

Domestic Violence Arrests in Washington

Domestic Violence (DV) poses a risk to the safety of Washington residents. This report focuses on arrests with a DV enhancement from the Washington State Patrol (WSP) and aims to explore the demographics of those being arrested.

Data Parameters

The WSP maintains a database of Washington criminal history information, or background checks, consisting of fingerprint-based records and disposition information from law enforcement agencies and courts throughout the state. Data is retrieved from the Washington State Identification System (WASIS) for criminal history information and the Washington Crime Information Center (WACIC) for non-fingerprint hot file information. In conjunction with the WSP's Automated Biometric Identification System (ABIS), this database connects all arrests based on fingerprints, not merely by name. The following parameters were used for this brief:

- DV is defined by RCW 10.99.020 and, in terms of the present data, involves having a DV enhancement noted on the arrest record, designating a crime committed against family or a household member. The most common DV-related arrests in the present data include assault (RCW 9A.36) and violation of a protection order (RCW 26.50).
- Only individuals who were 18 years or older at the time of arrest were included.
- Due to conflicting records associated to one arrest, any arrests with multiple demographics (i.e., race, sex, birth dates) were excluded to avoid any potential incorrect assumptions and to maintain data integrity. As such, data might be underreported.
- The data is provided as arrest based, not individual based, therefore, an individual would be represented as many times as they were arrested from 1995 to 2024.

Demographics

Between January 1, 1995, to December 31, 2024, there were 451,063 arrests with a DV enhancement. The average age of an arrestee was 35 years old ($M = 34.8$, $SD = 11.2$). Arrests with a DV enhancement were more likely to be associated with males as compared to females (Table 1). Arrests with a DV enhancement were more likely to be associated with white arrestees than the rest of race categories. In terms of age category, those closer to the average age were more likely to be associated to an arrest with a DV enhancement.

Washington's population is almost evenly distributed in terms of sex, and the majority of the population were white (81.0%), while the BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and/or People of Color community) presented slightly less than one-fifth of the Washington population.

Limitations

This brief identifies a few major limitations that could impact any work that utilizes this data. These limitations include but are not limited to:

- 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 cautiously. Race data can be misclassified, which impacts any analysis of race across criminal justice decision points. 1.5% of arrests were excluded in the demographic analysis due to race data being unknown, compared to less than 0.1% of the sex data being excluded. Additionally, this brief was limited to values collected by WSP. Race data provided by WSP are defined by NCIC and are required to be utilized by all agencies reporting CHRI to the FBI.
- Any longitudinal analyses must be carefully evaluated due to potential policy changes in DV laws that could impact trends and interpretations.
- Due to the impacts of COVID-19, trends might be skewed and underreported.
- There are many factors that contribute to the reluctance of a victim reporting abuse, and the data might not accurately represent the true picture of DV-related arrests.

Table 1. DV enhancement arrests demographics

	N	%
Sex		
Female	119,108	26.4
Male	331,906	73.6
Race		
American Indian or Alaskan Native	7,433	1.7
Asian or Pacific Islander	14,885	3.3
Black	51,565	11.6
White	370,653	83.4
Age Category		
18 to 25	100,575	22.3
26 to 35	149,902	33.2
36 to 45	117,863	26.1
> = 46	82,723	18.3

Notes: Percentages are based on column totals. Due to rounding, totals may not equal 100%. Due to unknown values demographic totals may not be equal.

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Outcomes

Most felony arrests with a DV enhancement were classified as either a Class B felony (44.3%) or a Class C felony (42.1%) (Figure 1). Class A felony is the most severe classification, and these made up about a tenth of the classified felony arrests. It is important to note, not all felony were classified, leading to an unspecified felony arrest (3.8%); there are many reasons for non-classification, including the potential of a fast-paced environment during the arrests. Among all arrests with a DV enhancement, 14.5% were classified as felony offenses, while the rest were associated with a less severe classifications: gross misdemeanor (83.1%) or misdemeanor (2.3%).

Majority of DV enhancement arrests were classified as gross misdemeanors across all demographic breakdowns (Table 2). Additionally, across the sex, race, and age breakdowns, less than 5% of arrests with a DV enhancement were classified as misdemeanors. However, when evaluating felonies across sex, about 10% of female arrests with a DV enhancement were classified as felonies, while 16.1% of male arrests. Note that these classifications reflect the charge at time of arrest, which may be modified by the court prior to disposition.

On average, there were about 15,035 arrests annually with a DV enhancement from 1995 to 2024. The years 1995–2002, 2009–11, and 2019, were all above average. Additionally, Figure 2 shows the number of arrests with a DV enhancement from 2010 to 2024. From the peak in 2019, there was a 33.1% decrease to the low point in 2022, which likely reflects reductions in arrests during the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, there was a general decrease in DV enhancements over time.

