

Victimization Relationship Patterns

This one-page report examines victimization patterns in Washington State from 2013 to 2023 using data from the NIBRS, focusing on type of victim, victim–offender relationship, and the presence of familiarity in victimization. The analysis highlights how victimization varies across victim types and the relational context between victims and offenders, including distinctions between known and unknown individuals. Findings provide insight into the extent to which victimization occurs within existing social networks versus between strangers.

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). NIBRS differs methodologically from the legacy Summary Reporting System and participation is voluntary, findings are not intended to be generalized, and comparisons should be made cautiously.

Incidents may contain multiple offenses, and classification is based on the primary offense as recorded in NIBRS reporting structure. Additionally, victim records represent victimization events rather than unique individuals and may include multiple records. The dataset includes over 4.6 million incidents:

- Victim type was categorized using standard NIBRS classifications (e.g., individual, business, government), with analyses primarily restricted to individual victims to allow for demographic and relational assessment.
- Victim–offender relationship was measured using NIBRS-defined categories (e.g., acquaintance, intimate partner, family member, stranger), and cases with missing or unknown relationship data were excluded from related analyses. A dichotomous familiarity variable was constructed from this relationship field, classifying incidents as “familiar” when the offender was known to the victim and “non-familiar” when the offender was a stranger.

Relationship Shapes Victimization

Table 1 depicts the count and frequency of the victim relationship to their offender from 2013 to 2023. The distribution is heavily influenced by missing data, with 80.6% of cases lacking recorded relationship information, which limits interpretation of relational patterns and should be considered when reviewing results. Among known cases, victimization was most commonly associated with strangers (5.0%), indicating a notable share of incidents involving no prior interpersonal connection. Non-stranger relationships collectively represent smaller proportions but show variation across categories, reflecting different levels of social proximity between victims and offenders. The most commonly known non-stranger relationship was boyfriend/girlfriend (3.2%), followed by acquaintances (2.5%) and otherwise known individuals (2.2%). Familial relationships were less frequent but present across several categories, including spouses (1.2%), parents (1.2%), siblings (0.7%), and children (0.7%). Friend and neighbor relationships were relatively rare, at 0.6% and 0.5%, respectively, while extended or stepfamily ties each accounted for 0.1–0.4% of cases. Overall, the pattern suggests that stranger-perpetrated victimization is prominent among known cases, while a substantial portion of incidents also occur within existing social or intimate relationships. However, the large proportion of missing data requires caution in interpretation and limits definitive conclusions about the full distribution of victim–offender dynamics. These results highlight the importance of context, including social proximity and missing data, in interpreting victim–offender relationships.

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.
- Changes in NIBRS participation and reporting practices over time may influence observed trends, making it difficult to determine whether increases or decreases reflect actual changes in crime or differences in data collection.
- 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.
- Victim records reflect reported incidents to law enforcement and may not capture unreported or undetected victimization, leading to potential bias in estimates of prevalence and patterns.
- Due to the impacts of COVID-19, trends might be skewed and misreported.

Table 1. Count and frequency of the victim’s relationship to their offender (2013-2023)

	N	%
Victim relationship to offender		
Missing	3,718,512	80.6
Victim was Stranger	229,122	5.0
Victim was Boyfriend/Girlfriend	147,576	3.2
Victim was Acquaintance	116,272	2.5
Victim was Otherwise Known	102,548	2.2
Victim was Spouse	54,951	1.2
Victim was Parent	53,164	1.2
Victim was Sibling	31,039	0.7
Victim was Child	30,673	0.7
Victim was Friend	26,267	0.6
Victim was Neighbor	24,930	0.5
Victim was Other Family Member	20,567	0.4
Victim was Offender	10,342	0.2
Victim was Ex-Spouse	8,216	0.2
Victim was Stepchild	5,400	0.1
Victim was Stepparent	4,873	0.1
Victim was Grandparent	4,658	0.1

Notes: Percentages are based on row totals. Counts under 10 are redacted for confidentiality. Incidents may include multiple offenses and are classified by the primary offense in NIBRS. Victim records represent victimization events, not unique individuals, and may include repeat records.

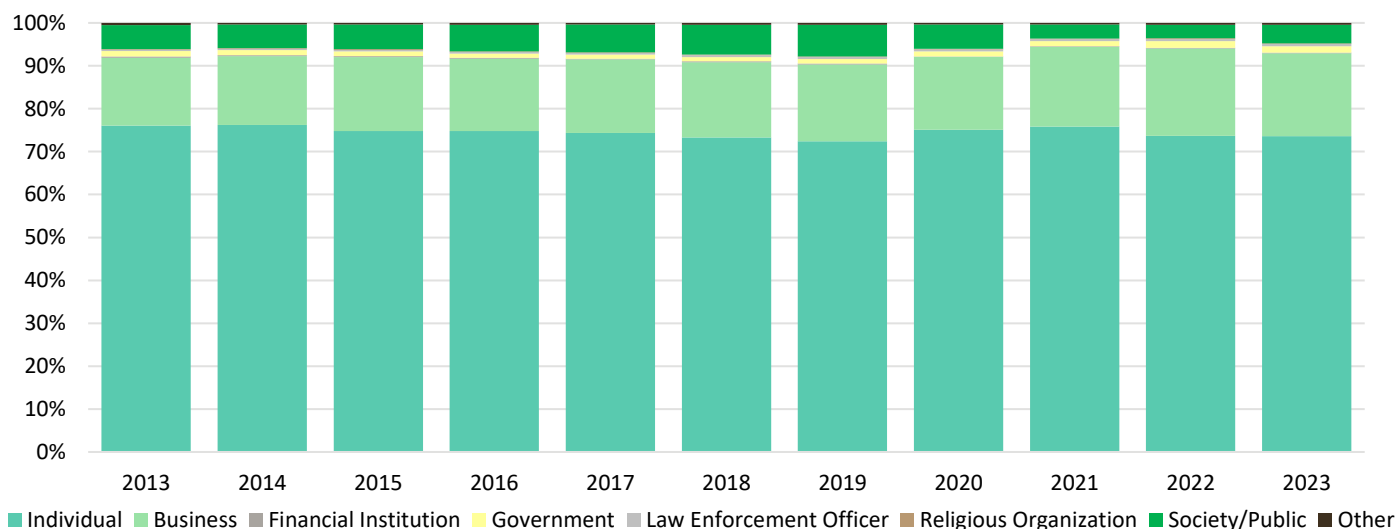
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Victim Types in Reported Victimization

