



# Domestic Violence 2020



**BILL LEE**  
Governor

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**DAVID B. RAUSCH**  
Director

March 18, 2021

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Each year the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation releases annual reports on crimes reported by law enforcement agencies to the Tennessee Incident Based Reporting System (TIBRS) program in seven different reports. The TIBRS data contains a wide range of incident level information including victim and offender demographics.

The issue of domestic violence is by no means a novel problem in American society. The persistence of domestic violence and the large number of related incidents reported to law enforcement necessitate continued awareness about this issue. In an effort to gain more insight into the problem of domestic violence within the state of Tennessee, the current study analyzes crime data collected from the Tennessee Incident Based Reporting System, hereafter referred to as TIBRS. Utilizing this TIBRS crime data, offenses flagged as domestic violence for 2020 are included in the report.

I would like to thank all contributing agencies for their hard work and contributions to making this report a thorough and accurate picture of crime in Tennessee. It is only with their support the state continues to maintain such a successful program.

Sincerely,

Director  
David B. Rausch



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## Quick Facts

- ❖ A total of 69,385 offenses were flagged as domestic related in 2020.
- ❖ Of the 69,385 domestic related offenses reported in 2020, 45,854 of them were reported as *Simple Assault*.
- ❖ The overall number of domestic related offenses decreased by 2.6% from 2019 to 2020.
- ❖ *Females* were three times more likely to be victimized than males; accounting for 71.5% of all domestic violence victims.
- ❖ *Males* accounted for the other 28.4%.
- ❖ *Juveniles* made up 9.7% of the reported victim types in 2020, with *Simple Assault* being the most reported offense made against juveniles.
- ❖ Data on victim to offender relationship types revealed that *Boyfriend/Girlfriend* was the most frequently reported relationship type for domestic abuse.
- ❖ Domestic violence resulted in 90 Murder victims in 2020.
- ❖ The most common weapon reported with domestic violence offenses was *Personal Weapons* (hands, feet, teeth, etc.) at 42,501.
- ❖ The most frequently reported Injury Types was *None* at 50.3% followed by *Apparent Minor Injuries* at 45.7%.
- ❖ 57.7% of domestic violence incidents were *Cleared* in 2020.

## INTRODUCTION

The issue of domestic violence is by no means a novel problem in the American society. However, the persistence of domestic violence and the large number of related incidents reported to law enforcement necessitate continued awareness about this issue. In an effort to gain more insight into the problem of domestic violence within the state of Tennessee, this study analyzes recent crime data collected from the Tennessee Incident Based Reporting System (TIBRS). Utilizing this TIBRS crime data, offenses flagged as domestic related in 2020 were examined.

## OVERALL FINDINGS

Upon initially examining the TIBRS data submitted for domestic violence offenses, several parameters for the study were established. The data included in this study had to meet the following criteria: Crimes Against Persons offense(s); offense(s) flagged by the law enforcement agency as being domestically related; and victim gender could not be reported as Unknown. The total number of domestic violence victims reported in the state for 2020 totaled 69,385. It should be noted that individuals who reported domestic abuse in more than one incident during the study period will be duplicated accordingly in this report's victim count. The majority of these victims were female (71.5%) outnumbering male victims by almost 3 to 1.

An analysis of race breakdown revealed that White victims, the race majority for all offenses, accounted for as much as 57.4% of victims reported in 2020. A total of 6,755 juveniles, or individuals under age eighteen, accounted for 9.7% of all victims. When examining relationship types, domestic violence occurred predominately in Boyfriend/Girlfriend relationships at 38.2%, followed by Spouse at 13.7% in 2020. The most common weapon type reported was Personal Weapons (hands, feet, teeth, etc.) at 42,501. A total of 57.7% of domestic violence cases were cleared in 2020.

## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE OFFENSES

Crimes identified as domestically related in TIBRS must always have the victim type of Individual. Crimes Against Society and Crimes Against Property cannot be flagged as domestic violence in TIBRS. There are 17 offenses considered to be Crimes Against Persons. Of these, 14 were included in the study with the three omitted offenses being Negligent Manslaughter, Negligent Vehicular Manslaughter, Justifiable Homicide. Findings found that from 2019 to 2020, domestic violence offenses decreased 2.6%.

