

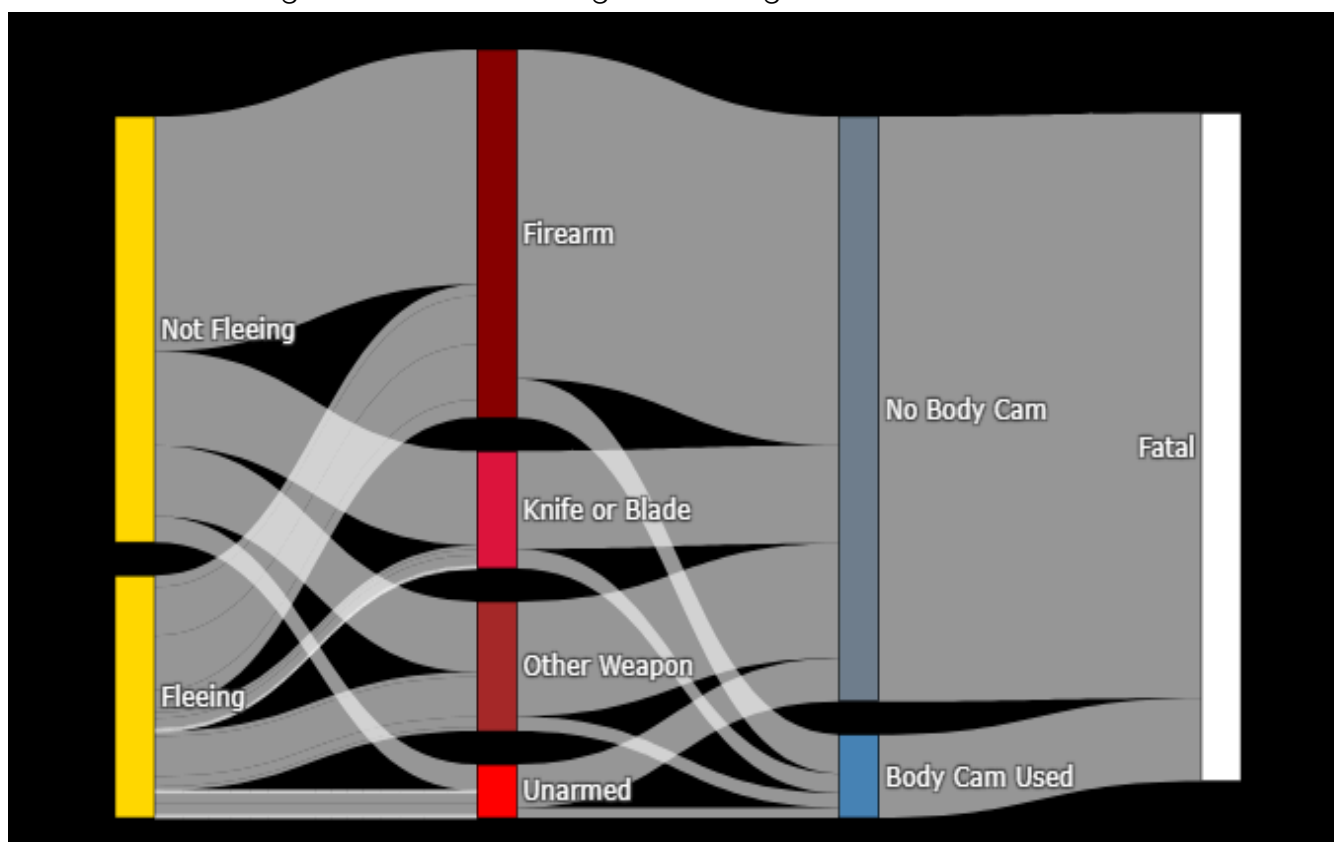
Understanding Fatal Police Shootings In The U.S.

Since January 1, 2015, The Washington Post has been tracking fatal police shootings across the United States, gathering data on over 10,000 incidents from 2015 through 2024. This initiative was sparked by the tragic killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014, which ignited the Black Lives Matter movement and called for greater police accountability. Our analysis draws from this comprehensive dataset to examine key patterns in police encounters, which can inform law enforcement strategies and policy reforms.

