Georgia Commission on Family Violence

Walking the Line

Navigating Duty and Discretion in Responding to Family Violence

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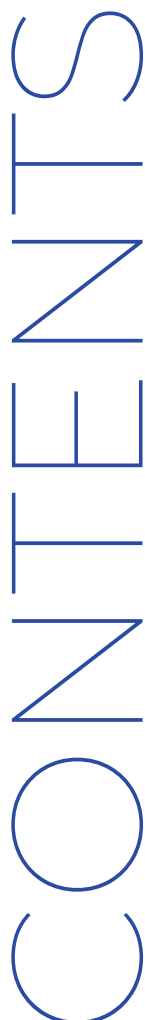CONTENTS

ABOUT

The Georgia Commission on Family Violence

The Georgia General Assembly created the Georgia Commission on Family Violence (GCFV) in 1992 to create a comprehensive state plan for ending family violence in Georgia. The mission of GCFV is to provide leadership to end family violence by promoting safety, ensuring accountability, and improving justice for generations to come. GCFV is led by a dedicated team and 37 appointed Commission members from multidisciplinary professions and is administratively attached to the Georgia Department of Community Supervision.

The Family Violence Fatality Review Project

Ensuring safety and holding individuals accountable are crucial components in effectively addressing family violence. To help stakeholders gain a comprehensive understanding of the prevalence and consequences of family violence in communities across Georgia, the Family Violence Fatality Review Project engages in extensive research and data collection. By prioritizing safety and accountability in its work, the Fatality Review Project strives to make a meaningful impact in addressing family violence. Since its inception in 2004, the project has published numerous insightful resources that offer guidance to communities and statewide stakeholders. By examining fatal and near-fatal incidents of family violence, as well as the factors influencing the frequency and severity of such incidents, the project sheds light on the issues and provides valuable recommendations.

The success of the Fatality Review Project is a direct result of collaborative efforts with community leaders and professionals throughout the state. Multiple project teams have joined forces under the umbrella of the Fatality Review Project throughout the years, conducting thorough case reviews, analyzing data trends, and researching key issues and best practices. The project works to improve Georgia's response to pressing issues through research, data analysis, and collaboration with community leaders. Through these collective endeavors, the project aims to continuously develop and present practical recommendations for systemic changes to enhance Georgia's response to family violence at all levels.

ABSTRACT

This report investigates trends in arrest rates in Georgia family violence cases, revealing a disparity where women, despite being predominantly victims, experience higher arrest rates than their male counterparts. To probe this gender gap, the report analyzes factors influencing law enforcement decision-making in domestic disturbances, suggesting a potential gender bias in officer arrest determinations amid complex situational dynamics. The report advocates for specialized training and standardized best practice protocols to enhance decision-making processes and outcomes in domestic violence responses. It emphasizes the importance of addressing the gender imbalance in family violence arrests to improve safety, accountability, and justice for all parties involved, irrespective of gender or circumstances, proposing that uniform training and written departmental procedures aligned with domestic violence best practices can help rectify arrest decision discrepancies.

Female offenders face 6% higher arrest rates than male offenders in family violence incidents.[1]

INTRODUCTION

The safety and well-being of victims and their families are at stake in domestic violence cases. Law enforcement intervention plays a crucial role in addressing safety for victims and accountability for perpetrators in these incidents. However, without adequate policies and training, the decision-making process for officers can be influenced by improper factors, such as bias and personal attitudes. This can lead to outcomes that do not prioritize safety and accountability.
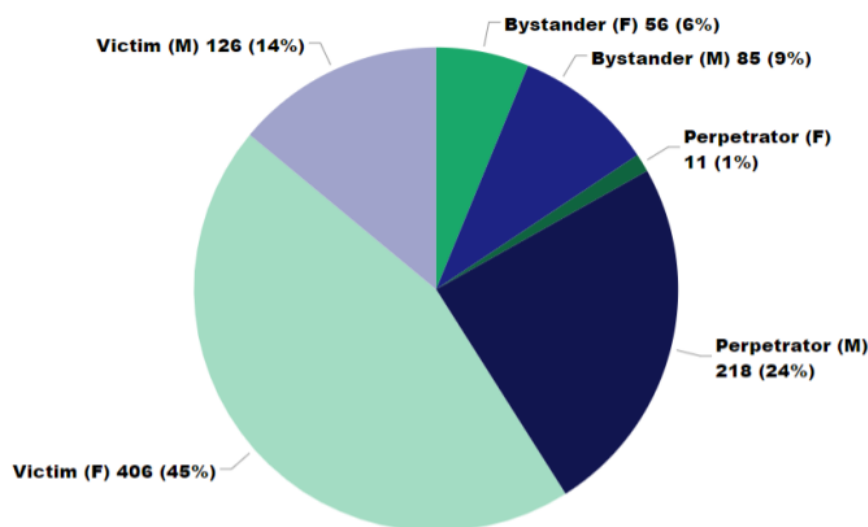
This report examines the arrest rate patterns in Georgia,[1] which align with national statistics[2] showing that most domestic violence cases involve a male offender and a female victim. Interestingly, recent trends indicate that women are being arrested at higher rates for domestic violence offenses despite being more frequently victimized and committing fewer offenses.[1] This discrepancy may be attributable to the unique challenges inherent in domestic violence cases, such as emotional intensity, lack of physical evidence, and barriers to cooperation. However, it is essential to recognize that an officer's internal predispositions and attitudes can also contribute to these outcomes, stemming from personal beliefs, values, or frustrations with the results of such cases.[3]

Addressing potential officer biases through training is critical to improving response. Implementing minimum annual training mandates and standardized protocols for domestic violence cases can directly influence how officers apply discretion at incident scenes. Comprehensive education on abuse dynamics paired with investigative guidelines can enhance outcomes by better-informing officers knowledge and actions in these sensitive cases.