**TABLE 1: 2018-2020 ANNUAL COMPARISON**

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE OFFENSE TYPE	2018	2019	2020
Murder	100	90	90
Kidnapping/Abduction	1,115	1,287	1,420
Forcible Rape	718	679	613
Forcible Sodomy	146	167	139
Sexual Assault W/Object	99	63	58
Forcible Fondling	745	713	628
Incest	36	27	33
Statutory Rape	132	113	100
Aggravated Assault	10,947	10,647	11,140
Simple Assault	49,660	48,006	45,854
Intimidation	9,458	8,628	8,453
Stalking	873	844	856
Commercial Sex Acts	1	0	1
Involuntary Servitude	2	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>74,032</b>	<b>71,264</b>	<b>69,385</b>

**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE VICTIMS**

Domestic violence may often be perceived as violence against women. There are numerous agencies nationally and locally which advocate specifically for battered and abused women. The current analyses of domestic offenses in the state of Tennessee support the notion that domestic violence is most often reported as being committed toward a female victim.

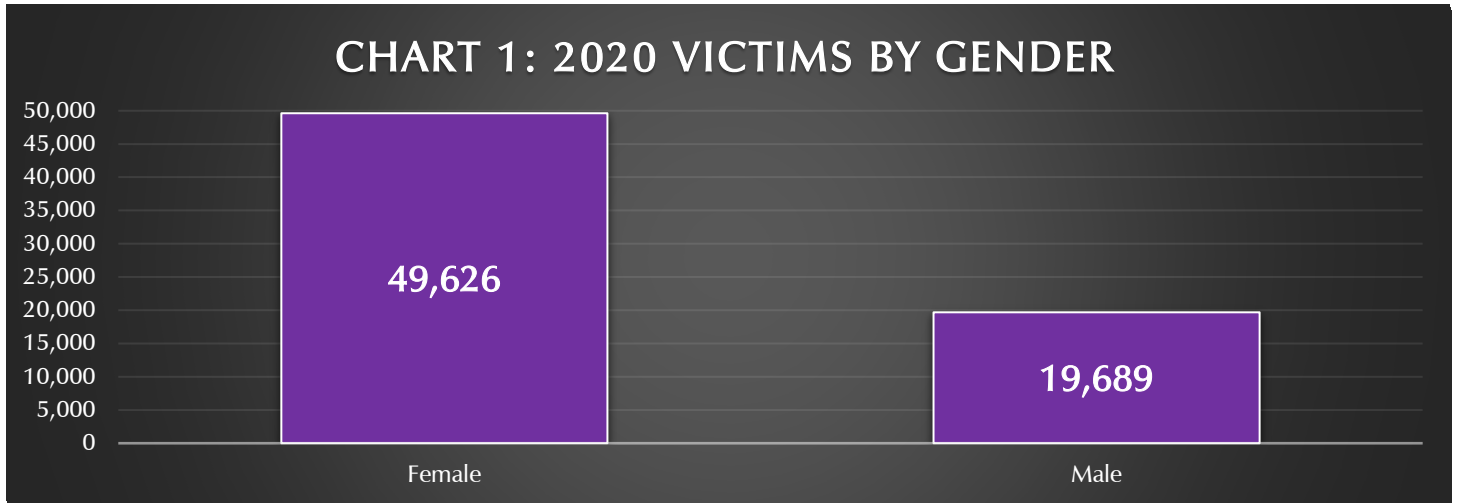
**TABLE 2: 2020 DOMESTIC VIOLENCE OFFENSES BY GENDER**

OFFENSE TYPE	FEMALE	%	MALE	%	UNKNOWN	%	TOTAL	%
Murder	54	0.1%	36	0.2%	0	0.0%	90	0.1%
Kidnapping/Abduction	1,004	2.0%	415	2.1%	1	1.4%	1,420	2.0%
Rape	606	1.2%	7	0.0%	0	0.0%	613	0.9%
Sodomy	82	0.2%	57	0.3%	0	0.0%	139	0.2%
Sexual Assault W/Object	53	0.1%	5	0.0%	0	0.0%	58	0.1%
Fondling	531	1.1%	97	0.5%	0	0.0%	628	0.9%
Incest	25	0.1%	8	0.0%	0	0.0%	33	0.0%
Statutory Rape	92	0.2%	8	0.0%	0	0.0%	100	0.1%
Aggravated Assault	7,212	14.5%	3,912	19.9%	16	22.9%	11,140	16.1%
Simple Assault	32,736	66.0%	13,076	66.4%	42	60.0%	45,854	66.1%
Intimidation	6,491	13.1%	1,951	9.9%	11	15.7%	8,453	12.2%
Stalking	739	1.5%	117	0.6%	0	0.0%	856	1.2%
Commercial Sex Acts	1	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	0.0%
