

THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF POLICE USE OF FORCE:

An Analysis of Data from Ontario's Special Investigations Unit

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Background

- Police use of force -- particularly the use of force against racial minorities – is one of the most controversial issues facing North American law enforcement agencies.
- *High profile American cases*: Rodney King, Amadou Diallo, Abner Louima, etc.
- *High profile Canadian cases*: Dudley George, Jeffrey Reodica, Wade Lawson, Sophia Cook, Jama Jama, etc.

Background

- In the United States, specific incidents of police use of force have recently sparked major urban riots in cities like Los Angeles, Miami and Cincinnati.
- Although relatively uncommon, controversial cases of police use of force can erode public trust in the police and contribute to the perception that the police are racially biased.
- Police use of force is a serious issue that deserves serious research attention.

Previous Canadian Research

- A 1994 survey revealed that the majority of Toronto's Black population (55%) believes that the police are more likely to use force against Black people than White people.
- Unfortunately, very little Canadian research has actually investigated whether this perception is true or not.
- The Police in Canada rarely release use of force statistics.
- There is also an informal ban on all “race-crime” stats.
- The few Canadian studies that have been conducted have been plagued by various methodological difficulties including small sample size and a reliance on newspaper coverage of police shootings.
- For example, Pedicelli (1998) conducted a content analysis of newspaper coverage to determine that, between 1994 and 1997, African Canadians grossly over-represented in police shootings in both Montreal and Toronto.

Previous American Research

- Unlike Canada, the issue has been examined extensively in the United States.
- Study after study, conducted at different points of time and in different regions of the country, have found that African American civilians are grossly over-represented in police shootings and other cases of police use of force.

American Research

- However, racial disparities in police use of force have declined over time.
- In the 1970s, American police shot and killed 8.1 Black civilians for every one White civilian. By 1998 that ratio had been reduced to 4.1.

American Research: The Debate

- “What every single study of police use of fatal force has found is that persons of color, particularly Black males, are a disproportionately high number of the persons shot by the police compared to their representation in the general population. Where the studies diverge are the reasons for that disproportionality” (Locke 1996).
- Is this over-representation the result of police bias (racism) or minority criminality?

Research Questions

- Are racial minorities over-represented in cases involving police use of force in Ontario?
- Are use of force cases involving racial minorities similar or different than cases involving White people?
- What might account for the over-representation of racial minorities in police use of force cases?
- What policies might reduce the over-representation of racial minorities in police use of force cases?

Methodology

- The current study is based on an examination of data from Ontario's Special Investigations Unit (the SIU).
- The SIU, formed in 1990, is an independent, civilian law enforcement agency that conducts investigations into the death or serious injury of civilians that result of police activity.
- SIU is led by a Director and approximately 40 civilian investigators.
- The Director cannot be a present or former police officer.
- Investigators cannot be current police officers and cannot investigate cases involving former employers.
- The SIU is the only civilian law enforcement agency in Canada with the power to investigate and charge police officers with a criminal offence.

Methodology

- The current study is based on an examination of information from SIU Director's Reports.
- Director's reports provide a detailed description of each SIU investigation – including the Director's decision to lay or not to lay criminal charges.
- The research team collected data for each SIU investigation that was completed between January 1st, 2000 and June 6th, 2006.
- During the study period, the SIU completed 1,060 investigations involving 1,113 civilians (53 cases involved more than one civilian casualty).

Methodology

- Preliminary analysis revealed that 329 of the original 1,113 cases (30%) had been closed “by memo” shortly after the investigation had begun.
- Most of these cases were dropped from further investigation because they were deemed outside of the SIU’s jurisdiction (i.e., the injury or death was not serious or was not caused by the police).
- These cases were dropped from further analysis.
- Final sample=784 completed SIU investigations between January 2000 and June 6th, 2006.

Methodology

- The research team collected a large amount of information for each case. Important variables included: 1) the age, gender and race of the civilian; 2) the civilian's criminal record and mental health history; 3) the civilian's actions at the time of the incident; 4) the nature of the injury or death; 5) the cause of the injury or death; 6) officer characteristics (i.e., rank, age, gender, race, etc.); and 7) the final disposition of the case.

Methodology

- The SIU does not normally record the race of the civilians involved in their investigations.
- Thus, a variety of strategies were used by the research team to identify race. Strategies included the examination of photographs included in the case file, the examination of newspaper photographs and interviews with the SIU investigators assigned to specific cases.
- Data entry and cleaning was completed in August 2006.
- Population estimates were taken from the 2001 Canadian Census

NOTE

- Although the SIU provided access to the raw data used in this analysis, it in no way contributed to our report's conclusions, commentary or interpretations.
- It should also be noted that the SIU instituted various security measures to ensure that the data collected could not be linked to individual civilians or police officers.
- The following analysis is based on aggregate data, not an examination of individual cases.

TOTAL SIU INVESTIGATIONS:

Ontario, 2000-2006

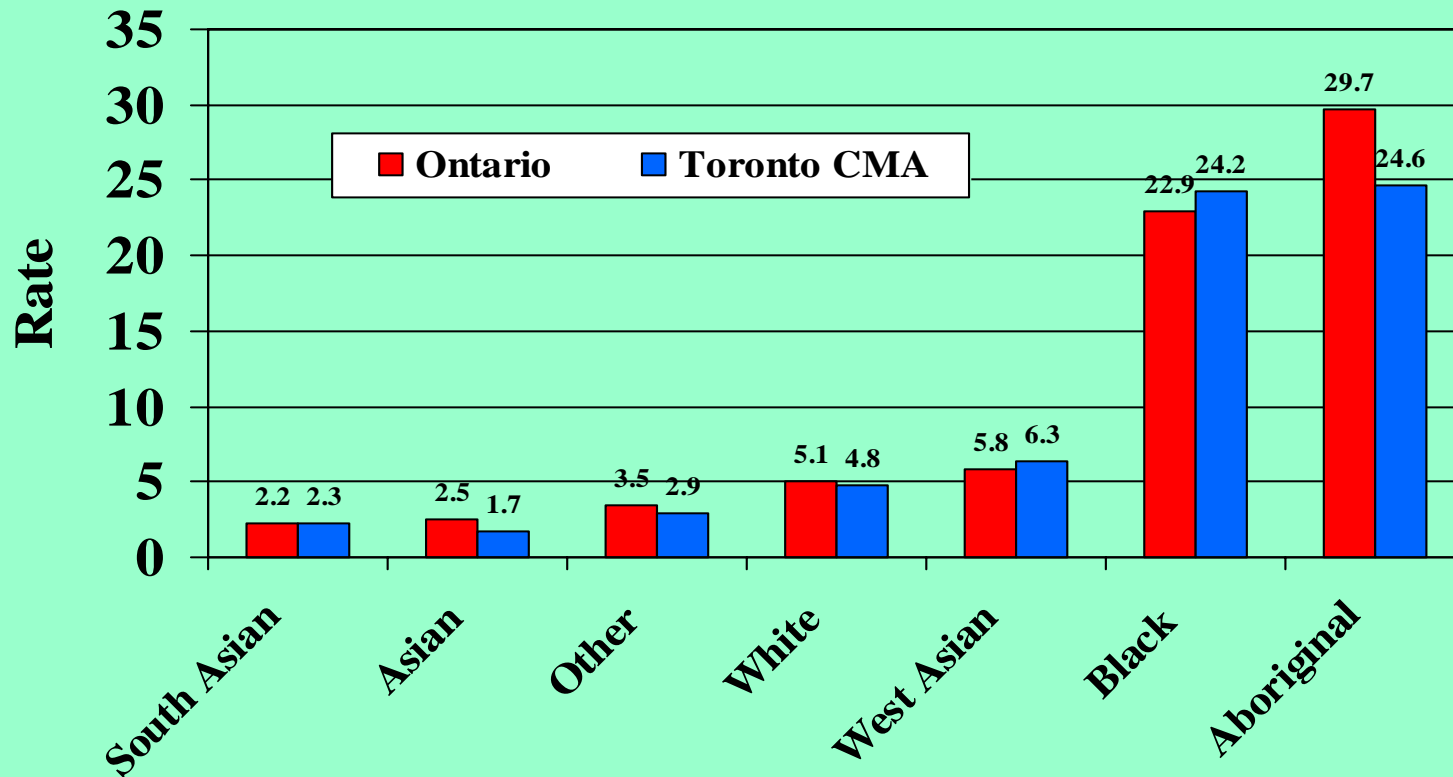
RACE	Population Size	% Population	# of SIU Cases	% of SIU Cases	Odds Ratio
White	8,944,190	79.3	457	58.3	0.73
Black	411,095	3.6	94	12.0	3.33
Aboriginal	188,315	1.7	56	7.1	4.18
Asian	803,310	7.1	20	2.5	0.35
South Asian	554,870	4.9	12	1.5	0.31
West Asian	155,640	1.4	9	1.1	0.78
Other	228,130	2.0	8	1.0	0.50
Missing	----	----	128	16.3	----
TOTAL	11,285,550	100.0	784	100.0	1.00