INTRODUCTION

The significance of the higher arrest rates among women becomes even more pronounced when considering the significantly higher rate of fatal domestic violence victimization of women in Georgia. Over the five years, there were over 217,000 family violence incidents reported[2] and 907 domestic violence fatalities. 473 (52%) of those fatalities were women.[4] **The majority of the women killed, 45%, were identified as the primary victims of the fatal assaults, compared to 14% of male primary victims killed.** This highlights the need to explore factors and circumstances that contribute to arrest rate disparities across genders. Specifically, the impact of subjectivity and bias in discretionary decision-making during family violence incidents between men and women.

Family Violence-Related Fatalities by Gender and Role 2018-2022

- Victim (M) 126 (14%)
- Bystander (F) 56 (6%)
- Bystander (M) 85 (9%)
- Perpetrator (F) 11 (1%)
- Perpetrator (M) 218 (24%)
- Victim (F) 406 (45%)

The following sections analyze influences on police response and arrest rates in family violence cases. The analysis spotlights the need for Georgia agencies to adopt standardized policies and protocols. Instituting robust practices and clear investigative guidance reinforced by training can enhance officer response. Domestic incidents represent one of the most common call types[5] with immense victim safety implications both immediate and long-term. Thus, formalized policies plus meeting minimum training standards remain vital. Doing so bolsters effective response while curtailing bias in officer decision-making.

METHODOLOGY

Data Limitations

This report analyzes data on family violence collected from the five years between 2018 and 2022. The data comes from two sources: domestic violence fatality data collected by GCFV[4] and incident-specific data from law enforcement reports compiled by the Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI).[1] GCFV gathers domestic violence fatality data from a variety of publicly available sources, primarily media reports, police reports, and court records.

Once a fatality is identified through public sources, details and confirmation about the incident are verified with certified domestic violence programs and district attorney's offices in the jurisdiction where the incident occurred. This validation method combines scrutiny of public records with firsthand knowledge of the incidents.

> **On average, someone dies from domestic violence every other day in Georgia.[4]**

The incident-specific data collected from the GBI provides categorical variables, such as demographic information, whether children were involved or present, whether either party was under the influence of substances, etc. However, the GBI's incident-specific data does not include narratives from police reports that could further clarify details about the event to contextualize the actions taken by law enforcement.

To examine whether gender bias exists in arrest decisions during family violence incidents, we conducted a statistical analysis that controlled for victim and offender gender variables. Through a methodology that neutralized the influence of gender on other variables, we could accurately measure the impact of different factors on arrest rates and determine if they were statistically significant. Statistical significance would suggest that where that factor is present, variations in arrest rates between female and male offenders could be attributable to that factor independent of gender.

METHODOLOGY

Data Limitations

The analysis throughout this report must be viewed in light of several data limitations. A key limitation is that many incidents were categorized as "Other" across variables like weapon type, abuse type, police action taken, and victim-offender relationship. The vagueness of the "Other" label precludes precise analysis, as it may contain diverse scenarios that cannot be distinctly defined or extracted. Further, the incident data is limited to the initial police report. It does not capture subsequent actions police took following their first response. Consequently, post-incident arrests cannot be identified in the data analyzed in this report, potentially skewing arrest rates.

The data also does not specify dual arrests. This prevents assessing how the variables studied relate to officers arresting both parties. Additionally, domestic violence statistics are broadly considered underestimates. Not all domestic violence incidents get reported to police. Also, some law enforcement agencies do not accurately report local statistics to the GBI.

> **From 2018 to 2022, over 217,000 family violence incidents were reported to police in Georgia.[1]**

Future Directions

Further research should examine case outcomes post-arrest. This can detect gender bias in later criminal justice stages following arrests. Examining if gender disparities continue from arrest through case closure can uncover broader issues. It may demonstrate a need for system-wide reforms addressing bias throughout the criminal justice process. However, the current data available at the state level does not allow for an evaluation of arrest rates relative to conviction rates. To enhance future studies, the Fatality Review Project would require access to narrative information from police incident reports to supplement the incident-specific data and data on family violence case dispositions beyond the arrest phase.

METHODOLOGY
Terminology

Throughout this report, several terms are used to describe specific data and analysis related to domestic violence. Because these terms are used interchangeably in most other contexts, the following explanations provide a clear understanding of how these terms are used within the context of this report:

Domestic Violence Fatality: This term refers to incidents where one or more deaths occur as a result of a violent event involving intimate partners.[4] It encompasses various scenarios, including cases where one partner kills the other, instances where an intimate partner dies by suicide during or immediately following a domestic violence incident, situations where a bystander is killed during an active domestic violence incident, or cases where an intimate partner is killed by law enforcement while responding to a domestic violence incident or serving a family violence warrant or protective order. The term "bystander" typically refers to individuals such as a new partner/spouse, family member or child, friend, unrelated intervener, law enforcement, or an unrelated witness or member of the public who is killed in a domestic violence incident.

Family Violence: Under Georgia law, the Family Violence Act[6] categorizes criminal offenses related to domestic violence based on specific relationships between the parties involved. These crimes are collectively referred to as "family violence." The term "family violence" in this report specifically refers to the incident report data reported by law enforcement agencies to the GBI, which serves as the statewide administrator of the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS).[1] NIBRS is the standard law enforcement crime data reporting system in the United States. This system captures detailed information on various criminal incidents, offering insights into offenses, property losses, and demographic details of individuals involved. The relationships defined by the law include both intimate partners and familial relationships. It is important to note that, within this report, family violence incidents are distinct from the domestic violence fatality data discussed, as the latter focuses solely on intimate partner relationships.