Involuntary Servitude	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>49,626</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>19,689</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>69,385</b>	<b>100%</b>

Note: Unknown is listed in Table 2 to accurately represent data reported in 2020. The category of unknown will not be listed in other tables or charts throughout this report.

## VICTIMS BY GENDER

In 2020, a total of 69,385 domestic violence victims were reported to the TIBRS program. Per TIBRS reporting guidelines, up to ten offenses may be reported per each incident, such as those listed in Table 2. Data collected from TIBRS revealed that women were consistently the primary victims of domestic violence offenses. In 2020, Females accounted for 71.5%, whereas their male peers accounted for only 28.4%, as shown in Chart 1. As such, females in Tennessee are almost three times more likely than males to become victims of domestic abuse.



Additional findings revealed victims classified as White (57.4%) and Black or African American (41.9%) were more likely to be victims of domestic violence than other races in Tennessee. White Females, in particular, were victimized at a higher rate than Black or African American Females in 2020. Male victims classified as Black or African American represented 40.1%, compared to White Males at 58.7%.

## VICTIMS BY RACE



*Victims by Race Continued*

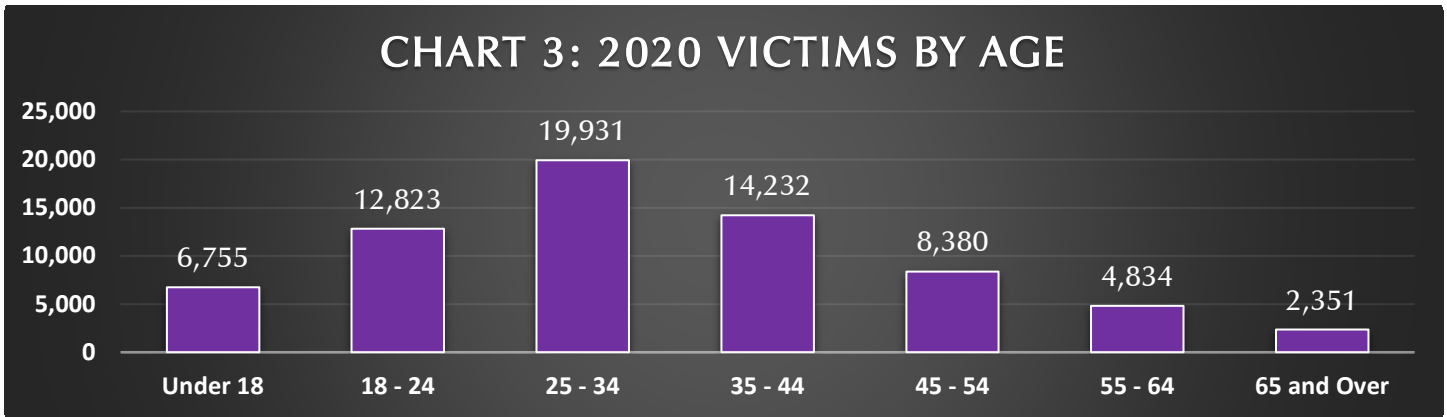
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<b>TABLE 3: 2020 RACE COMPARISON BY OFFENSE</b>		
<b>OFFENSE TYPE</b>	<b>WHITE</b>	<b>BLACK OR AFRICAN AMERICAN</b>
Murder	51	39
Kidnapping/Abduction	688	720
Rape	439	165
Sodomy	80	59
Sexual Assault W/Object	40	14
Fondling	464	152
Incest	18	15
Statutory Rape	73	25
Aggravated Assault	5,827	5,194
Simple Assault	27,283	18,021
Intimidation	4,188	4,179
Stalking	473	376
Commercial Sex Acts	1	0
Involuntary Servitude	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>39,625</b>	<b>28,959</b>