TOTAL SIU INVESTIGATIONS:

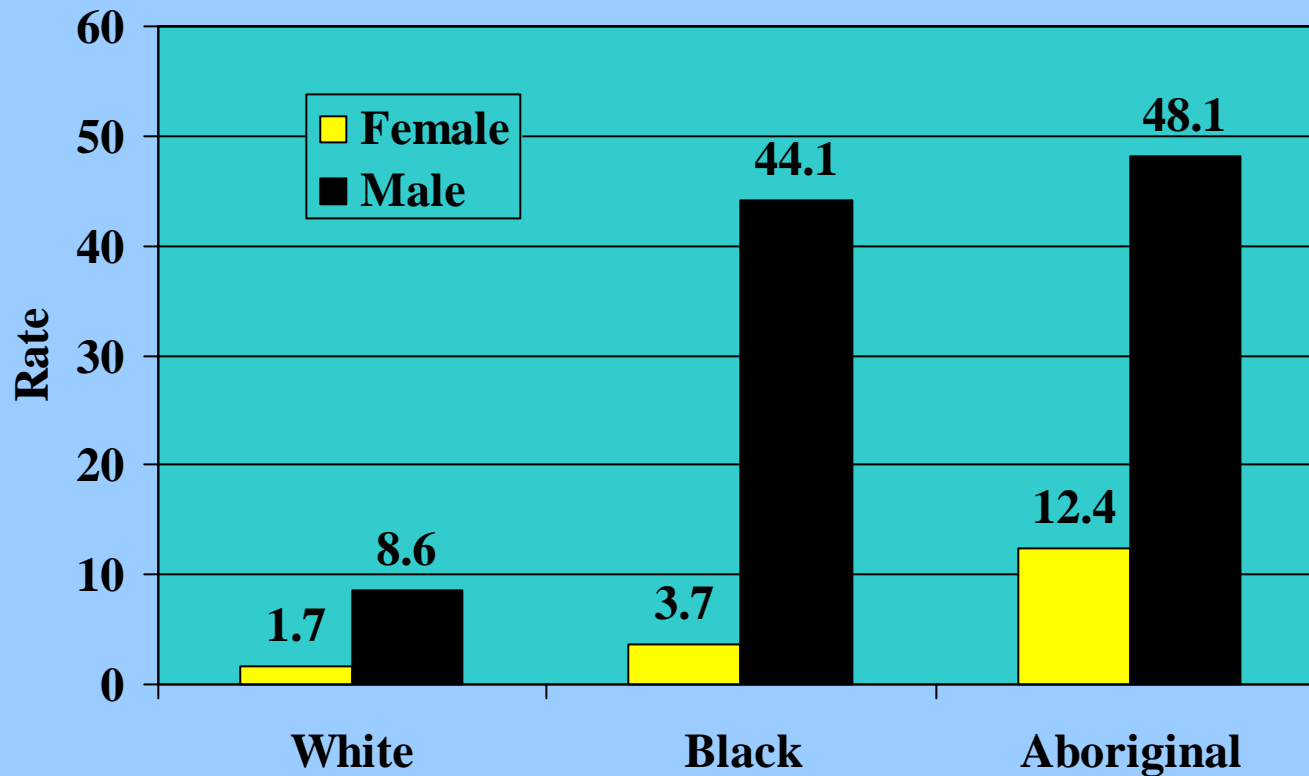
Toronto CMA, 2000-2006

RACE	Population Size	% Population	# of SIU Cases	% of SIU Cases	Odds Ratio
White	2,915,125	62.7	139	47.9	0.76
Black	310,500	6.7	75	25.9	3.87
Aboriginal	20,300	0.4	5	1.7	4.25
Asian	656,805	14.1	11	3.8	0.26
South Asian	473,805	10.2	11	3.8	0.37
West Asian	95,820	2.1	6	2.1	1.00
Other	175,605	3.8	5	1.7	0.45
Missing	----	----	38	13.1	----
TOTAL	4,647,960	100.0	290	100.0	1.00

Total SIU Investigation Rate (per 100,000), by Race of Civilian, Ontario and Toronto CMA, 2000-2006



Total SIU Investigation Rate (per 100,000), by Race and Gender



SIU INVESTIGATIONS:

Civilian Death or Serious Injury Directly Caused by Police Use of Force, Ontario, 2000-2006

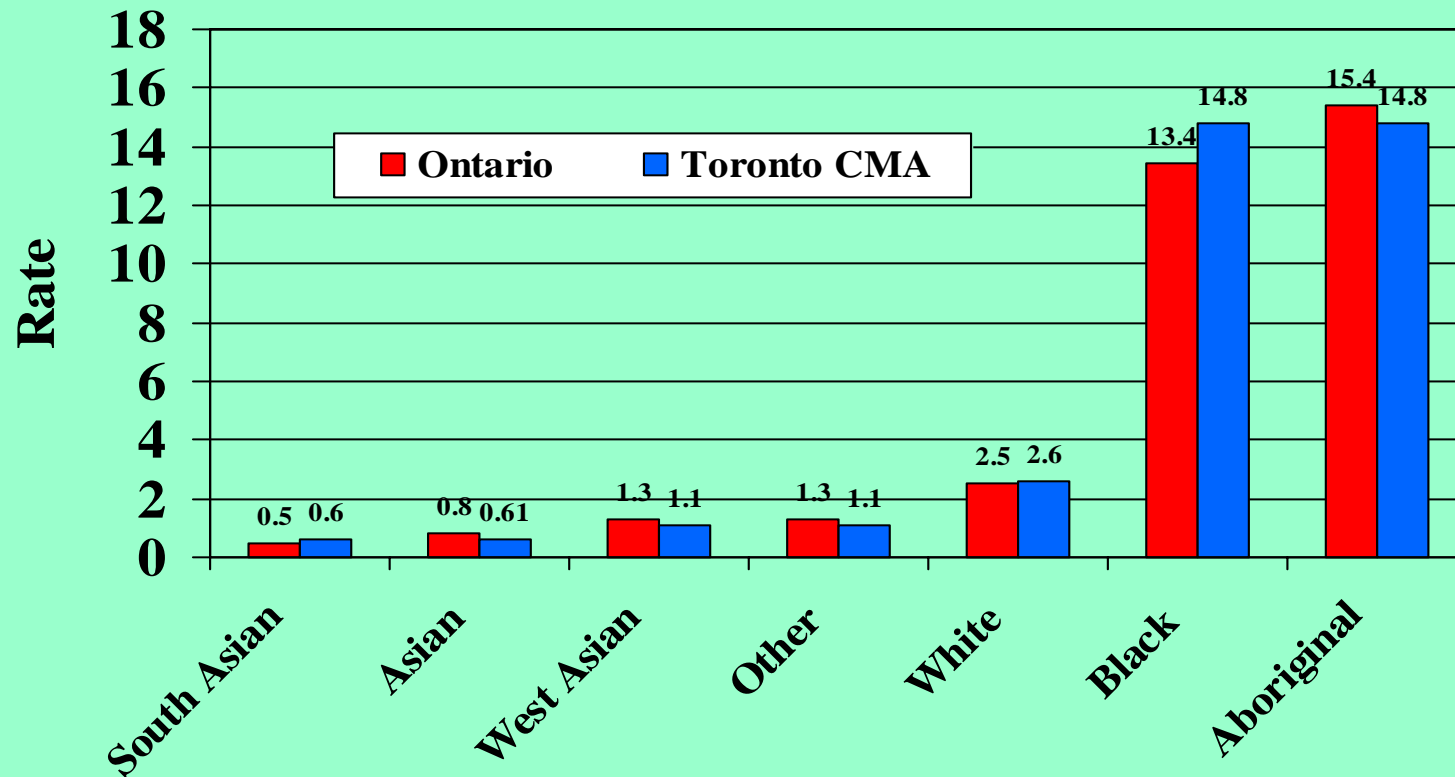
RACE	Population Size	% Population	# of SIU Cases	% of SIU Cases	Odds Ratio
White	8,944,190	79.3	222	63.6	0.80
Black	411,095	3.6	55	15.8	4.39
Aboriginal	188,315	1.7	29	8.3	4.88
Asian	803,310	7.1	6	1.7	0.24
South Asian	554,870	4.9	3	0.9	0.18
West Asian	155,640	1.4	2	0.6	0.43
Other	228,130	2.0	3	0.9	0.45
Missing	----	----	29	8.3	----
TOTAL	11,285,550	100.0	349	100.0	1.00