Intimate Partner: This term encompasses current or former dating partners and spouses.[4] Georgia law excludes dating partners from the qualifying relationships under the Family Violence Act[6] unless the couple has a child together or has ever resided in the same household. Also, under the current law, a couple with a pregnancy is not equivalent to having a child together.

By providing these explanations, this report aims to ensure a clear understanding of the specific terms used and their relevance within the context of the data and analysis presented.

DATA ANALYSIS

Law Enforcement Response to Family Violence

Variations in arrest rates for family violence incidents cannot be examined in isolation. Multiple factors contribute to the outcomes of these incidents, and six key factors emerged as significant contributors. These factors include the type of relationship, the type of weapon involved, substance use, the form of abuse, the presence of children, and race. Each of these factors, when considered individually, has a strong correlation with arrest rates.

To assess gender bias in family violence incidents, the six factors were compared across two primary incident types: **Scenario 1**, involving a male offender and female victim (59% of reported incidents), and **Scenario 2**, involving a female offender and male victim (17% of reported incidents). In Scenario 1, an arrest occurred during the initial call in 32% of the incidents, while in Scenario 2, an arrest occurred 38% of the time. This difference is significant, especially considering the varying scale of the two scenarios.

SCENARIOS

SCENARIO ONE

MALE OFFENDER   FEMALE VICTIM

32% ARREST RATE

SCENARIO TWO

FEMALE OFFENDER   MALE VICTIM
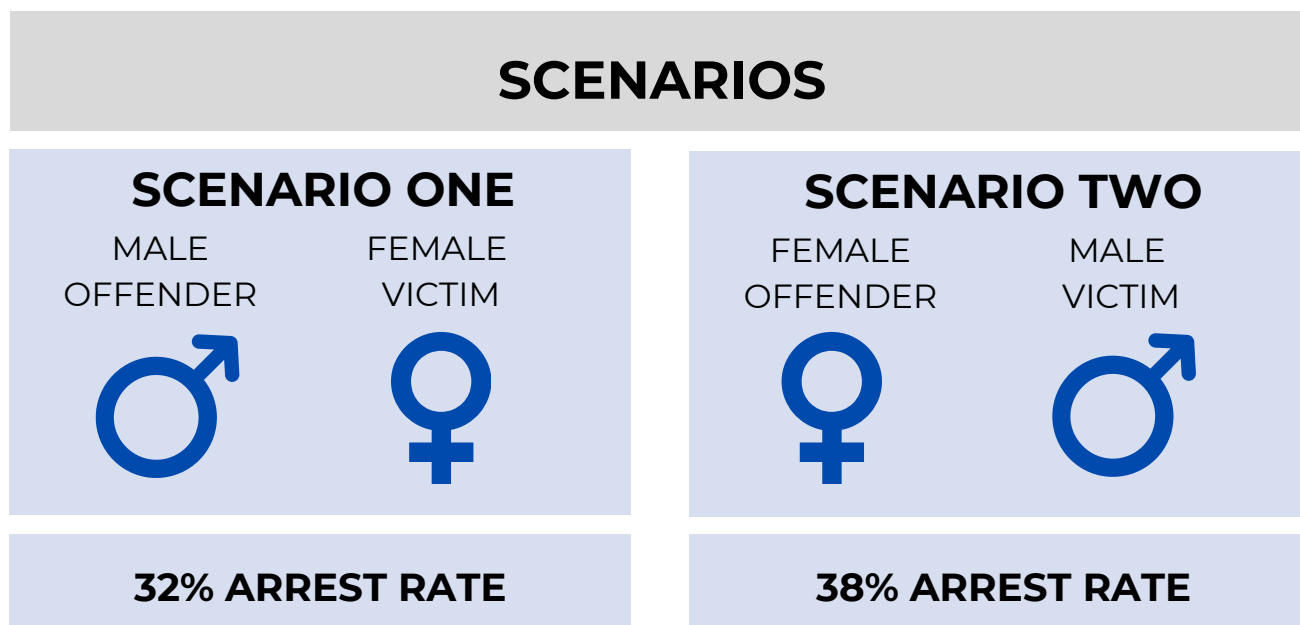
38% ARREST RATE

Viewing the arrest rates in light of reported victimization rates between women and men suggests gender biases may play a role in arrest decisions during family violence incidents. However, these statistics do not provide a complete picture of the complex dynamics in domestic violence cases. Each incident is unique, and multiple factors contribute to the outcomes. Further analysis is needed to understand the influence of gender bias in family violence fully and to develop strategies for addressing it effectively.

DATA ANALYSIS

Relationship Type

The relationship type category encompasses non-intimate (familial) and intimate partner relationships. Non-intimate relationships consist of various combinations, such as parents (biological or adoptive, stepparents, and foster parents) and children (biological or adoptive, stepchildren, and foster children). Additionally, there is a miscellaneous category for individuals who live or used to live in the same household. For situations that do not fit into any recognized relationship types, there is an option entitled "None of the above." Intimate partner relationships include current and former spouses but exclude many dating partners. Dating relationships are not included in the family violence data collected by the GBI, as this relationship type is not legally recognized as a qualifying relationship under the Family Violence Act[6] unless they have cohabitated or share a child (note that a current pregnancy is not recognized as having a child in common).

Is there a significant difference in arrest rates based on the interaction between relationship type and gender?

The relationship type distribution of victims-offenders was comparable across each scenario. The finding that there was no significant difference in arrest rates based on the interaction between relationship type and victim/offender gender suggests that the relationship type itself does not directly influence the arrest rates based on the gender of the offender.

