

LEILA STEMLER, JOLYNN RODRIGUEZ, AND DR. KELLER SHEPPARD

INTRODUCTION

Over the past several decades, police use of fatal force has driven public policy reform and subsequently amplified the racial disparities prevalent within police violence. Public outcry in the high-profile deaths of minority individuals, such as George Floyd, continues to drive police reform and the demand for transparency, accountability, and evidence-based policies within police work.

Crowd-sourced media such as Fatal Encounters, the Washington Post, and Mapping Police Violence lack the ability to collect a comprehensive report on the rate of force, temporal trends, characteristics of officers and citizens, and the inclusion of incidents for comparative purposes. A collective data pull from numerous public data sources was gathered and dispersed into datasets, followed by additional coding through Qualtrics. The focus is to refine the categorized incident reports that public datasets lack in order to display a comprehensive report of police use of fatal force.

The standard list of criteria includes ensuring compatibility with public law enforcement agencies and accurate definitions of police use of fatal force. This accurate definition excludes accidental deaths and differentiation if an officer is working in an official capacity, whether that is on duty or off duty at the time of the incident.

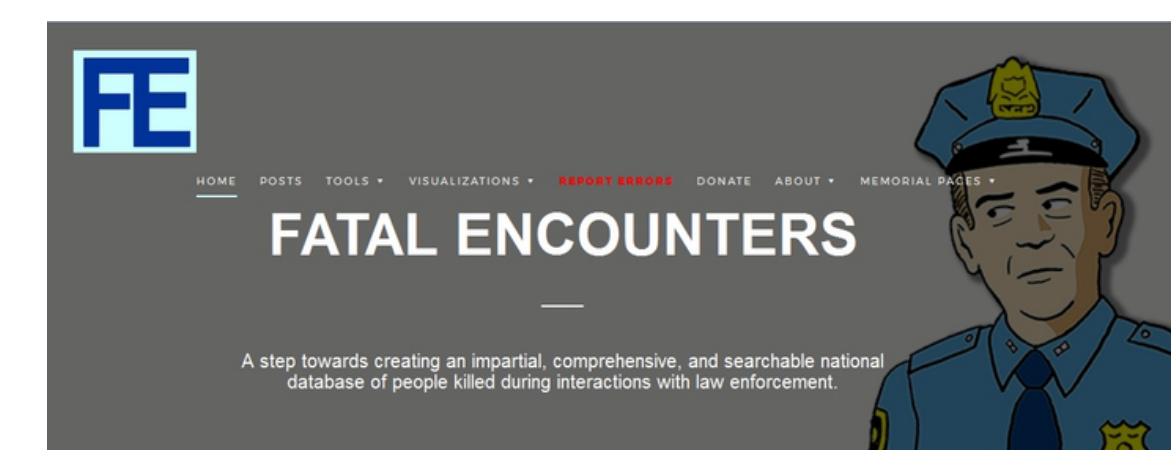
The result of data collection is inconclusive thus far; implications for future research will be valuable for long-term use. Opportunities to analyze police use of fatal force continue to drive police reform, and comprehensive datasets produced in this study are intended to substantially support future research and reform.

METHODOLOGY

- We collected the data from the three primary databases of police fatalities: Fatal Encounters, Washington Post, and Mapping Police Violence.
- The data was entered into a spreadsheet, and each event was labelled with the case number, the original database, the database ID, the date it occurred, the victim's name, a brief description (gleaned from the original database and news sources), and prior coding information.
- Once our spreadsheet was completed, our team went through case by case and manually input each police fatality event into a survey questionnaire in order to code and determine whether or not it fit the credentials for our police fatality database.
- We are currently still coding cases, but once we have gathered enough data, researchers will begin drawing conclusions that can aid police reform regarding citizen fatalities.
- By organizing our database into more detailed subsets, including the duty-status of officers, the weapons that were used, instances of suicide, accidental deaths, and more, the data can be applied to later projects and used to pursue change.



FIGURE 3. DEPICTS COMMUNITY AND FAMILY MEMBERS HONORING THE LIFE OF 18 YEAR OLD, MICHAEL BROWN. MICHAEL WAS SHOT AND KILLED BY POLICE OFFICER DARREN WILSON IN FERGUSON, MISSOURI IN 2014.



RESULTS AND IMPORTANCE

The results of this study are inconclusive thus far, and coding is still in progress. While current databases are thorough, they often code cases in such a way that prevents further data analysis. This includes a tendency to compile cases into larger data groups instead of more accurate subsets. This prevents us from viewing a comprehensive image of police use of fatal force against citizens. By recoding the data that is already available, this project ensures that the cases are thoroughly reviewed and can be applied to further projects and movements toward police reform.

CONCLUSION

Our project highlights gaps in how data on police use of fatal force is recorded. By manually reviewing each selected case from several databases, we provided a more accurate view of the current state of policing in the United States and prepared a new database that can be interpreted and used to further change within our communities.



FIGURE 1. DISPLAYS THE PUBLIC OUTCRY AND PROTESTS FOR THE BLACK LIVES MATTER MOVEMENT FOLLOWING THE DEATH OF GEORGE FLOYD.



Figure 2 showcases the movement towards BLM and police reform after the deaths of George Floyd (1973-2020) and Tyre Nichols (1993-2023).

REFERENCES

Comer, B. P., & Ingram, J. R. (2023). Comparing Fatal Encounters, Mapping Police Violence, and Washington Post fatal shooting data from 2015–2019: A research note. *Criminal Justice Review*, 48(2), 249–261. <https://doi.org/10.1177/07340168211071014>

Bussey, T., & Dunlap, B. (2025). Unofficial but essential: A short report of data quality and limitations in police deadly force research. *American Journal of Criminal Justice*. Advance online publication.

Barber, C., Azrael, D., Cohen, A., Miller, M., Thymes, D., Wang, D. E., & Hemenway, D. (2016). Homicides by police: Comparing counts from the National Violent Death Reporting System, vital statistics, and supplementary homicide reports. *American Journal of Public Health*, 106(5), 922–927. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2016.303074>