SIU INVESTIGATIONS:

Civilian Death or Serious Injury Directly Caused by Police Use of Force, Toronto CMA, 2000-2006

RACE	Population Size	% Population	# of SIU Cases	% of SIU Cases	Odds Ratio
White	2,915,125	62.7	75	53.2	0.85
Black	310,500	6.7	46	32.6	4.87
Aboriginal	20,300	0.4	3	2.1	5.25
Asian	656,805	14.1	4	2.8	0.20
South Asian	473,805	10.2	3	2.1	0.21
West Asian	95,820	2.1	1	0.7	0.33
Other	175,605	3.8	2	1.4	0.37
Missing	----	----	7	5.0	----
TOTAL	4,647,960	100.0	141	100.0	1.00

SIU Investigation Rate (per 100,000), Civilian Death or Serious Injury Directly Caused by Police Use of Force, by Race



SIU INVESTIGATIONS:

Civilian Death or Serious Injury Directly Caused by Police Shooting, Ontario, 2000-2006

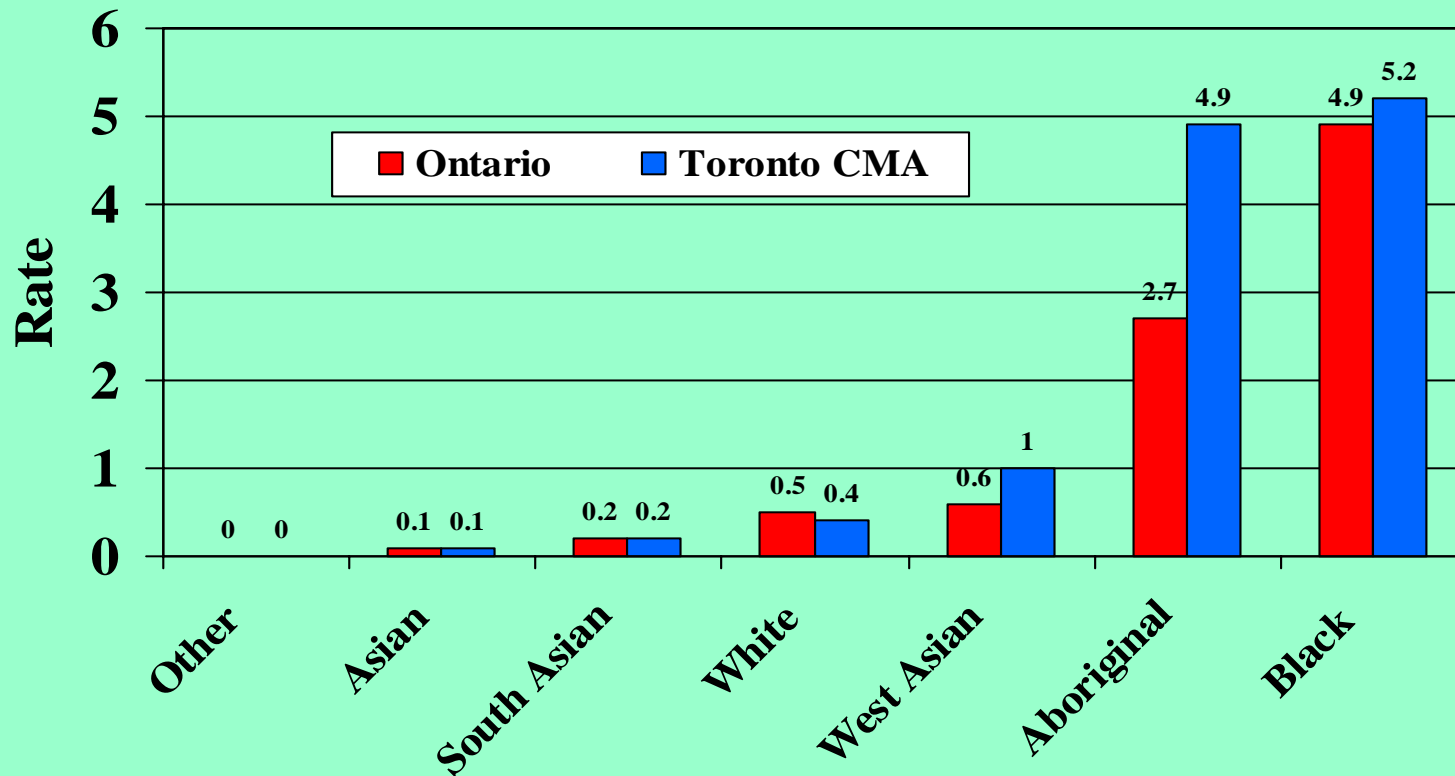
RACE	Population Size	% Population	# of SIU Cases	% of SIU Cases	Odds Ratio
White	8,944,190	79.3	43	58.9	0.74
Black	411,095	3.6	20	27.4	7.61
Aboriginal	188,315	1.7	5	6.8	4.00
Asian	803,310	7.1	1	1.4	0.20
South Asian	554,870	4.9	1	1.4	0.29
West Asian	155,640	1.4	1	1.4	1.00
Other	228,130	2.0	0	0.0	0.00
Missing	----	----	2	2.7	----
TOTAL	11,285,550	100.0	73	100.0	1.00

SIU INVESTIGATIONS:

Civilian Death or Serious Injury Directly Caused by Police Shooting, Toronto CMA, 2000-2006

RACE	Population Size	% Population	# of SIU Cases	% of SIU Cases	Odds Ratio
White	2,915,125	62.7	12	37.5	0.60
Black	310,500	6.7	16	50.0	7.46
Aboriginal	20,300	0.4	1	3.1	7.75
Asian	656,805	14.1	1	3.1	0.22
South Asian	473,805	10.2	1	3.1	0.30
West Asian	95,820	2.1	1	3.1	1.48
Other	175,605	3.8	0	0.0	0.00
Missing	----	----	0	0.0	----
TOTAL	4,647,960	100.0	32	100.0	1.00

SIU Investigation Rate (per 100,000), Civilian Death or Serious Injury Directly Caused by Police Shooting, by Race



SIU INVESTIGATIONS:

Civilian Death Directly Caused by Police Shooting, Ontario, 2000-2006

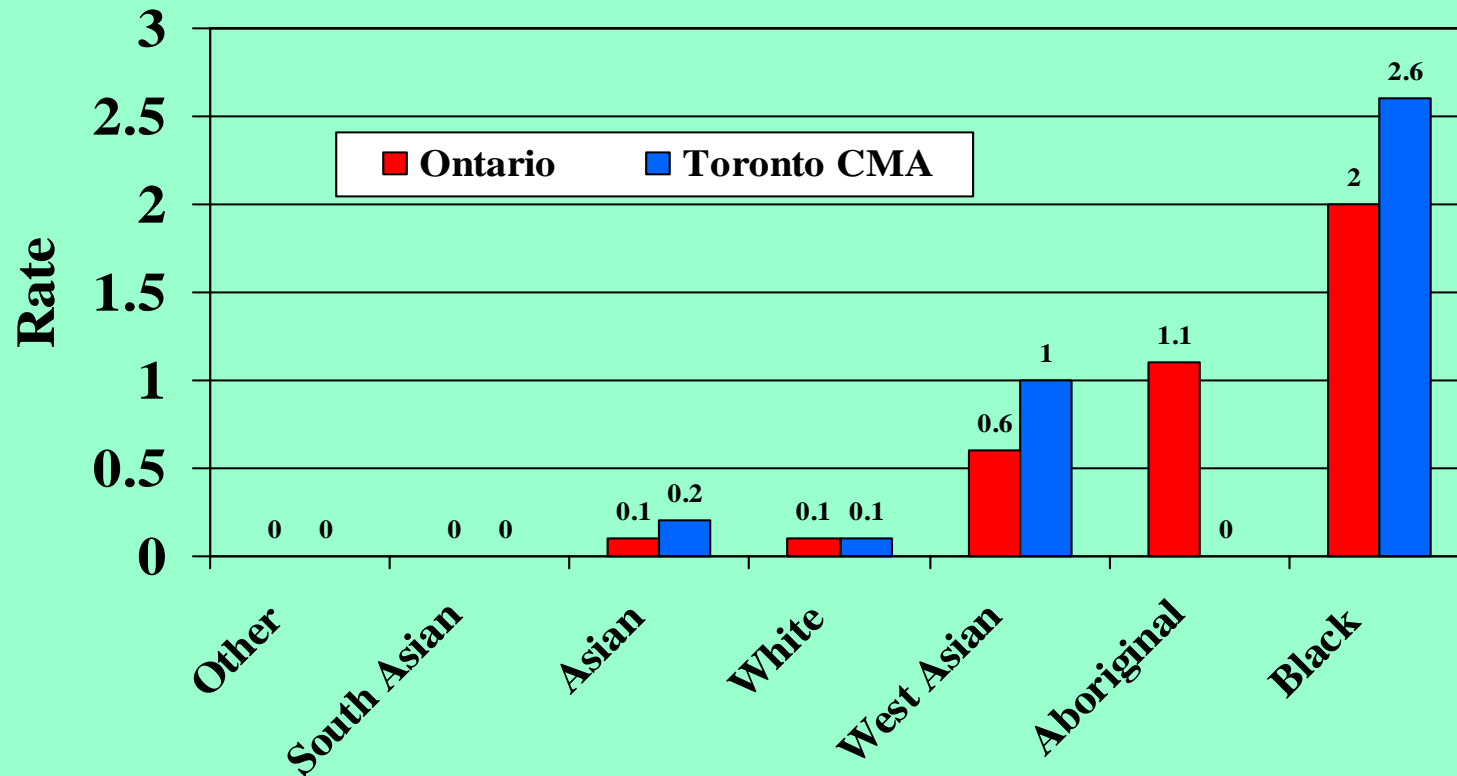
RACE	Population Size	% Population	# of SIU Cases	% of SIU Cases	Odds Ratio
White	8,944,190	79.3	11	47.8	0.60
Black	411,095	3.6	8	34.8	9.67
Aboriginal	188,315	1.7	2	8.7	5.12
Asian	803,310	7.1	1	4.3	0.61
South Asian	554,870	4.9	0	0.0	0.00
West Asian	155,640	1.4	1	4.3	3.07
Other	228,130	2.0	0	0.0	0.00
Missing	----	----	0	0.0	----
TOTAL	11,285,550	100.0	23	100.0	1.00

SIU INVESTIGATIONS:

Civilian Death Directly Caused by Police Shooting, Toronto CMA, 2000-2006

RACE	Population Size	% Population	# of SIU Cases	% of SIU Cases	Odds Ratio
White	2,915,125	62.7	2	16.7	0.27
Black	310,500	6.7	8	66.7	9.95
Aboriginal	20,300	0.4	0	0.0	0.00
Asian	656,805	14.1	1	8.3	0.59
South Asian	473,805	10.2	0	0.0	0.00
West Asian	95,820	2.1	1	8.3	3.95
Other	175,605	3.8	0	0.0	0.00
Missing	----	----	0	0.0	----
TOTAL	4,647,960	100.0	12	100.0	1.00

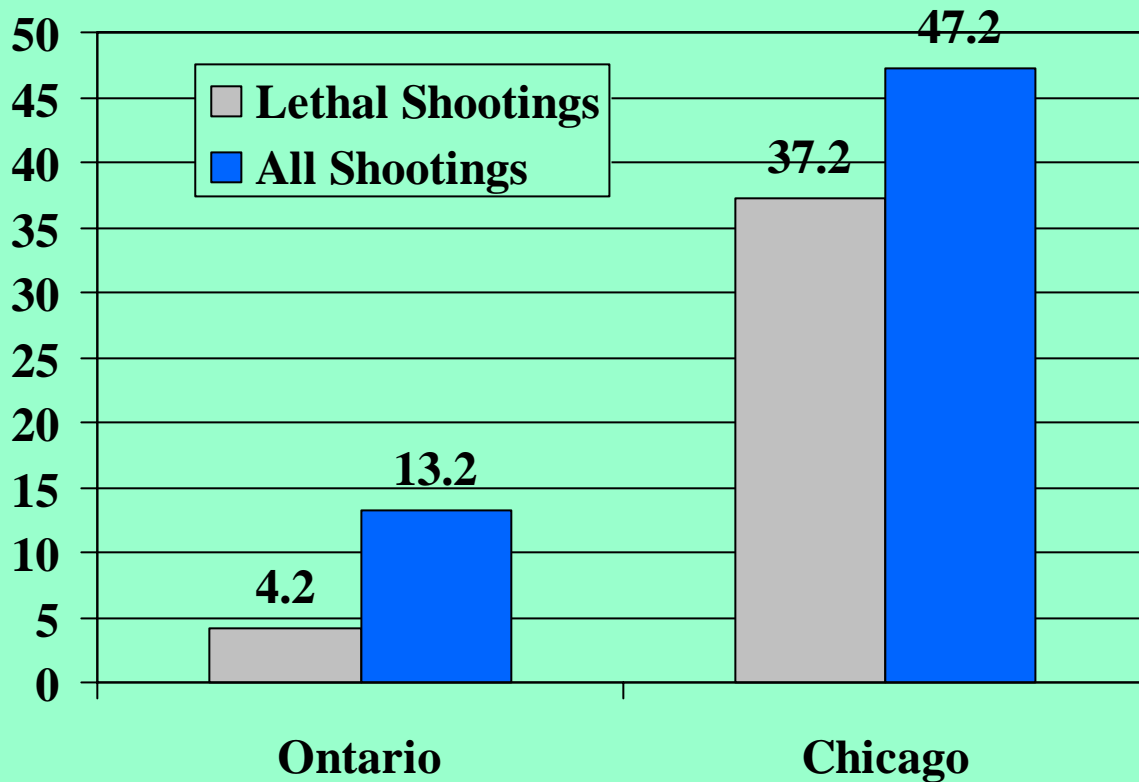
SIU Investigation Rate (per 100,000), Civilian Death Directly Caused by Police Shooting, by Race



The Numbers in Context

- Black and Aboriginal civilians are significantly over-represented in police use of force statistics in Ontario.
- However, other racial minority groups (South Asians, Asians, etc.) are significantly under-represented.
- Overall, police use of force – particularly lethal force -- is relatively infrequent in this province.

