

Seattle Police Monitor

Federal Police Monitor for the City of Seattle **Statement Regarding Questions and Concerns on Crisis Intervention and** **Use of Force Data**

This memorandum addresses questions and concerns raised by Seattle community members regarding crisis intervention data, and the Federal Monitoring team’s approach to data collection and balancing privacy and transparency.

The primary concern of some community members revolves around representations by the Monitoring Team about what data is publicly available at the nexus of the Seattle Police Department’s (SPD) use of force and crisis intervention, and, in particular, the Monitoring Team’s use of SPD data sources for evaluation of compliance.

As part of the [Comprehensive Assessment of the Seattle Police Department](#), The Monitoring Team referenced the data source for this nexus as: “Statistics provided by SPD’s Data Analytics Platform based on SPD Crisis Contact Forms and Use of Force Reports.” Additionally, in the Crisis Assessment, the only reference to the department’s public data and dashboards does not say that force levels and crisis events are linked in public data.

The Assessment also links to the [crisis intervention](#) dashboard itself. The SPD data is available in two formats, a Tableau dashboard and a [downloadable dataset](#). The downloadable dataset describes the information available as “Data representing crisis contacts made by officers of the Seattle Police Department” and explains that “Data is denormalized to represent the one too

many relationship between the record and the reported disposition of the contact.” Twice, the dataset page cautions: “**USE CAUTION WHEN COUNTING**”

The dataset page also provides the 25 columns available in the dataset, which includes “Use of Force Indicator.” This field “Indicates whether reportable force was used.” As such, SPD has never made representations that the available public data includes links between levels of force and a crisis event; rather, the dataset page clearly explains that only *whether* force was used is available.

There are two reasons that force levels are not included in the crisis data: a privacy issue and a complexity issue. First, unlike the [officer-involved shooting dataset](#), which provides location data at the Block Level, the crisis location data are presented at the Beat level to protect privacy. **This prevents the public from discovering that their neighbor was suicidal or in crisis.**

Second, the manner in which force is reported raises levels of complexity when attempting to cross-reference with crisis. Whereas crisis “counts” reflect the number of crisis subjects involved in a particular CAD incident, force “counts” reflect the total applications of force used by officers in the course of that incident. For example, if in the course of one crisis response three officers used force, one at Level I, one at Level II, and one at Level III, there would be three reported uses of force at three different levels – a one to many relationship. This is not easily presented in a X/Y table and would create the misimpression that more crisis events had uses of force associated with them. As such, SPD and the Assessment analysis link force and crisis at a one to one level.

Additionally, the Monitoring Team would like to address two other data issues that have been discussed publicly.

First, as stated at the CPC meeting on March 8, 2022, SPD confirmed that all crisis data relating to officer-involved-shootings were validated. As officers do not write reports in Level III cases – they are interviewed instead by the Force Investigation Team – it is up to the chain of command

to complete the required forms in the Records Management System, including the Behavioral Crisis Report, and FIT and the FRB serve as backstops to ensure that the Behavioral Crisis Report is completed. As requested at the CPC meeting, **SPD has confirmed that the often-discussed officer-involved shootings are included in the *public-facing* crisis data as appropriate.**

Fundamentally, the concern expressed at the CPC meeting regarding “crisis individuals who are missing in the dataset” appears to be one of classification, rather than data governance. Statements have been offered in CPC meetings regarding individuals whom some on the calls believe to be “unquestionably and unambiguously” in crisis. Because this debate has occupied so much of all of our time, it warrants some discussion here.

Consistent with best practices nationwide, SPD classifies incidents as “crisis” based upon the behaviors presented in the moment, not as a post-mortem diagnostic analysis that might be done in a research context by way of a psychological autopsy (a practice that some have criticized as grounded in “methodological weaknesses so severe” that they should be abandoned)¹, or in a criminal setting, by way of a forensic examination as to a person’s competence to stand trial. A review of relevant literature demonstrates clearly that it is far from an exact science to determine, in the moment or post hoc, whether motivational factors underlying one’s behavior are driven by mental illness, substance use, or other factors that overwhelm the ability act rationally (as opposed to calculated and deliberate intent to cause harm to themselves or others, especially where one could argue that no one “rational” would ever so act). Even among those who hold the professional qualifications to render an opinion to a reasonable degree of scientific certainty in this regard, reasonable minds can, and often do, differ.

For our purposes, where we are examining officer use of force in the context of whether (1) there were behavioral indicators of an individual in crisis such that (2) there would have been meaningful opportunity for officers to intervene prior to the point where the subject’s actions posed an imminent risk of death or serious bodily injury, the inquiry is not purposed to be quite

¹ See, for example, Hjelmeland, H., Dieserud, G., Dyregrov, K., Knizek, B.L., and Leenaars, A.A. (2012) Psychological Autopsy Studies as Diagnostic Tools: Are They Methodologically Flawed? *Death Studies*, 36:7, 605-626;

as academic. Unquestionably, a large number of individuals who come into contact with police do suffer from underlying mental health disorders, and certainly one can speculate post-hoc that one's mental health disorders may have contributed to their motivation to act as they did (indeed, whether an individual can be held responsible for their actions/competent to stand trial is a robust area of forensic interest). However, that does not mean, for our purposes, that the individual was overcome by those conditions at the time of their interaction with law enforcement such that the incident would fall within our policy definition of "crisis." Thus, if the crux of the data confusion is that individuals whom SPD did not designate as exhibiting "crisis" do not appear in SPD's crisis dataset, that debate can be quickly resolved: we do not dispute that cases that we did not classify as "crisis" are not included in the crisis dataset.

Second, there is an often-stated concern that the Monitoring Team assessments "use SPD data." This is a puzzling allegation as the consent decree specifically contemplates collection and analysis of department data. *See e.g.*, Settlement Agreement, ¶189. Moreover, what other data exists systematically about SPD use of force, stops and detentions, and crisis interventions? Only SPD collects data on officer activities – any other data source would be anecdotal at best. Additionally, the [Center for Policing Equity](#) report that is often referenced favorably at CPC meetings and by community also relied on SPD data. The original [Department of Justice findings](#) were based primarily on SPD data – "The findings we made from examining just SPD's own use of force statements are compelling. We find that approximately 20% of those incidents involved the unnecessary or excessive use of force."

The Federal Monitoring Team is committed to balancing transparency and privacy and remains open to working with the community to further improve analysis and reporting of Seattle Police Department's compliance with the Federal Consent Decree.

You can contact the monitoring team via their website:

www.seattlepolicemonitor.org