As shown in Table 3, Simple and Aggravated Assaults accounted for the most frequently reported offense types between both racial groups; however, domestic related sexual incidents occurred much more predominately among White victims than Black victims in 2020. Incidents involving Rape and Fondling were reported as having occurred over two- and one-half times the rate of Black victims. Despite the greater differences in these crimes, data revealed little variation between the victim types in Intimidation offenses reported (nine) in 2020.

Although the racial categories of White and Black or African-American were the most often reported groups victimized at 57.4% and 41.9% respectively, the types of offenses committed against the groups sometimes show a much greater disparity between the two in terms of victimization.

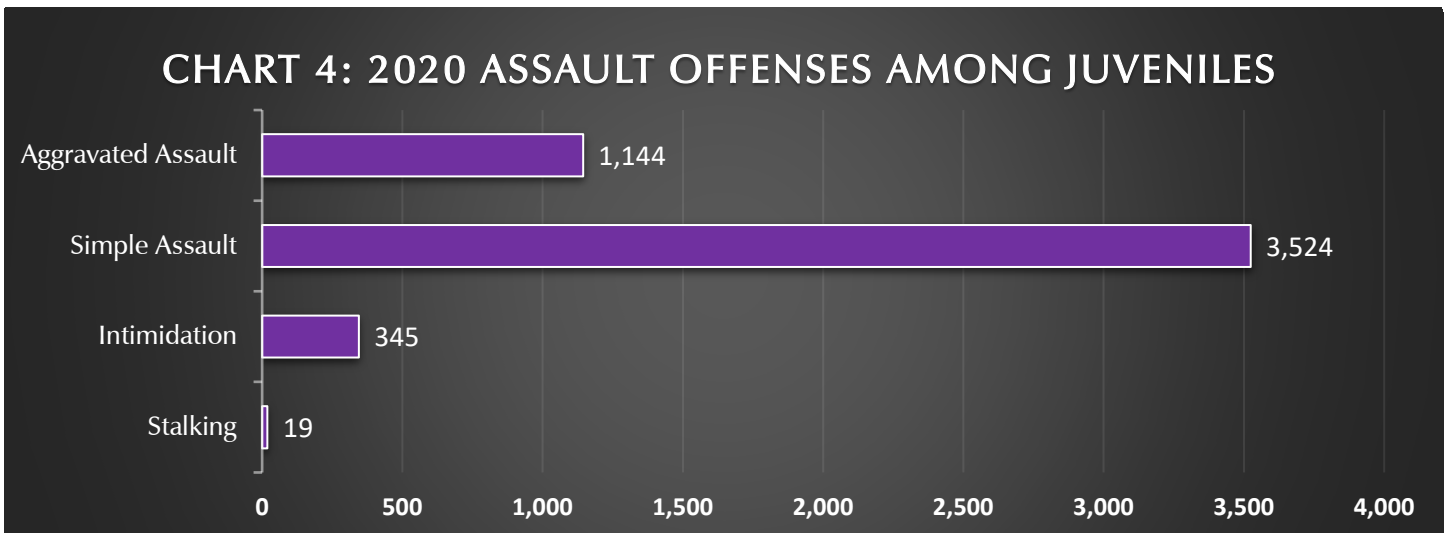
## VICTIMS BY AGE



Individuals between the ages of 25-34 were at a higher risk of domestic abuse than other age groups displayed on Chart 3. Though individuals over 18 comprised the majority of domestic abuse victims, the group representing ages 65 and Over was reported as having the fewest number of victims, as shown in Chart 3 above. Although the racial categories of White and Black or African-American were the most often reported.