Average Police Shootings Per Year, *Chicago and Ontario*



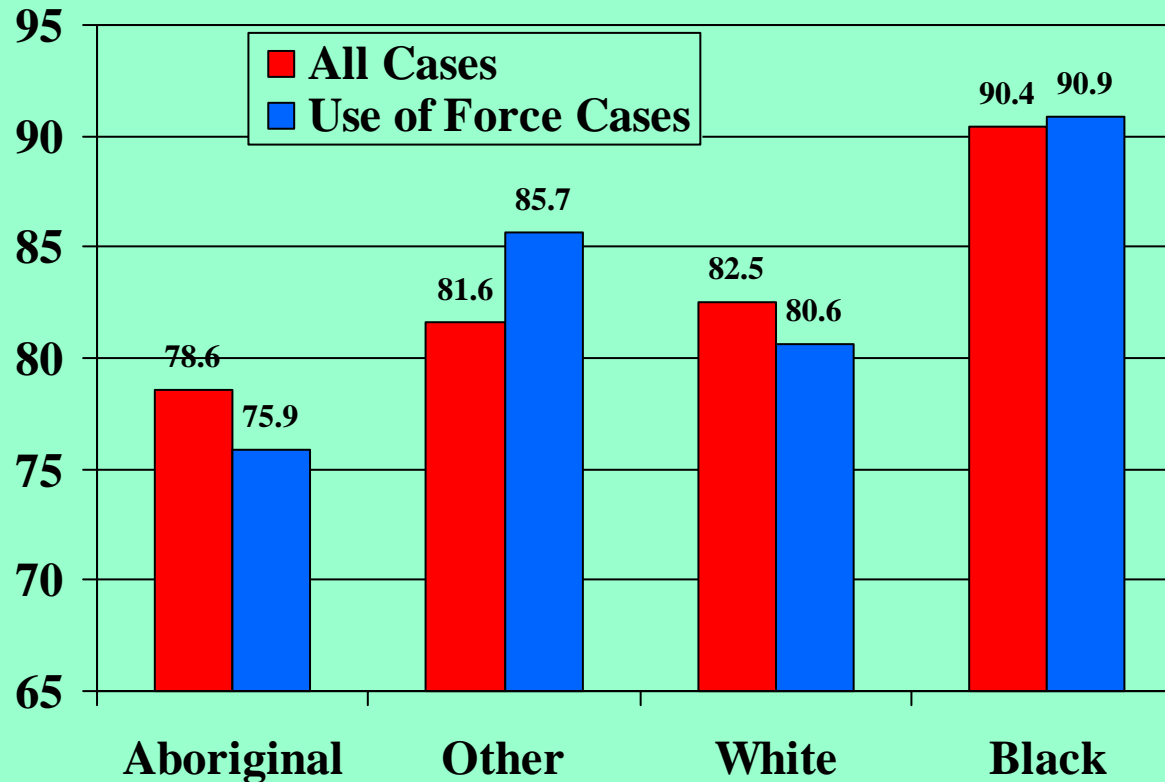
Are Minority Cases Different?

- Black civilians are somewhat younger and slightly more likely to be male.
- Aboriginal civilians are slightly more likely to be female.
- Black civilians involved in police shootings are somewhat less likely to have a criminal record.
- White and Aboriginal civilians were more likely to be intoxicated at the time of the incident.
- Black civilians were less likely to be manifesting mental illness at the time of the incident.

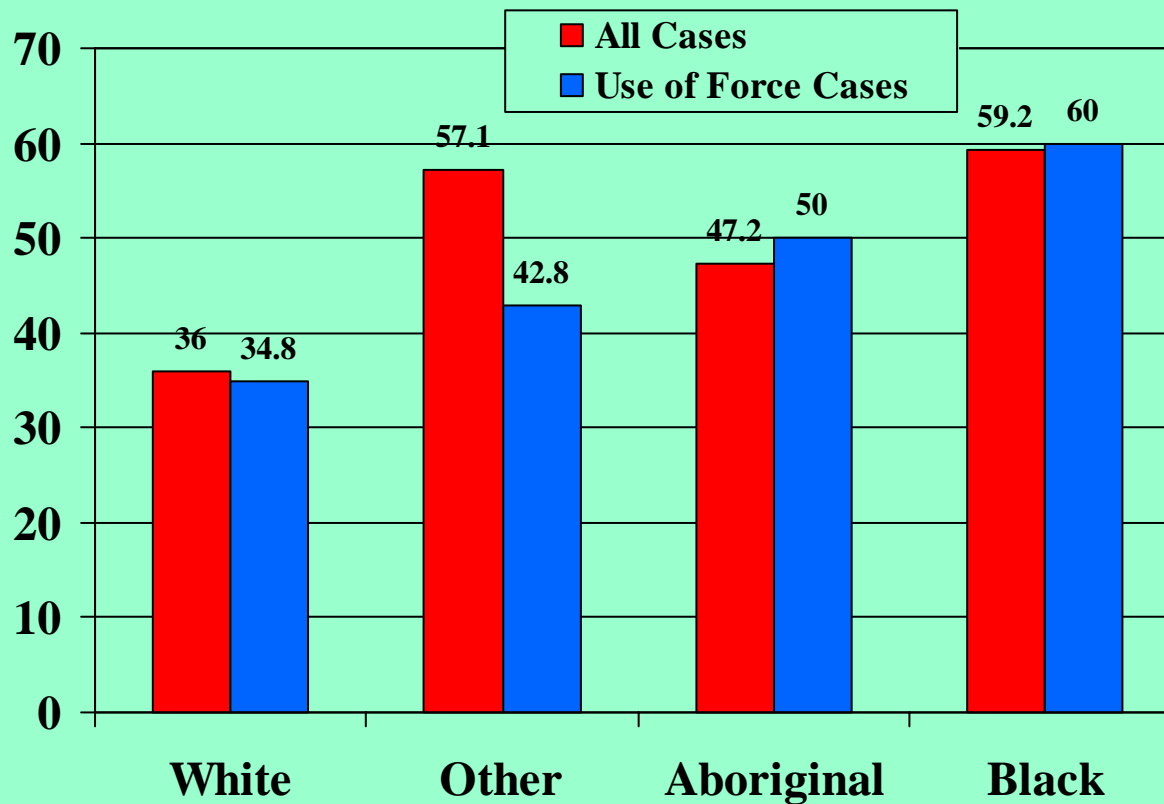
Are Minority Cases Different?

- Black civilians were more likely to be fleeing the police or threatening the police at time incident.
- Black civilians were somewhat less likely to have a weapon at the time of the incident.

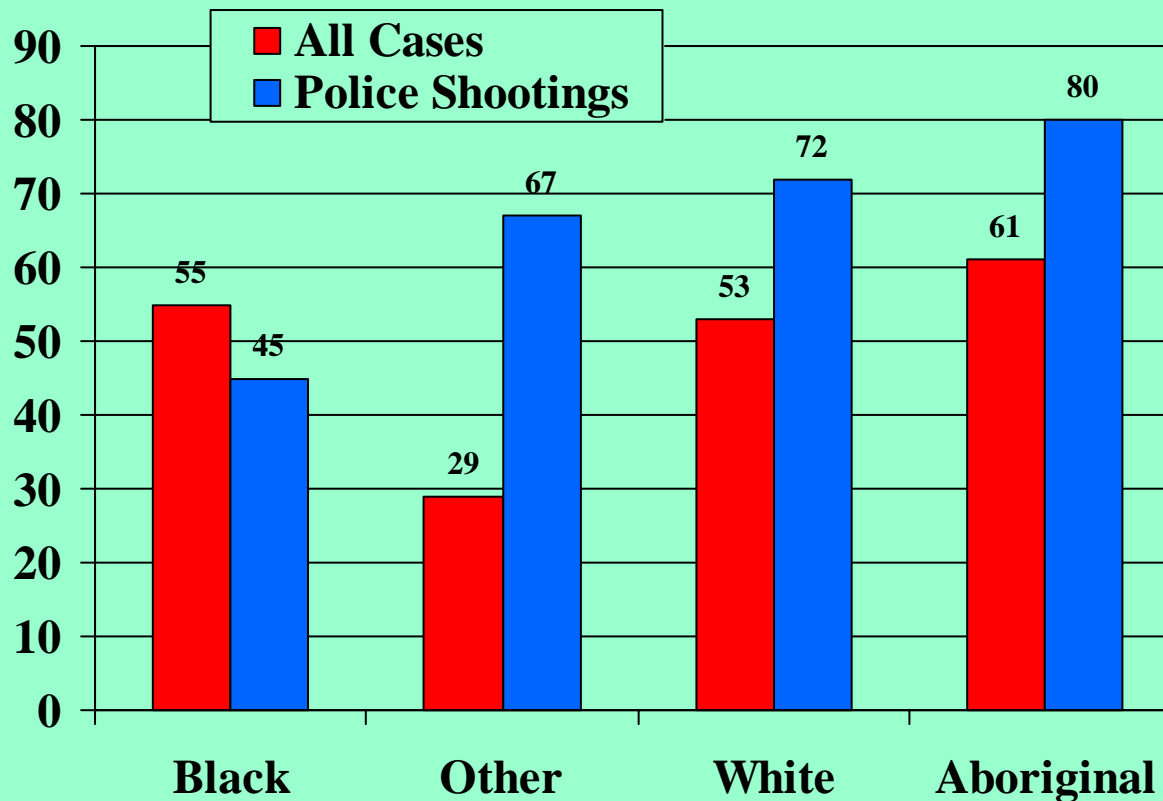
Percent of Cases Involving Male Civilians