Figure 1. Distribution of ranked felony classifications for DV enhancement arrests

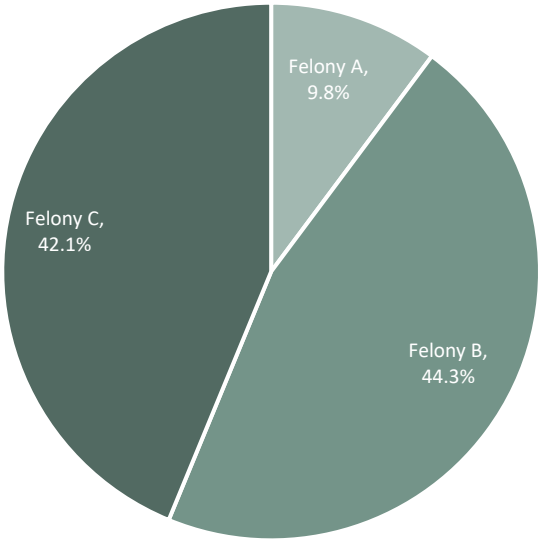
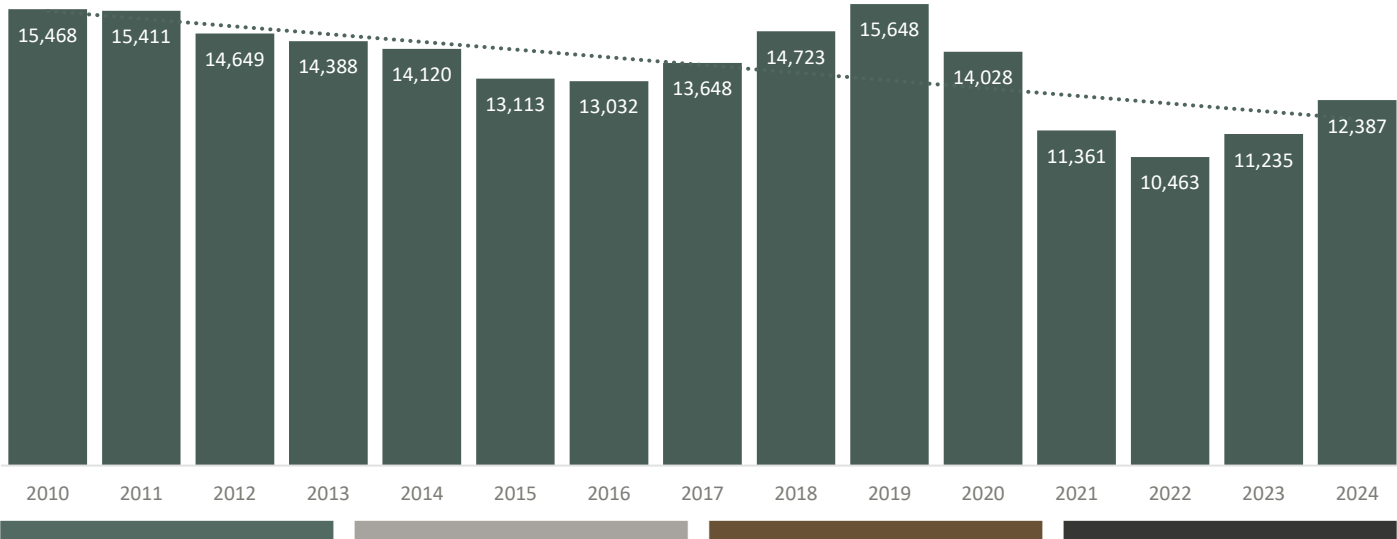


Table 2. Distribution of offense classification by demographics for DV enhancement arrests

	Classification N (%)		
	Felony	Gross Misdemeanor	Misdemeanor
Sex			
Female	9,688 (10.1)	84,525 (88.0)	1,831 (1.9)
Male	42,723 (16.1)	215,273 (81.3)	6,634 (2.5)
Race			
American Indian or Alaskan Native	862 (15.6)	4,566 (82.6)	100 (1.8)
Asian or Pacific Islander	1,772 (16.2)	8,928 (80.9)	335 (3.0)
Black	7,112 (19.4)	27,949 (76.0)	1,691 (4.6)
White	42,039 (13.9)	253,472 (84.0)	6,293 (2.1)
Age Category			
18 to 25	10,757 (13.4)	67,620 (84.4)	1,782 (2.2)
26 to 35	17,634 (14.7)	99,187 (82.9)	2,855 (2.4)
36 to 45	13,632 (14.5)	78,196 (83.2)	2,197 (2.3)
> = 46	10,394 (15.5)	54,828 (82.0)	1,631 (2.4)

Notes: Percentages are based on row totals. Due to rounding totals may not equal 100%. “Felony” includes unspecified felonies, felony class A, felony class B, and felony class C.

Figure 2. Frequency of arrests with a DV enhancement by year



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