## JUVENILE VICTIMS

Additional findings on domestic violence data reveal juveniles accounted for 9.7% of all domestic abuse victims in 2020. This group was more likely to be reported as the victims of domestic-related Rape, Fondling and Incest than adults. Similarly, the majority of Kidnapping/Abduction incident victims were comprised of juveniles in 2020, often times stemming from reports of parental abduction. When examining assault offenses, Simple Assault among Juveniles comprised 52.2%, followed by Aggravated Assault at 16.9% in 2020.





## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE VICTIM TO OFFENDER RELATIONSHIPS

Victim to Offender Relationship data allows one to understand the true nature of domestic abuse. Generally, domestic violence victims and offenders can have various interpersonal relationships. The intimate relationship is the most common when addressing domestic abuse. Intimate relationships may be presented as formal relationships such as a marriage or less formal relationships such as dating.

**TABLE 4: DOMESTIC VIOLENCE VICTIM TO OFFENDER RELATIONSHIPS**

WITHIN FAMILY	
Spouse	Grandchild
Common-Law Spouse	In-Law
Parent	Stepparent
Sibling	Stepchild
Child	Stepsibling
Grandparent	Other Family Member
OUTSIDE FAMILY	
Boyfriend/Girlfriend	Ex-Spouse
Child of Boyfriend/Girlfriend	Child of Ex-Boyfriend Child of Ex-Girlfriend
Ex-Boyfriend/Ex-Girlfriend	

In order to define the relationships of those involved in domestic related incidents, TIBRS uses a specific Victim to Offender relationship rather than how the offender is related to the victim. For example, when law enforcement receives a report of a step-child being assaulted by a step-parent, the question must be asked as to how the *step-child* (victim) is related to the step-parent (offender) rather than how the step-parent is related to the step-child. In this example, the relationship would be reported as Step-Child. This is of particular importance since Crimes Against Persons use victim counts and demographics to assist in understanding the number of crimes impacting various groups of persons. Two additional categories (Ex-Boyfriend/Girlfriend and Child of Ex-Boyfriend/Girlfriend) were added to the TIBRS program in 2018, joining the existing intimate Victim to Offender relationships of Spouse, Ex-Spouse, and Boyfriend/Girlfriend. Chart 6 reveals the number of Victim to Offender relationships reported in 2020.



## SPOUSE/EX-SPOUSE

Spouse and Ex-Spouse relationships were examined together for comparison purposes. Results revealed that Spouses are more likely to be domestically abused than those who fall in the relationship category of Ex-Spouse. Over the three-year reporting period, as shown below, domestic violence with a relationship of Spouse/Ex-Spouse declined 16.0%. Female victims classified as Black or African Americans in an Ex-Spouse Relationship decreased 57.4% from 2018 to 2020, while White Female victims decreased by 27.3% within that same timeframe.