This finding highlights the need to consider other factors - the use of weapons, substance use, the form of abuse, the presence of children, and race - to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the arrest rates in family violence incidents. These factors may impact arrest decisions more than the relationship type alone. By examining the interplay between the remaining five factors and the gender of the offender, we hope to understand better the complexities of arrest decisions during family violence incidents.

DATA ANALYSIS

Weapon Type

The weapon type data category delineates sections by grouping the instrumentalities used during an incident. The instrumentality groupings identified in this category include firearms, sharp instruments, hands/fists, etc., or other unspecified objects. "Hands/Fists, etc." constituted nearly 50% of the weapons incidents, "Other" was indicated in 45% of the incidents involving weapons, and "Firearms" and "Sharp Instruments" collectively accounted for around 5%.
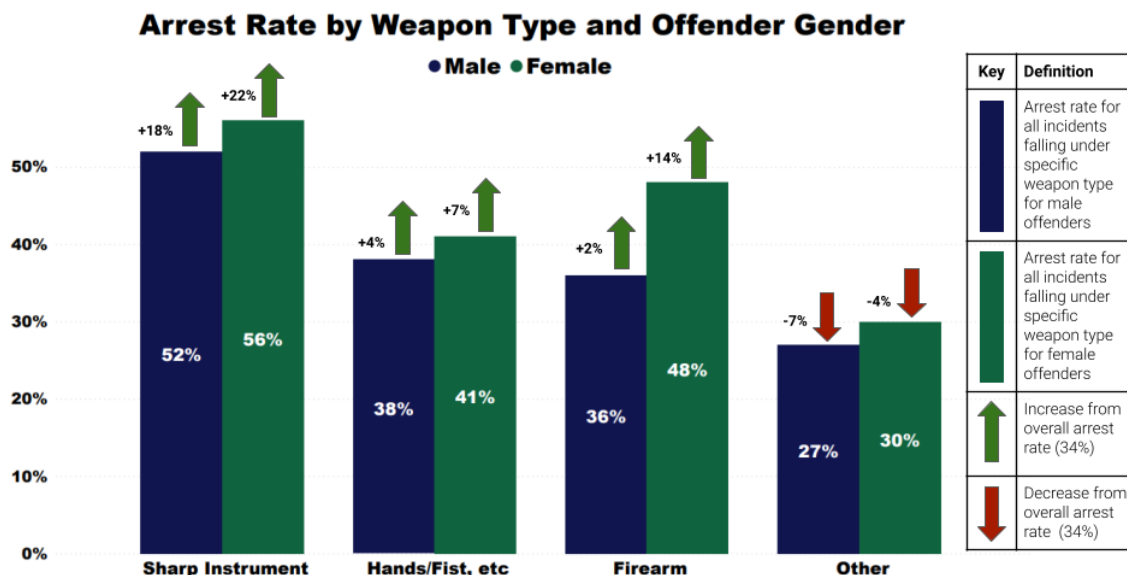

Do variations in the weapon choices of male and female offenders impact arrest rates?

In family violence cases, there is a notable difference in weapon usage between male and female offenders. Male offenders are approximately twice as likely to use firearms, while female offenders are twice as likely to use sharp instruments. However, the arrest rate increased when the weapon type was a sharp instrument, contributing to a 4% higher arrest rate for female offenders within this overall category. Interestingly, the arrest rate was also 12% higher for female offenders in possession of a firearm against a male victim compared to a male offender in possession of a firearm. These findings suggest that certain weapon types, in combination with gender, may contribute significantly to arrest rate disparities between men and women.

Arrest Rate by Weapon Type and Offender Gender
● Male ● Female

Weapon Type	Male	Female
Sharp Instrument	52% (+18%)	56% (+22%)
Hands/Fist, etc	38% (+4%)	41% (+7%)
Firearm	36% (+2%)	48% (+14%)
Other	27% (-7%)	30% (-4%)

Key	Definition
(dark blue bar)	Arrest rate for all incidents falling under specific weapon type for male offenders
(green bar)	Arrest rate for all incidents falling under specific weapon type for female offenders
(green up arrow)	Increase from overall arrest rate (34%)
(red down arrow)	Decrease from overall arrest rate (34%)

DATA ANALYSIS

Weapon Type

Strikingly, female offenders are more frequently arrested relative to men when in possession of the two most lethal weapon types—firearms and sharp objects. While the underlying reason for this correlation between gender and lethal weapon type for higher female arrest rates is unknown, this finding lends credibility to the possibility that unconscious gender bias may be influencing arrest outcomes. It is also essential to look at this in the context of the domestic violence fatality data implications. Examining policing standards regarding arrest practices in incidents involving dangerous weapons can ensure more consistent outcomes regardless of gender.

Substance Use

FACTOR

Substance Use

The substance use data provides information about whether the victim or offender was under the influence of alcohol, drugs, or some combination at the time of the incident. The substance use variable is inherently subjective because whether someone is impaired by alcohol or drugs is generally a matter of the responding officer's perception. Interestingly, in the data set examined in this report, the analysis did not indicate a strong correlation between substance use and the severity of abuse.

When substance use is present, does the data show significant differences in arrest rates between male and female offenders?

The data revealed a clear link between substance use and a higher likelihood of arrest. **Regardless of gender, both male and female offenders experienced a consistent 15% increase in their arrest rates when substance use was present.** The absence of any notable difference in arrest rates between genders suggests that gender bias does not play a significant role when individuals are under the influence of drugs or alcohol during a family violence incident. The reasons behind the lack of gender disparity in this category are not known.