Key Findings: Incident Details

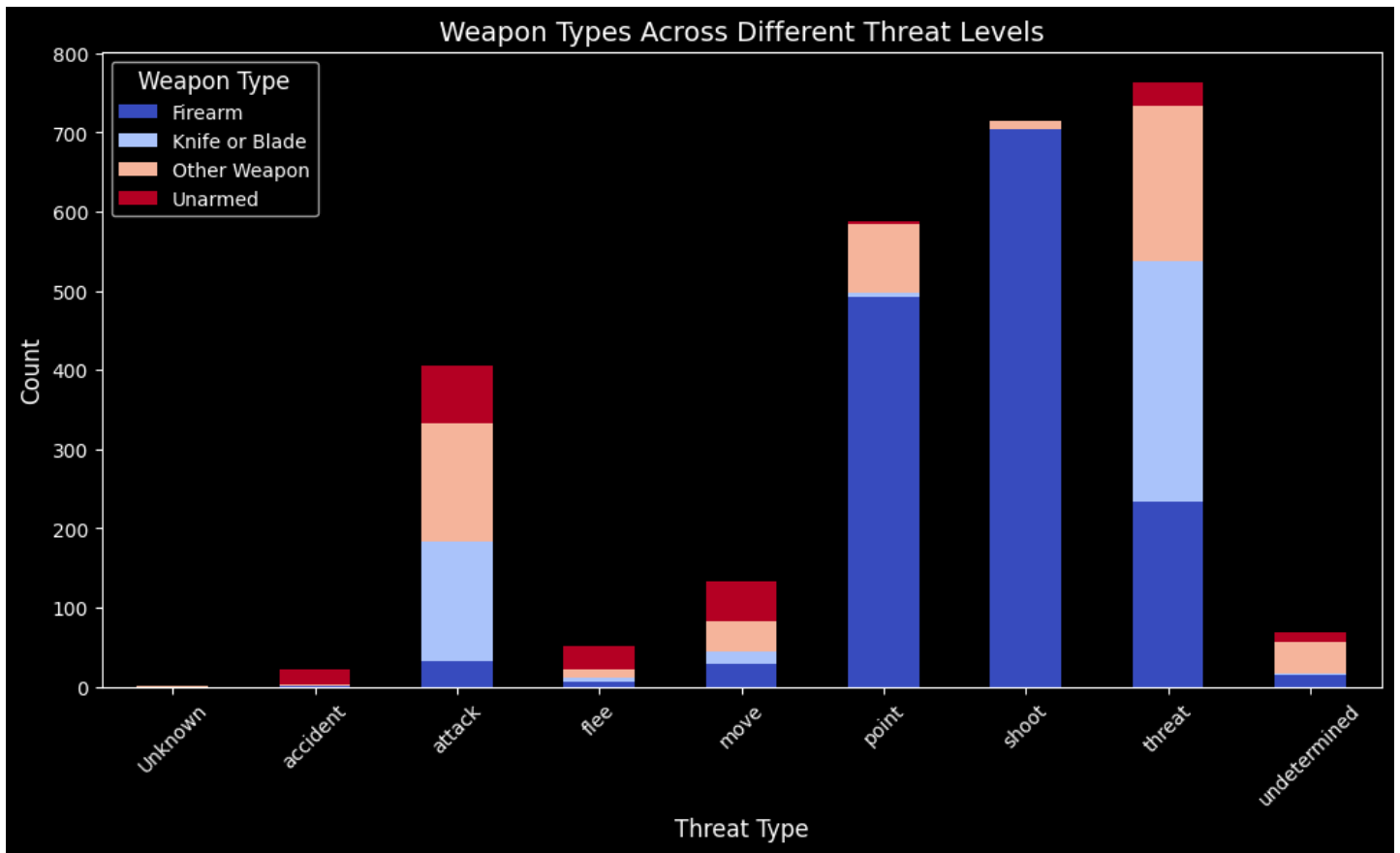
We began by analyzing the flow of fatal police encounters, particularly focusing on whether the individual was fleeing, armed, and if body cameras were in use. Notably, 11.23% of fleeing suspects were unarmed, yet they still faced fatal encounters, which comprised 4.07% of all incidents. This highlights a concerning trend where non-threatening individuals are still subjected to deadly force. Additionally, 87.56% of these encounters lacked body camera footage, pointing to a significant gap in accountability and the difficulty in verifying events.

Another striking result from our analysis is that 65.02% of armed individuals were not fleeing. This suggests that many confrontations escalated before movement occurred, pointing to potential issues in de-escalation training and the overall management of high-stress situations.