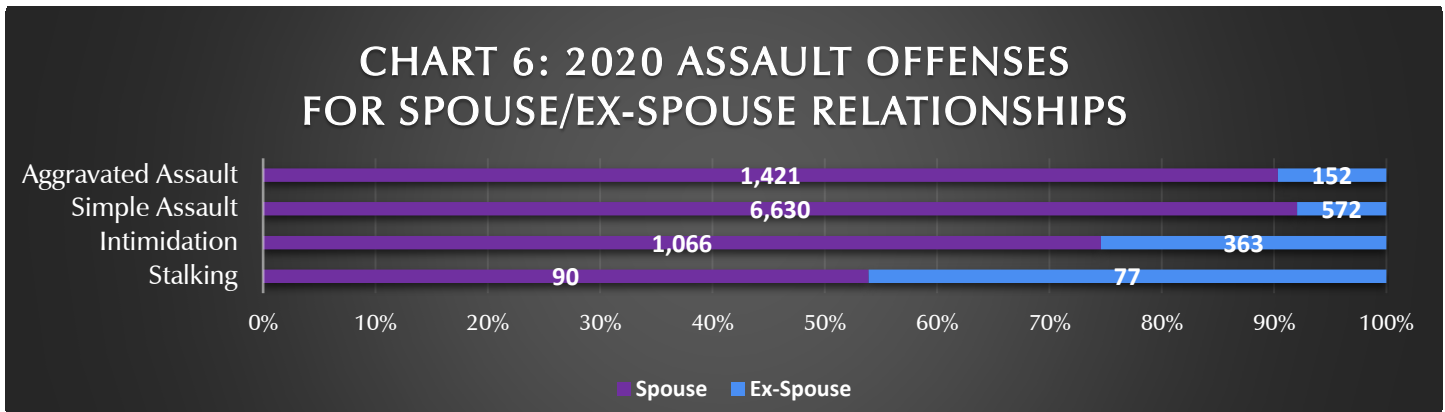
### TABLE 5: SPOUSE/EX-SPOUSE RELATIONSHIP BY GENDER AND RACE

SPOUSE	2018	%	2019	%	2020	%
<b>MALE</b>	2,786		2,675		2,422	
White	2,068	74.2%	1,956	73.1%	1,797	74.2%
Black or African American	718	25.8%	719	26.9%	625	25.8%
<b>FEMALE</b>	7,889		7,618		6,882	
White	5,948	75.4%	5,714	75.0%	5,118	74.4%
Black or African American	1,941	24.6%	1,904	25.0%	1,764	25.6%
<b>EX-SPOUSE</b>						
<b>MALE</b>	445		328		339	
White	296	66.5%	240	73.2%	235	69.3%
Black or African American	149	33.5%	88	26.8%	104	30.7%
<b>FEMALE</b>	1,427		980		891	
White	939	65.8%	769	78.5%	683	76.7%
Black or African American	488	34.2%	211	21.5%	208	23.3%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>12,547</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>11,601</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>10,534</b>	<b>100%</b>

Note: This table only reflects the relationships of spouse and ex-spouse for Black or African American and White victims.

### Victim to Offender Relationships Continued

Additional findings from 2018 to 2020 revealed White males were victimized at a higher rate than Black or African American Males, as the number of Black or African Americans Males in Spousal relationships reported being victimized 13.0% less over the three-year reporting period.



Note: This chart only reflects the relationships of Spouse and Ex-Spouse for Black or African American and White Victims.

The offense of Simple Assault accounted for the most frequently reported offense type among spousal relationships in 2020. A total of 198 domestic-related Stalking offenses were reported in 2020. Of those 198 reported, 51.5% cases involved a Spouse.