DATA ANALYSIS

Abuse Type

For comparison purposes, the types of abuse were divided into two groups: severe physical violence and other forms of abuse. Severe physical violence encompasses incidents resulting in serious injuries (such as broken bones or gunshot/knife wounds), temporary or permanent disabilities, sexual assault, or fatalities, while the other group includes less severe forms of abuse like verbal abuse or threats, property damage, and minor injuries. As expected, the arrest rates were consistently higher when the abuse involved severe physical violence. However, it is worth noting that these severe cases accounted for a relatively small percentage (3%) of the overall incidents. The vast majority (97%) of both male and female offenders were involved in incidents that were not classified as severe physical violence. Despite this, a noticeable gender discrepancy persisted in relation to this factor and arrest rates.
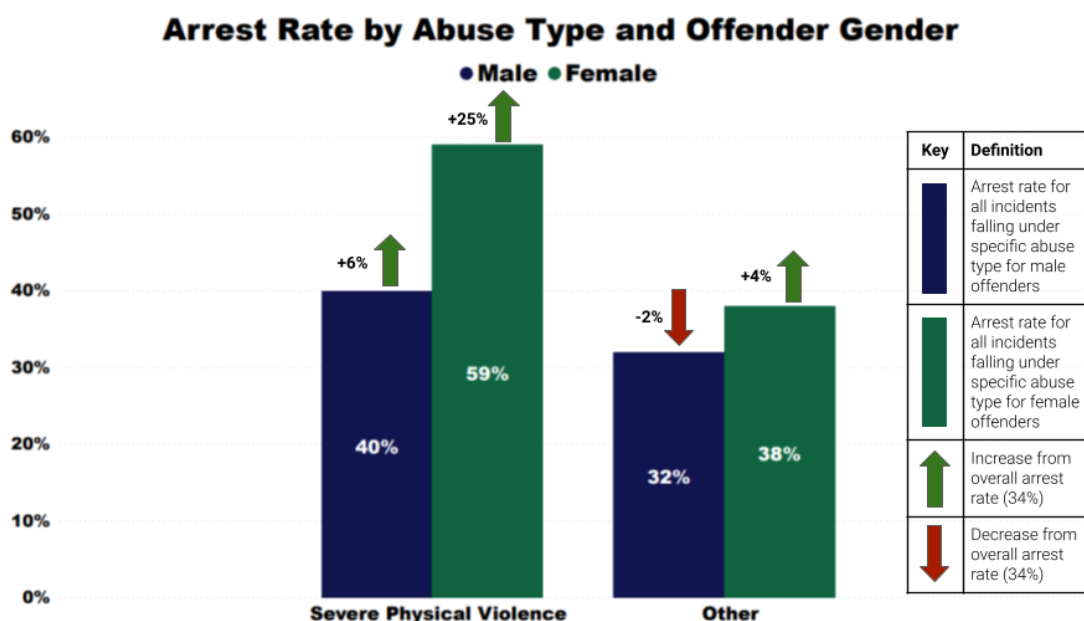

What was the variation in arrest rates by gender of the offender when correlated with reported severe physical violence abuse type?

Female offenders of severe violence had a 21% higher arrest rate than the average female offender. Male offenders were only 8% more likely to be arrested for severe acts versus general violence. This implies that severe violence elevates arrest likelihood, especially for women.

Arrest Rate by Abuse Type and Offender Gender

● Male ● Female

Key	Definition
(dark blue bar)	Arrest rate for all incidents falling under specific abuse type for male offenders
(green bar)	Arrest rate for all incidents falling under specific abuse type for female offenders
(green arrow)	Increase from overall arrest rate (34%)
(red arrow)	Decrease from overall arrest rate (34%)

Severe Physical Violence: Male 40% (+6%), Female 59% (+25%)
Other: Male 32% (-2%), Female 38% (+4%)

DATA ANALYSIS

Abuse Type

Potential reasons include perceptions of enhanced danger from violent female offenders. However, men commit more severe acts, and women experience higher victim mortality. Given this context, the wide female severe violence arrest rate gap is noteworthy. Detailed incident data could shed light on why this discrepancy exists. However, results suggest gender yields harsher outcomes for women using severe violence.

Children

FACTOR

Children

Direct or indirect harm to children is often an unintended result of their presence during a family violence incident. The family violence incident reports used by law enforcement categorize the involvement of children in family violence incidents into children present or involved. The distinction between children being present or involved seems subjective, as no clear definitions are provided. However, involvement generally suggests the child had a higher level of direct engagement in the conflict.

Does the presence of child victims affect arrest rates? Is there a significant difference between female and male offenders in terms of how children's involvement impacts their arrest likelihood?

Surprisingly, cases involving child victims showed a slightly lower rate of arrests, regardless of the gender of the perpetrator or the child's level of involvement in the incident. Throughout the five years between 2018-2022, the presence or involvement of children was not statistically significant in distinguishing the arrest rates in either scenario. Thus, children, as a variable, did not noticeably influence whether a male or female offender was arrested.

> **The rate of arrest is lower when children are present or involved.**

DATA ANALYSIS

Race

The demographic data from the GBI provides insights into the race and gender of both victims and offenders. In terms of racial distribution, approximately 57% of all offenders are Black, 41% are White, the remaining 2% fall under other categories such as American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian, and Other. It is essential to consider that the Black population in Georgia constitutes approximately 31% of the total population,[7] underscoring a disproportionate representation of Black Georgians in family violence incidents compared to their overall presence in the state.

How do arrest rates vary based on the race of male and female victims and offenders in Georgia?

The data reveals two distinct trends in arrest rates for each scenario. In Scenario 1 (male offender, female victim), the highest arrest rate occurs when the victim is a white female and the offender is a white male (35%), while the lowest is in incidents with a black female victim and a black male offender. In Scenario 2 (female offender, male victim), the highest arrest rate is when the male victim is white and the female offender is black (43%), and the lowest is when both the male victim and female offender are white. The data also revealed that incidents against white female victims are 9% more likely to result in arrests than incidents involving black female victims. While these findings present intriguing patterns, the intersection of gender, race, and police action taken is a nuanced issue requiring further in-depth analysis for conclusive insights.