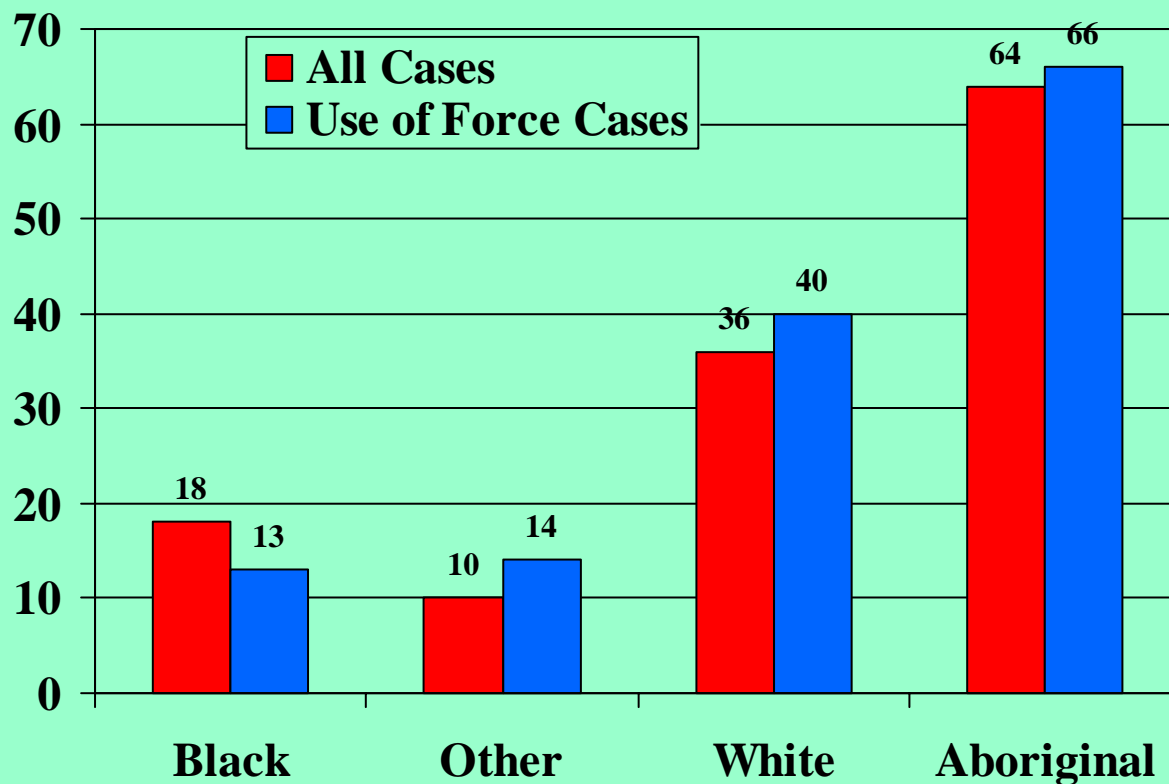
Percent of Cases Involving Civilians Under 30 years of Age



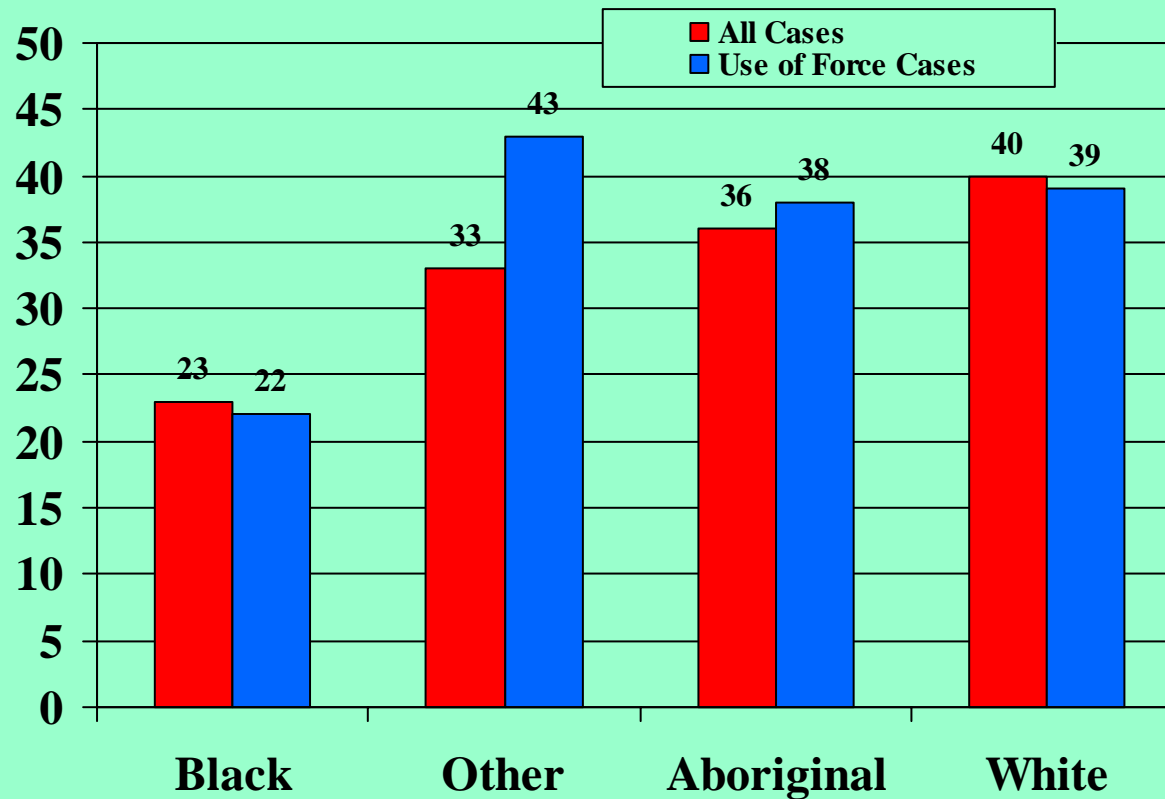
Percent of Cases In Which the Civilian Had a Previous Criminal Record