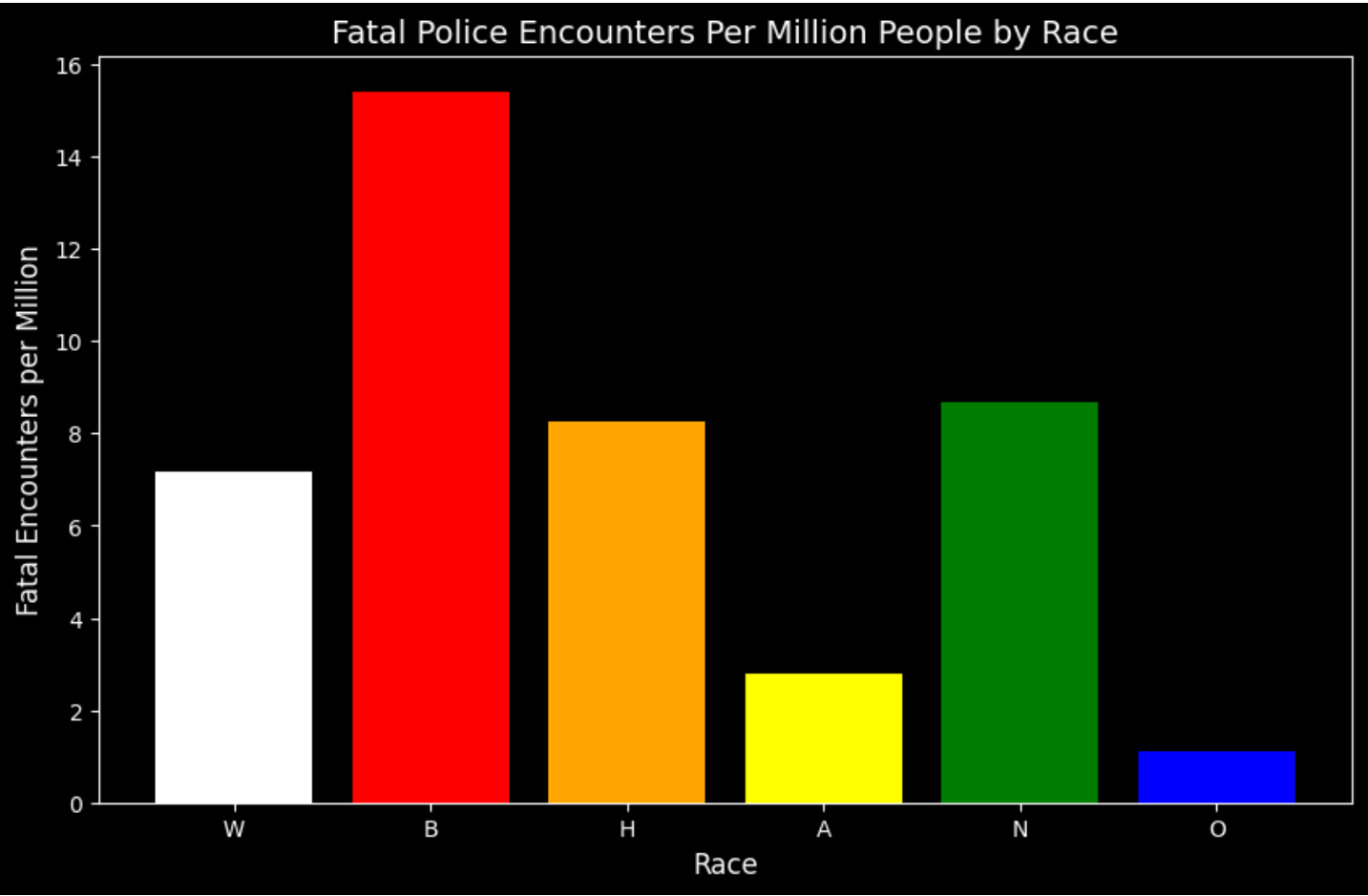
Weapon Type & Threat Perception

We also categorized incidents by the type of threat officers perceived. The most common threats included individuals "pointing" a weapon (e.g., firearm, knife, or other object), making sudden "move" actions that were interpreted as attempts to resist, or issuing "verbal threats." However, one of the more concerning findings was that unarmed individuals were too often categorized as "high threat," particularly in incidents involving verbal confrontations. This shows that perceived threats don't always align with actual weapon possession, suggesting a need for more refined use-of-force protocols and better de-escalation tactics.

