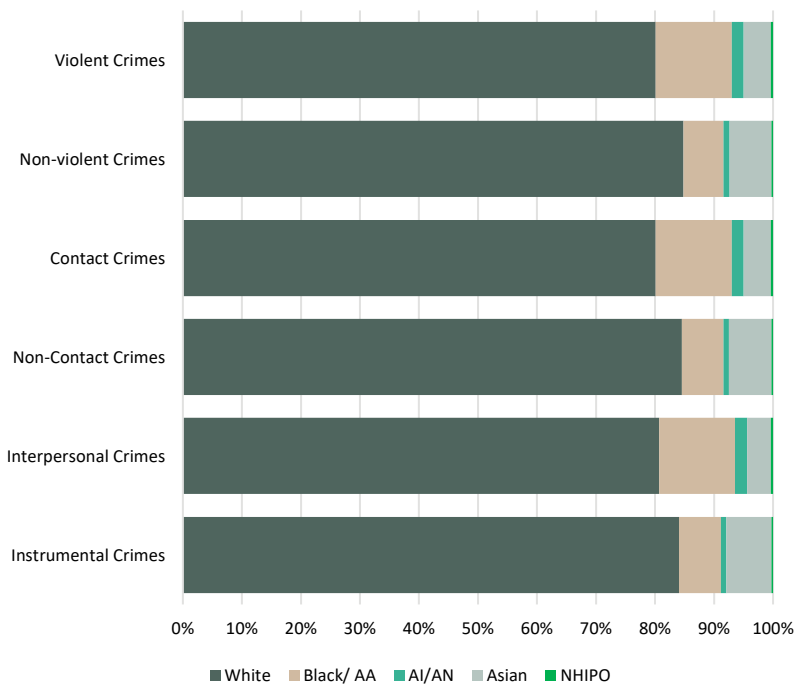


Figure 3. Average frequency distribution by race and by offense type



Racial patterns reflect offense concentration, not structure

Figure 3 shows the average frequency distribution by race and victimization type. The race data shows that White victims represented the largest proportion across all victimization types, accounting for between 80.1% and 84.8% of cases. Black/African American victims made up the second-largest proportion in interpersonal crimes (12.9%), contact crimes (12.9%), and violent offenses (12.9%), while Asian victims had a higher representation in instrumental crimes (7.7%), non-contact crimes (7.2%), and non-violent offenses (7.1%). American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (NHIPO) groups consistently represented the smallest percentages across all categories. Overall, the findings suggest that racial representation varied somewhat depending on the type of offense, although White victims remained the majority group in every category. The higher percentages of Black/African American victims in interpersonal and violent offenses may indicate differences in the nature of victimization or reporting patterns across crime types. Additionally, the similarities between contact and violent offense percentages suggest a close relationship between these two categories.

Victimization patterns across offense types show that exposure to harm is shaped more by social context, routine activity, and offense characteristics than by demographic identity alone. Differences across sex, age, and race reflected variation in interpersonal proximity, economic exposure, and environmental opportunity structures. Violent and contact-based offenses were more closely tied to direct social interaction and vulnerability, while nonviolent and instrumental crimes reflected broader opportunity-based exposure. Overall, the findings suggest that victimization is socially embedded and shaped by the environments and interactions individuals experience in daily life.

This one-page report is part of a series intended to provide a concise summary of victimization patterns in Washington State; for a more detailed analysis, please refer to *Utilizing the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS): Demographic Patterns of Victimization in Washington State*.

For more information contact:

Vasiliki Georgoulas-Sherry, PhD | vasiliki.georgoulas-sherry@ofm.wa.gov | Hanna Hernandez, MA | hanna.hernandez@ofm.wa.gov