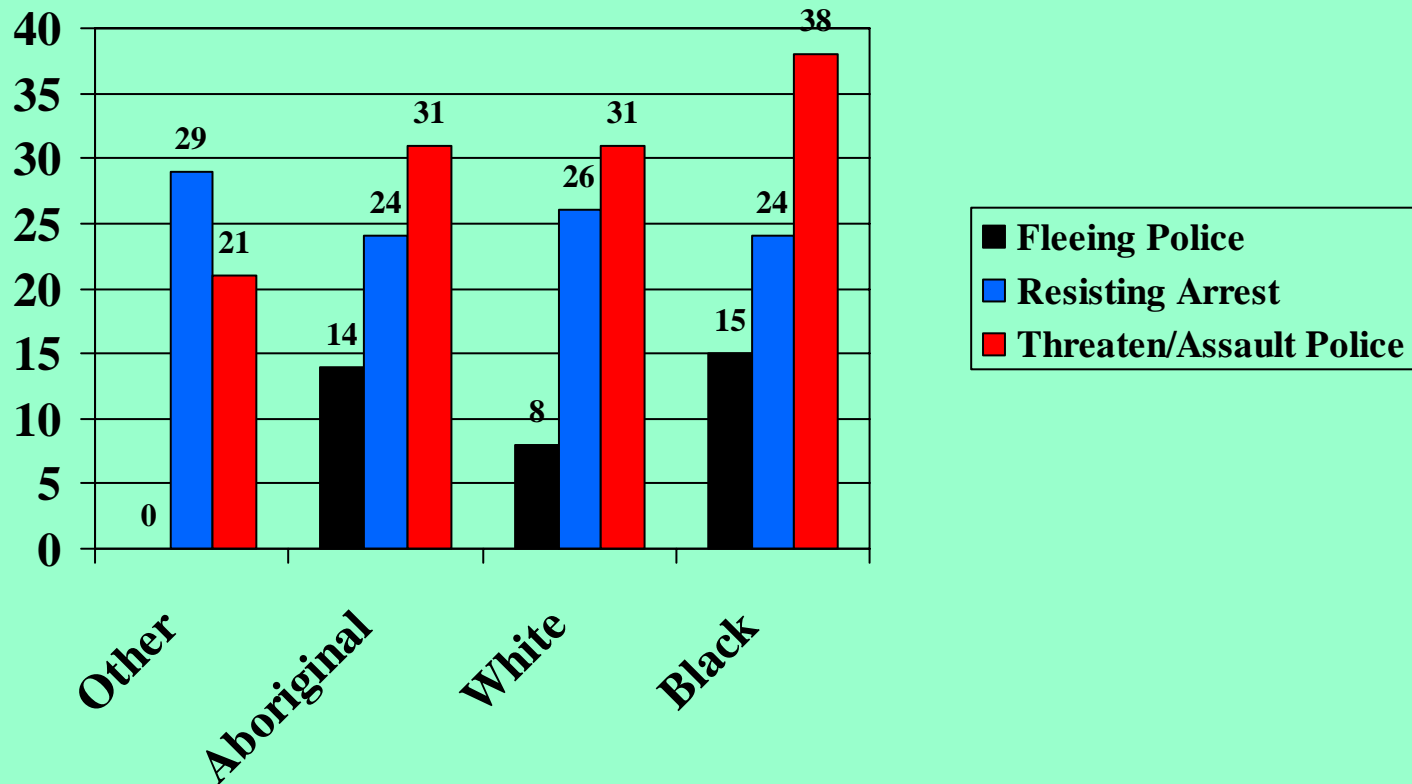
Percent of Civilians Who Were Intoxicated at the Time of the Incident



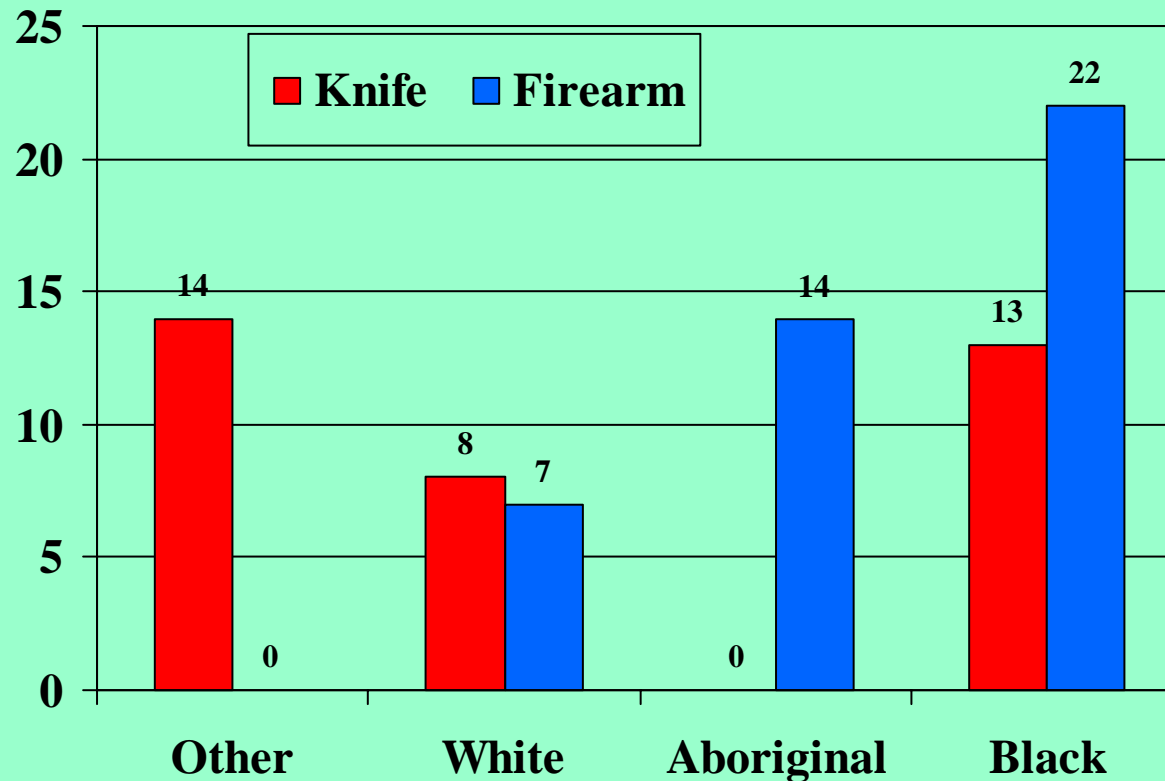
Percent of Civilians Who Were Manifesting Mental Health Problems at the Time of the Incident



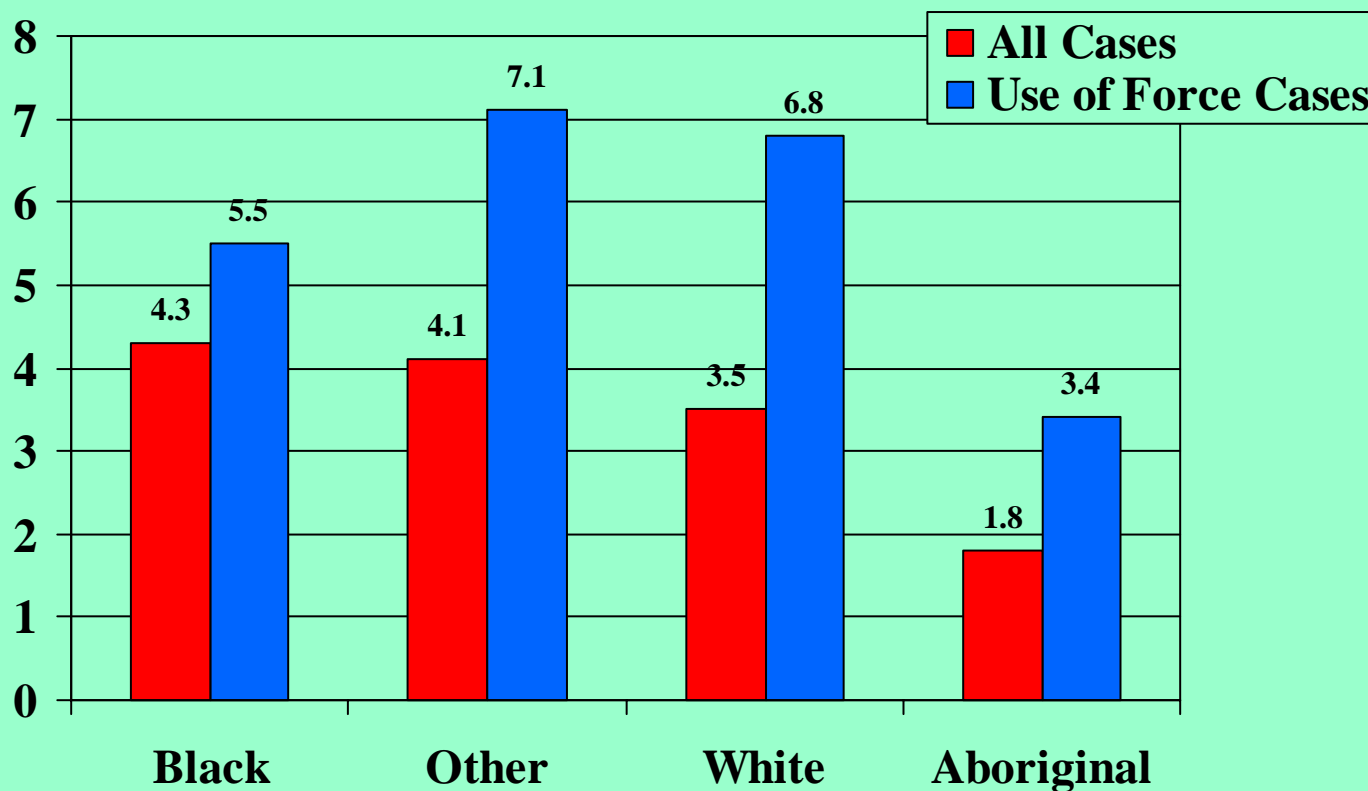
Behaviour of Civilian at Time of Incident, Serious Injury or Death Caused by Police Use of Force



