

Executive Summary

This report provides a quantitative analysis of demographic disparities found in law enforcement data from the Spokane Police Department. While quantitative data can be used to identify correlations between different variables, these correlations cannot be used to make findings or conclusions as to causation. This study does identify and measure demographic disparities by the race, age and sex of the subjects involved, but we do not attempt to determine whether these racial disparities may be caused by officer bias, racial profiling, or other discriminatory practices. These are causal questions that cannot be answered by a quantitative study alone.

The presence of a demographic disparity does not automatically mean that officers are engaged in biased behavior. Similarly, the absence of disparity does not mean that individual acts of bias by police officers are not occurring. This study is merely a starting point for a deeper examination of these issues by the Spokane Police Department. This report may also be used by the community to learn more about how their local police department works and how officers exercise their discretion when making law enforcement decisions. Our hope is that this report will stimulate an ongoing discussion between the Spokane Police Department and the communities they serve about procedural justice, fairness, and equity in policing.

The research methodology used in this report to measure demographic disparities employs several activity-based benchmarks rather than a single population-based benchmark. While the demographic disparities found in this report tend to be smaller than disparities found in studies that use a population-based benchmark, these activity-based disparities should be more reflective of officer behavior. Therefore, we have adjusted the disparity scale and consider disparities greater than 50% above the benchmark to be high disparity. This is roughly one-quarter of what population-based studies would consider to be high disparity (typically two or more times greater than the population).

The data from the Spokane Police Department revealed that Males were overrepresented, and Females were underrepresented as suspects in reported crimes, in uses of force and in searches, but there were not disparities observed for Males or Females in stops or arrests. Juvenile

Subjects and Subjects over age 50 were less likely to be reported as a crime suspect than would be expected based on their population while those between the ages of 18 and 49 were more likely to be reported as a crime suspect. When compared with reported crimes, those over 50 were more likely to be stopped by police while those under 30 were less likely to be stopped. After being stopped, Subjects over 50 were less likely to be arrested, searched, or have force used against them. Subjects between 18 and 30 were more likely to be searched. Black and Native American Subjects were more likely to be identified as a suspect in a reported crime than would be expected based on their populations. Asian Subjects were less likely to be identified as a crime suspect. There were no disparities by race in stops or in arrests, but Black and Native American Subjects were slightly more likely to have force used against them during an arrest. The largest racial disparities were observed in discretionary searches that occurred after a traffic stop. However, this search data should be viewed with caution since the total number of searches examined was only 256. This report provides detailed recommendations on how the quality of search data can be improved.

While no significant racial disparities were observed for stops or arrests, we conducted a deeper analysis by examining racial disparities in different levels of discretionary actions for both stops and the issuance of infractions, citations, and arrests for different crime levels. The findings show that it is unlikely that Spokane Police officers are engaged in systemic biased practices against any particular demographic group. The data also suggests that the racial groups that are typically viewed as the targets of police racial bias (Blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans) have the lowest risk of being discriminated against during encounters where officers have a high level of discretion in making law enforcement decisions. The analysis shows that in those cases where officers have the highest levels of discretion, Black, Native American, and Juvenile Subjects have the lowest risk of encountering officer bias in law enforcement decisions. These Bias Risk Scores only apply to systemic officer bias. Individual acts of officer bias should not impact the overall Risk Scores, but systemic and repeated acts of bias would.

This report provides descriptive information and basic statistics on police-civilian interactions in the City of Spokane. With dozens of data fields and hundreds of thousands of records, there is a great deal of statistical research that could be conducted on this data set. This report provides a

high-level look at the data. At the conclusion of this report, we provide some recommendations on how the ongoing data collection process by the Spokane Police Department can be improved as well as additional data variables that could enhance the analysis. Recommendations for SPD policy, training or procedural changes are beyond the scope of this report although this data set could certainly be used to support recommendations in these areas.