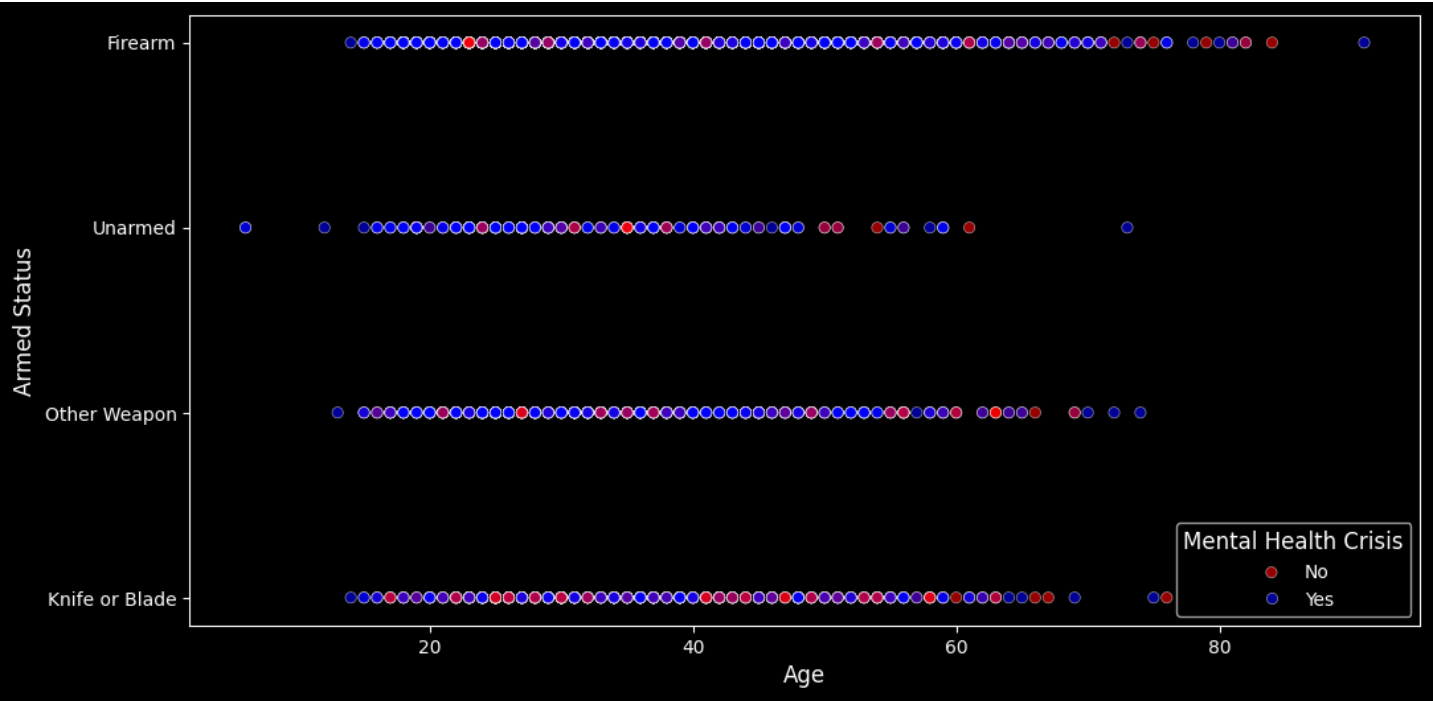


Demographics: Age, Gender, and Race

When we examined the demographics of victims, we found that the most common age group involved in fatal police encounters ranged from the late 20s to early 30s. White individuals made up the largest proportion of cases overall, but Black individuals faced a disproportionately higher per capita rate of fatal encounters. Hispanic individuals also faced higher-than-expected rates of deadly force, though to a lesser extent.