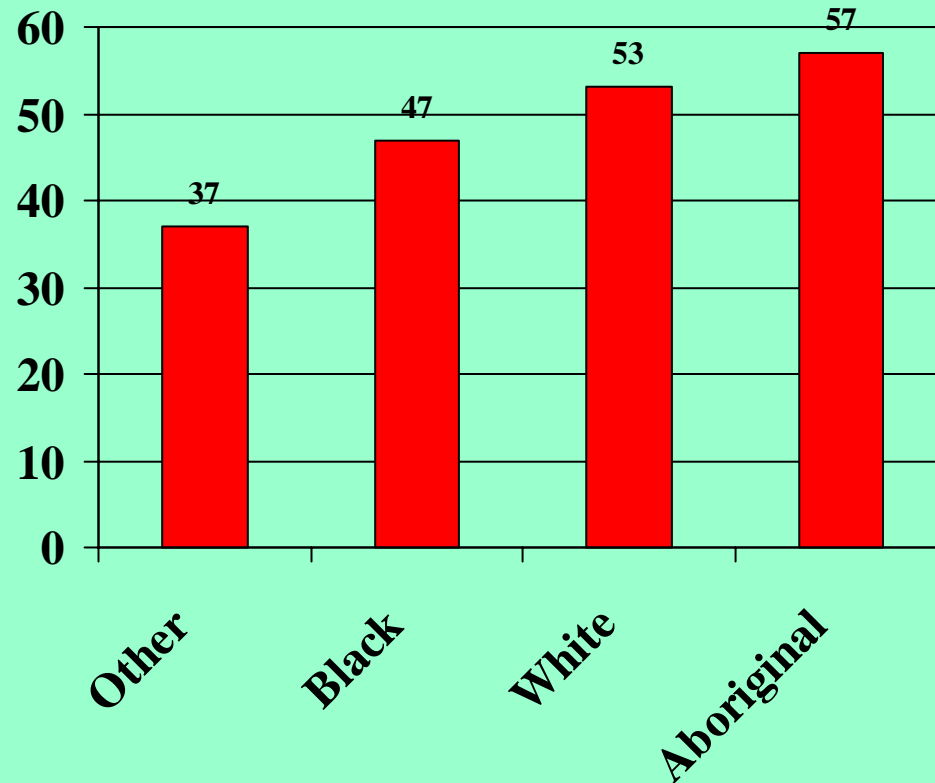
Percent of Civilians Who Had a Weapon at the Time of the Incident, Use of Force Cases Only



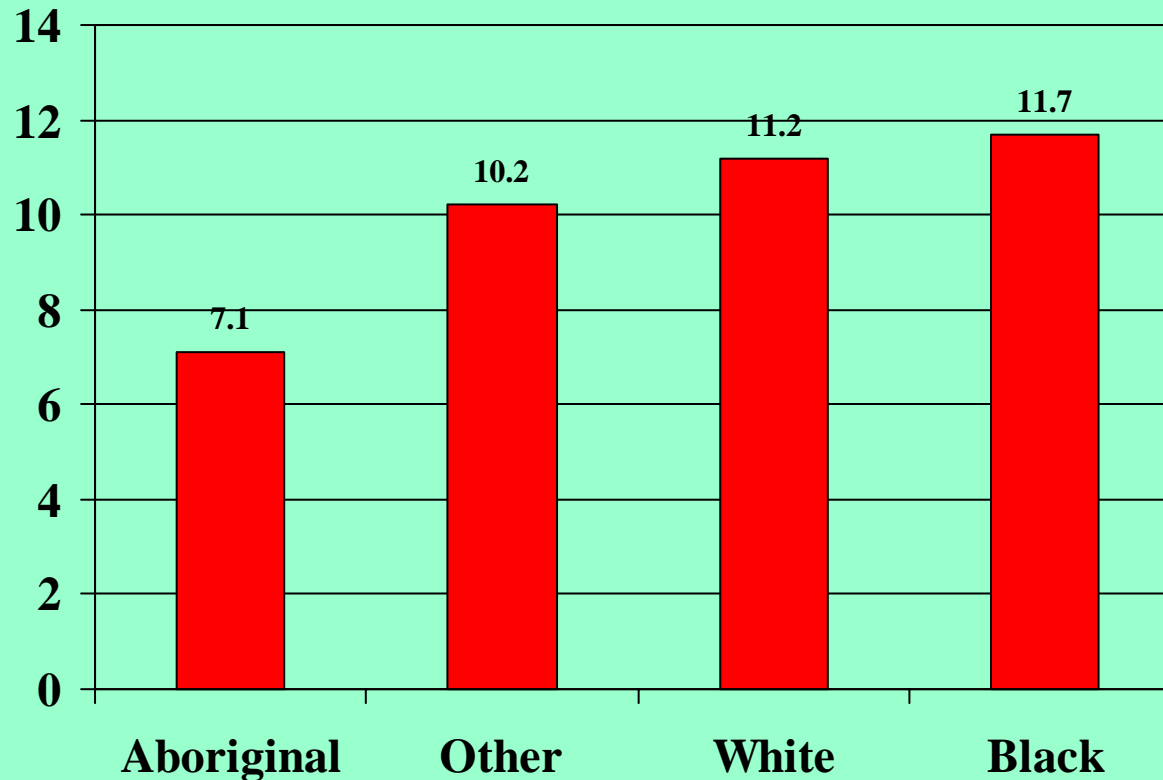
Percent of SIU Cases that Resulted in a Criminal Charge Against the Police



Percent of SIU Investigations In Which The Subject Officers Did Not Give A Statement



Percent of SIU Cases In Which the Director Noted Problems With Police Cooperation



Does the Data “Prove” Racial Bias?

- **NO.** However, data are *consistent* with allegations of racism.
- **Data Limitations:** SIU data only provide information on police-civilian encounters in which police force was used. Do not tell us about all the cases in which the police might have used force but did not.
- SIU data does not tell us about cases in which police use of force did not result in “serious” injury or death.
- Current study under-scores the need for more research.

Explaining Minority Over-Representation

- The Racial Animus Model
- The Racial Stereotype Model
- The Devaluation Model
- The Minority Crime Model
- The Neighbourhood Model
- The Demeanor Model
- The Police Subculture Model
- The Integrated Fear Model

Use of Force Policy Options

- Screening Procedures.
- Training.
- Increasing Non-lethal Force Options.
- Internal Use of Force Regulations.
- External Oversight (maintaining or expanding powers of organizations like the SIU).
- Monitoring through data collection and dissemination.

Anti-Racism Policy Options

- Screening (for racial bias and cultural capital).
- Anti-racism training.
- Minority hiring and promotion.
- Intensive community policing programs.
- Monitoring and evaluation through data collection and dissemination.

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