HIGHEST ARREST RATES BY RACE & GENDER

| SCENARIO ONE		SCENARIO TWO	
MALE OFFENDER	FEMALE VICTIM	FEMALE OFFENDER	MALE VICTIM
♂	♀	♀	♂
35% ARREST RATE		**43% ARREST RATE**	

DATA ANALYSIS

Key Findings

In summary, the analysis indicates that weapon type and abuse type significantly influence the relationship between gender and arrest rates. Furthermore, gender, as an independent factor, does exert some influence on arrest rates. These findings underscore potential areas for improvement in law enforcement training, particularly in addressing internal predispositions and biases when responding to family violence incidents.

Recent statistics show concerning domestic violence trends in Georgia. Females face both higher arrest rates and higher rates of victimization and death in domestic violence incidents. These findings suggest a level of systemic error in law enforcement's response to family violence. Law enforcement intervention aims to prioritize safety and accountability in family violence incidents. However, these scenarios pose complex challenges for response. Officers would benefit from annual training programs, definitive policies, and consistent protocols that empower them to make evidence-based and informed decisions in family violence incidents.

FACTORS

| Relationship Type	Weapon Type	Substance Use	Abuse Type	Children	Race
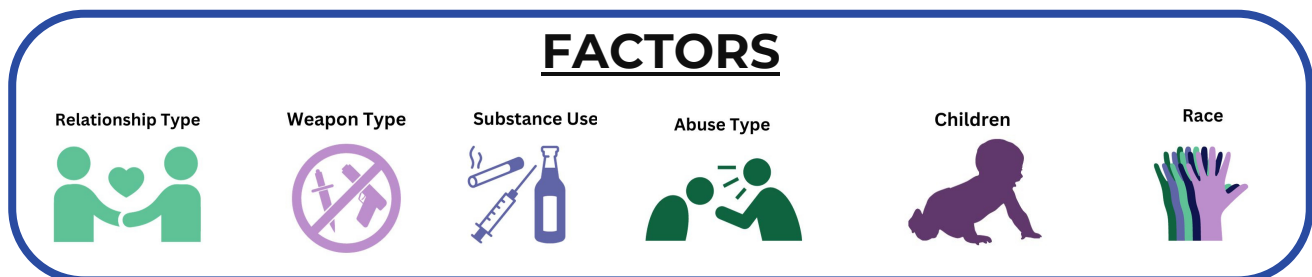
Many elements inform officer decision-making within the constrained timeframe domestic calls allow. Given that domestic violence calls constitute a substantial portion of police department activities,[5] proper resourcing coupled with continuous review of response data is critical for improving law enforcement's response to family violence.

Adopting these report recommendations marks a step for law enforcement to integrate further with coordinated community systems working to reduce family violence. The goal remains to ensure accountability, prioritize survivor support, and cultivate collaborative approaches for safer communities.

DISCUSSION

Implications of Police Action Taken

The response of law enforcement, known in family violence incident reports as Police Action Taken (PAT), is crucial for identifying and measuring the outcomes of family violence incidents. Analyzing the NIBRS data from 2018 to 2022, we can compare the distribution of the six possible outcomes listed in incident reports: arrest, citation, mediation, separation, other, and none. In Georgia, while deciding whether to arrest is discretionary, the recommended response is to arrest the predominant aggressor.[8] Georgia law defines a predominant aggressor as the individual who poses the most serious ongoing threat but might not necessarily be the initial aggressor in a specific incident. The law provides the considerations and a list of factors an officer should use to determine the predominant aggressor.[9]

Police Action Taken in Family Violence Incidents 2018-2022
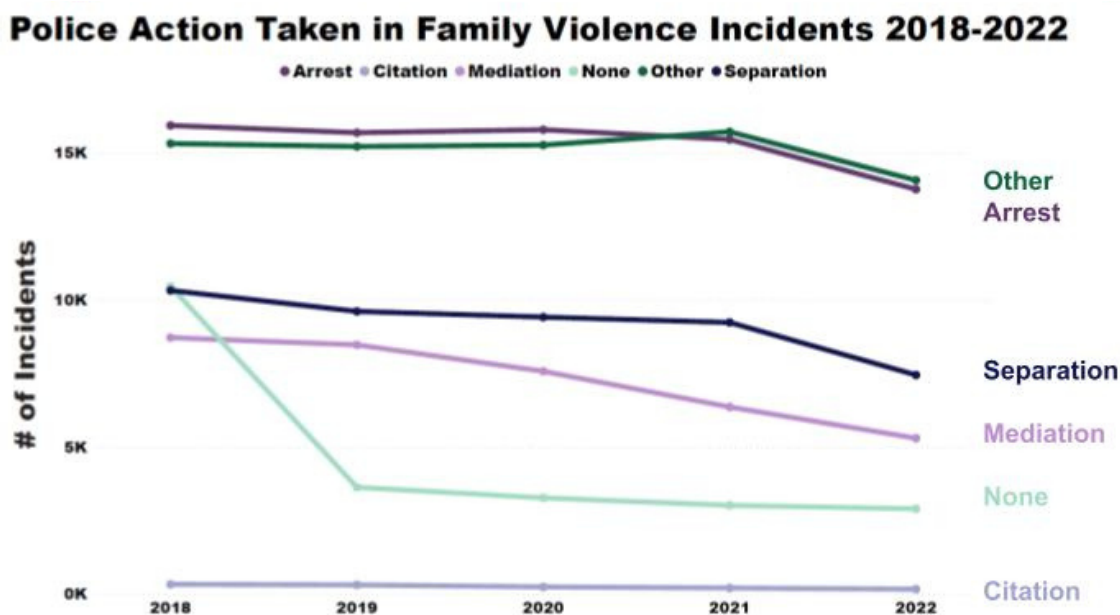
Non-arrest outcomes such as issuing a citation, mediating with the parties, and requiring immediate separation tend not to be viable as long-term solutions for relationships where violence and abuse are present. These outcomes fail to offer adequate protection for victims or hold offenders accountable.[8] The categories of "other" and "none" present additional challenges because understanding the implications of the data statewide is limited due to the lack of clear definitions of the police actions that fit within these subgroups.