Figure 1 shows the annual distribution of victim types by offense from 2013 to 2023. Across all years, individual victims overwhelmingly dominate the dataset, increasing from 264,780 in 2013 to a peak of 353,974 in 2022 before slightly declining to 325,618 in 2023, indicating sustained growth in person-directed victimization with minor recent stabilization. Business-related victimizations show a strong and consistent upward trend over the decade, rising from 54,970 in 2013 to a peak of 97,844 in 2022 before decreasing to 85,323 in 2023, suggesting expanding exposure of commercial entities to reported incidents. In contrast, financial institution victimizations remain relatively low and gradually decline over time, falling from 1,029 in 2013 to 616 in 2023. Government-related victimizations show moderate fluctuations but a noticeable increase in the later years, particularly from 2020 onward, reaching a peak of 7,379 in 2022 before slightly declining in 2023. Law enforcement officer victimizations exhibit a steady upward trajectory throughout the period, increasing from 978 in 2013 to 2,200 in 2023, indicating sustained growth in recorded incidents involving officers. Religious organization victimizations remain comparatively low and relatively stable, with minor fluctuations and a peak in 2022 (943) before declining in 2023 (682). Society/public victimizations rise sharply through 2018 (30,545) before dropping substantially in 2020 (25,195) and declining further in 2021 (14,629), followed by a partial recovery in subsequent years, suggesting a structural disruption during the pandemic period. Other victim types remain consistently low and stable across the time series. Findings highlight the persistent dominance of individual victims, a long-term increase in business and law enforcement-related victimizations, and a clear structural disruption around 2020 that reshaped reporting patterns across several categories.

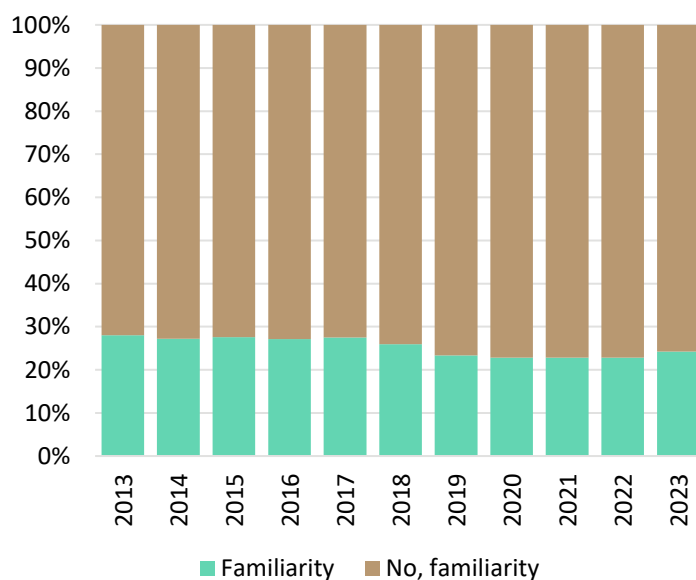
Figure 1. Average frequency distribution by year of offense and victim type



Victimization Increasingly Involves Strangers

Figure 2 shows the frequency distribution of victimization by year of offense and offender familiarity. Temporal variation was observed across both familiarity categories, with incidents involving no prior familiarity consistently exceeding those involving familiar offenders throughout the study period. Across 2013–2023, non-familiar victimization increased substantially, rising from 40,279 incidents in 2013 to 73,682 in 2023, with a pronounced increase beginning in 2019 that remained elevated through the end of the study period. Familiarity-based incidents also increased over time, growing from 15,699 in 2013 to 23,605 in 2023, though at a slower rate and with greater stability in the early 2020s. Both categories followed a generally upward trajectory, suggesting broader growth in victimization over time; however, the increase was considerably more pronounced among incidents involving strangers. As a result, the gap between familiar and non-familiar victimization widened across the study period, indicating an increasing concentration of recorded incidents involving individuals with no prior relationship to the offender. The sharp rise observed around 2019 represents a notable inflection point in the trend and may reflect changes in reporting practices, offense composition, or broader social conditions affecting victimization patterns.

Figure 2. Average frequency distribution by year of offense and presence of familiarity



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): Tracking Temporal Trends in Victimization, 2013–2023*.

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