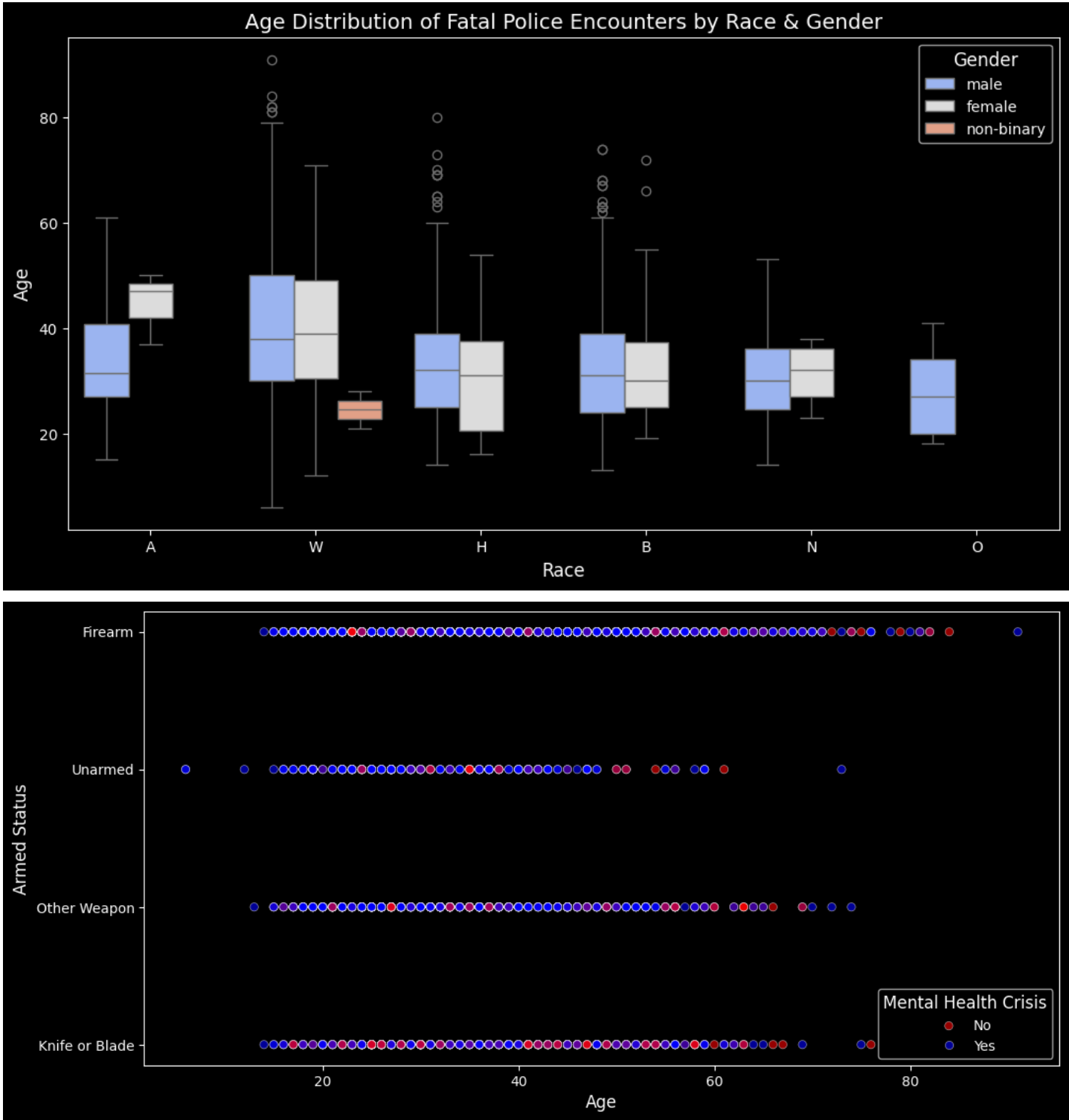
Additionally, our analysis found that 13.09% of victims under 25 years old were unarmed at the time of their death, and 20.25% were experiencing a mental health crisis. This finding aligns with broader concerns about law enforcement's handling of mental health crises, where the risk of escalation is significantly higher. This data suggests that improving mental health training for police officers and developing alternative crisis response models could reduce fatalities.



Local police and sheriff's departments were the most frequent agencies involved in fatal shootings, with these agencies showing the largest decline in fatal shooting rates over time. This could reflect evolving policing strategies or increased public scrutiny and policy changes. Geographically, we found that states like New Mexico and Oklahoma had disproportionately high rates of fatal police encounters when adjusted for population size, signaling the impact of regional law enforcement practices.

Correlations: Race, Age, and Mental Illness

Our analysis also revealed several correlations worth noting. Racial groups showed different age distributions in shootings, with certain groups being more likely to be younger when killed by police. Additionally, mental illness involvement varied across racial groups, with individuals experiencing mental health crises being slightly more likely to flee during encounters. This suggests that mental illness, along with race, plays a significant role in the dynamics of these encounters.



Conclusion

Our findings reveal urgent areas for reform in law enforcement practices. The high percentage of unarmed individuals involved in fatal encounters—especially those with mental health issues—demonstrates the need for enhanced de-escalation training and alternative response models. The lack of body camera footage in most incidents emphasizes a critical accountability gap that needs to be addressed through stronger policies and oversight. Finally, the disproportionate rates of fatal encounters among Black and Hispanic individuals highlight the need for greater racial equity in policing strategies and law enforcement training.

For full data analysis, visit our GitHub repository: [GitHub Link](#)