DISCUSSION

Implications of Police Action Taken

Also, in cases where offenders have left the scene or are deceased, an arrest is not feasible, and these scenarios represent appropriate outcomes categorized as "none" or "other" (though there is no defined standard for which category an officer chooses under either circumstance or what other actions are appropriate for these categories). Further, the available data from family violence incident reports only captures the information on PAT from the initial crime report, leaving a significant blind spot for identifying offenders who were arrested at a later date.

> ## Arrests were made in 34% of reported family violence incidents.[1]

Interestingly, arrests occurred in roughly one-third of reported family violence incidents (34%). Considering that men make up 70% of offenders and females account for 72% of victims, one would expect a higher proportion of male arrests. However, the data tells a different story. There is a disproportionate arrest rate for female family violence perpetrators compared to males, despite women having lower overall offense rates and higher victimization. The evidence in the data suggests the possibility of gender biases influencing arrest decisions, as the police seem more inclined to arrest female aggressors despite women statistically perpetrating a smaller proportion of family violence cases.

While arrest is considered the best practice response, dual arrest, where both parties involved in a dispute are arrested, is generally not recommended. Dual arrests can hinder the prosecution of the predominant aggressor and prevent victims from accessing necessary services. The data highlights how complex gender dynamics can affect law enforcement responses to domestic disturbances. Officers must be mindful of gender biases and ensure they have conducted thorough predominant aggressor analysis and risk assessments to avoid resorting to dual arrest decisions whenever possible in family violence scenarios. Training is essential to ensure accurate identification and apprehension of the predominant aggressor and safer outcomes for all parties.
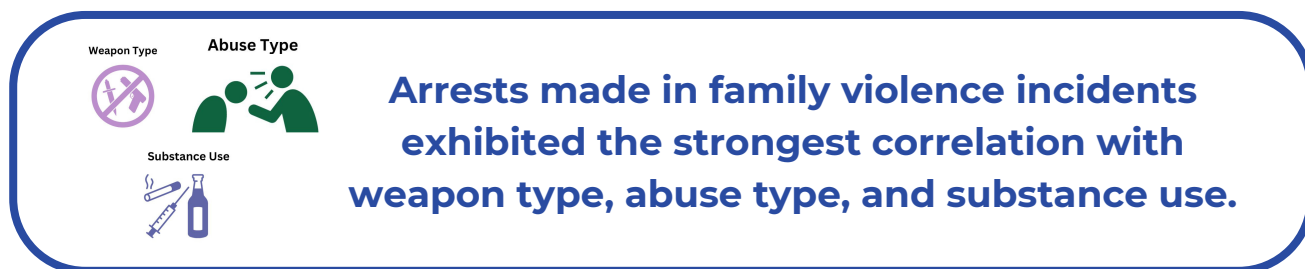
DISCUSSION

Key Factors Shaping Police Response

The actions of law enforcement officers in family violence cases are influenced by various external and internal factors.[11] External factors are those not within the control of the officer, such as the nature of familial relationships, weapon involvement, abuse types, substance use, child presence, and the race and gender of those involved. Internal factors involve officers' subjective judgment and discretionary powers. These factors form an intricate, multi-layered set of considerations that officers must evaluate and traverse when making decisions in domestic violence cases.

Familial relationship dynamics also play a pivotal role in shaping officers' responses, with officers encountering domestic violence involving current and former spouses and other household members. These relationships' emotional intensity, relational familiarity, and cultural subtleties can impact the officer's judgment and discretion.[12]

Weapon Type   **Abuse Type**

Substance Use

Arrests made in family violence incidents exhibited the strongest correlation with weapon type, abuse type, and substance use.

The type of abuse was another factor that appeared to complicate the decision-making landscape. Severe physical violence was more likely to result in arrest and showed evident gender disparities. Weapon involvement was yet another factor that affected arrest rates, with variations also observed in the data based on different gender scenarios. Substance use increases, and child presence or involvement decreases the rate of arrest for all parties regardless of gender. Additionally, the intersection of race and gender revealed clear disproportionate arrest trends, with both black offenders and victims impacted, highlighting distinct issues and the complexity of this particular external factor.

Internal dynamics involve officers' predispositions, attitudes, and the subjective nature of their investigative roles.[12] The research suggests the potential existence of gender bias at some scale, with higher arrest rates for female offenders compared to males. This raises concerns about the equitable administration of justice and the degree of influence of gender bias in family violence incidents.

DISCUSSION

Key Factors Shaping Police Response

The data does not definitively prove bias or suggest it drives outcomes alone. However, findings imply gender does potentially assert a sizable influence on arrest rate discrepancies when aligned with other influential factors. The findings point to the need for further examination of procedural, logistical, and cultural factors contributing to these results.

Any bias in the arrest process has profound implications for the fairness of the criminal justice system and the outcomes for individuals involved in family violence incidents. Higher arrest rates for female offenders, despite their lower overall offense commission rates, indicate a potential opportunity for departments to address proper and improper influences in officers' discretionary decision-making.

Numerous external and internal pressures affect officers' decision-making in domestic cases. These complex dynamics merit recognition when evaluating police response. The research suggests that gender bias is a potentially significant factor in higher arrest rates for female offenders. Addressing this bias is crucial for more equitable responses to family violence incidents. It requires evidence-based training, standard protocols, and written departmental policies that are implemented and adhered to. These steps ensure that officers can exercise reasoned discretion and navigate the unique dynamics present in family violence cases without perpetuating harmful gender-based disparities. Eliminating the influence of bias is a significant step towards interrupting the cycle of abuse and enhancing the safety of all individuals involved.

Safeguarding the Public

The primary duty of police officers is to protect and serve the public,[13] which requires them to exercise judgment based on their knowledge, training, and legal expertise. When responding to family violence incidents, officers face complex decision-making processes that involve understanding the legal obligations outlined in the Family Violence Act.[6] These situations often involve subtle forms of abuse or controlling behaviors[14] that may not immediately meet the criteria for criminal charges. Navigating discretion and duty in these cases requires a nuanced approach,[15] taking into account factors such as the severity of the crime,[11] the use of weapons, and the presence of injuries.[12]

DISCUSSION

Safeguarding the Public

Gender bias is a crucial consideration due to the gendered nature of family violence crimes, highlighting the need for equitable enforcement guidelines that address potential biases affecting officers' assessments.

The decisions made by officers during family violence responses have significant implications for victim safety, offender accountability, and the overall outcome of a case.[16] Analyzing how gender and other factors influence police responses can provide valuable insights for improving policies and practices. Further examination of police procedures in handling family violence incidents can identify areas in need of reform and standardization across jurisdictions. Officers can optimize victim safety and offender accountability by strategically exercising discretion and adhering to established arrest protocols.

Responding to family violence incidents requires officers to make quick assessments for intervention and accountability. Specialized training for officers handling these cases goes beyond legal knowledge and encompasses an understanding of the unique dynamics, patterns of behavior, and factors that influence both abusers and victims.[17] The complexity arises from the intimate nature of these relationships, the limited number of witnesses, and the challenge of distinguishing between the abuser and the victim. Officers must navigate subtle patterns of abuse, exercise discretion, and address biases to ensure accurate interpretations and reasonable actions at the scene.

Addressing family violence incidents requires an awareness of psychological manipulation, emotional abuse, and controlling behaviors[14] that may not meet the threshold for criminal charges but still impact victim safety. Officers must differentiate between the parties involved and carefully consider arrest decisions. Unconscious biases can influence subjective perceptions, affecting evidence collection, interactions, and decision-making.[18] Recognizing and addressing biases through departmental policies, response protocols, and specialized training is crucial for achieving safe, fair, and reasonable outcomes in family violence cases. The ultimate goal is to enhance victim safety, hold abusers accountable, and minimize the impact of biases on police officers' decision-making processes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To ensure impartial, consistent, and effective policing of family violence, the following actions should be considered:

01 Training

Provide annual family violence training for all officers, including a comprehensive discussion of internal factors that may influence their decision-making. This training should address biases, stereotypes, and the importance of fair and equitable responses to family violence incidents.

02 Reporting

To remove inconsistencies, implement minimum standards for family violence incident reporting practices across all jurisdictions. This includes ensuring officers accurately document the rationale behind their arrest decisions and the factors they considered during the response.

03 Identifying

Increase data collection on arrest rationale and factors considered during family violence incidents. This data can help identify potential biases or areas for improvement in policies and practices. It is vital to collect comprehensive and accurate information to better understand the factors influencing arrest decisions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

04 **Evaluating**

Conduct internal reviews of family violence calls to assess practices for determining the predominant aggressor and making arrest decisions. These reviews should be conducted regularly to identify any patterns or discrepancies that may show bias or areas for improvement.

05 **Implementing**

Revise standard operating procedures and training materials based on the findings from the evaluation data collected. Ensure that policies and training reflect and address biases, provide clear guidelines for determining the predominant aggressor, and promote victim safety and offender accountability.

06 **Collaborating**

Build collaborative relationships with victim advocates, community-based advocacy organizations, and other stakeholders to ensure a comprehensive and coordinated response to family violence incidents. This collective response attends to the immediate and long-term safety of victims, families, and law enforcement officers.

By implementing these actions, law enforcement agencies can work towards promoting impartial, consistent, and effective policing of family violence incidents. These measures can help address biases, improve decision-making processes, and ultimately enhance the safety and well-being of victims while holding offenders accountable.

SUMMARY

The latest data on family violence arrest rates and fatal incidents of domestic violence in Georgia reveals worrisome trends, particularly in the disparate impacts on women. Higher female arrest rates, despite higher rates of victimization and death, indicate the existence of systemic challenges that are directly affecting case outcomes. Domestic violence cases pose inherently complex challenges for law enforcement. Officers would benefit from annual training, written policies, standardized practices, evidence-based interventions aligning with their legal duties, and best practices for family violence response. The actions of law enforcement when responding to family violence calls involve complex decision-making under circumstances with limited time and information available. Many factors influence an officer's discretion, and no singular element predicts officer decision-making. Further examination of these influences is necessary to facilitate the development of more comprehensive recommendations.

Thank you to all law enforcement officers for your service and sacrifice.

Given that domestic violence calls constitute a substantial portion of police department activities,[5] proper training and resources for officers are paramount. Regularly reviewing family violence incident reports is essential to provide officers with constructive feedback, enable protocol adjustments, and ensure alignment with established standards. Thorough data analysis is crucial in understanding the impact of initial responses on victims, offenders, and case progression. Continuous scrutiny of domestic violence response data is indispensable for refining policies, protocols, and training and facilitating optimal service for families in abusive situations.

Implementing the recommendations in this report is a significant step for law enforcement departments to integrate into coordinated community responses, fostering a victim-centered approach and contributing to creating safer communities for all.

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