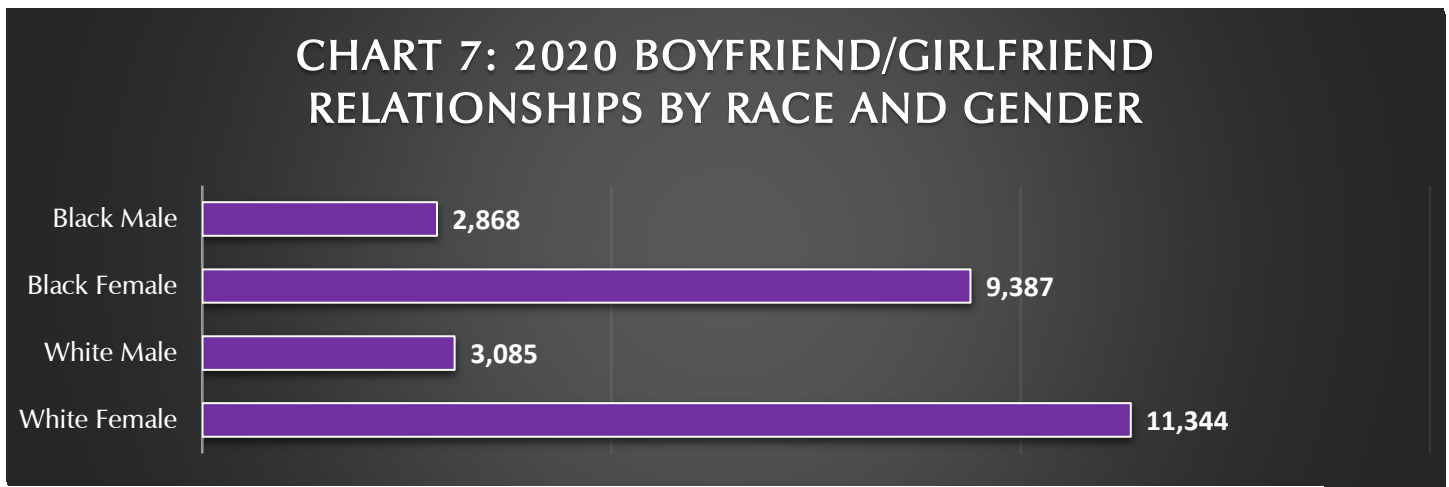
## HOMOSEXUAL RELATIONSHIP

In 2019, based on a decision by the FBI, the TBI discontinued the collection of the Homosexual Victim to Offender relationship code (HR) in the TIBRS program. Valid relationship codes for the former HR code are: Spouse (SP), Ex-Spouse (XS), Common-Law Spouse (CS), Boyfriend/Girlfriend (BG), and Ex-Boyfriend/Girlfriend (XR).

## BOYFRIEND/GIRLFRIEND

Research literature often documents the relationship between domestic victims and their abusers as Boyfriend/Girlfriend. In 2020, Tennessee law enforcement agencies reported 26,684 Boyfriend/Girlfriend Victim to Offender relationships flagged as domestic violence incidents. Specific demographic information of both victims and offenders were examined to better understand domestic abuse within Boyfriend/Girlfriend relationships. Black or African American victims comprised 45.9% while White victims comprised 54.1%. Victims reporting their offender as a Boyfriend/Girlfriend were mostly female victims at 77.7%.

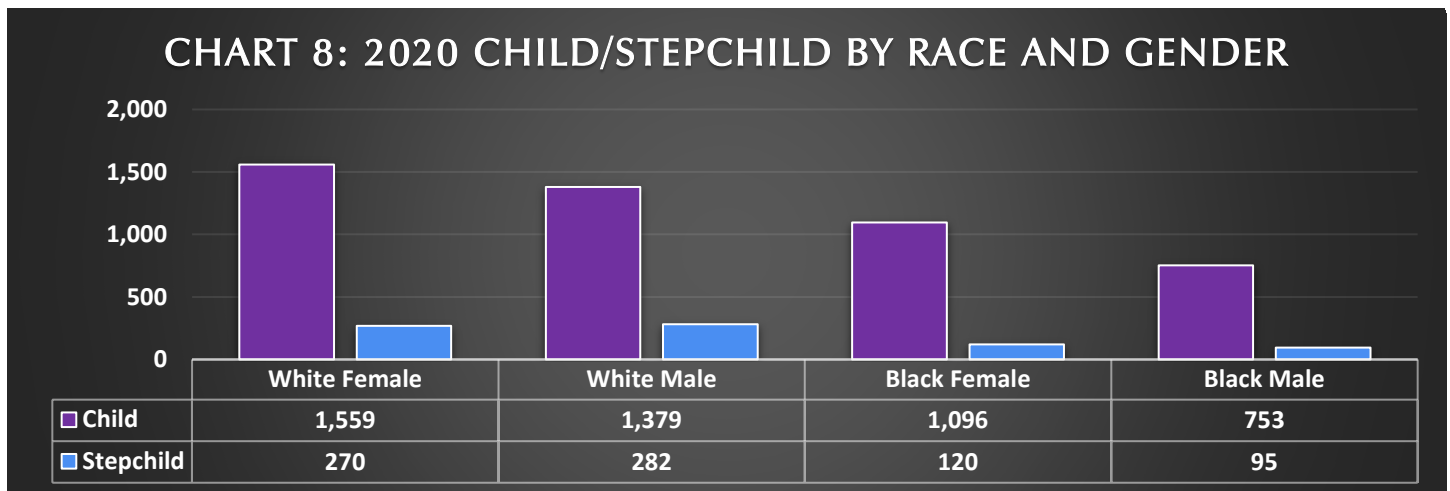
## BOYFRIEND/GIRLFRIEND RELATIONSHIPS: RACE AND GENDER



Note: This chart only reflects the relationships of Boyfriend/Girlfriend for Black or African American and White Victims.

## CHILD AND STEPCHILD

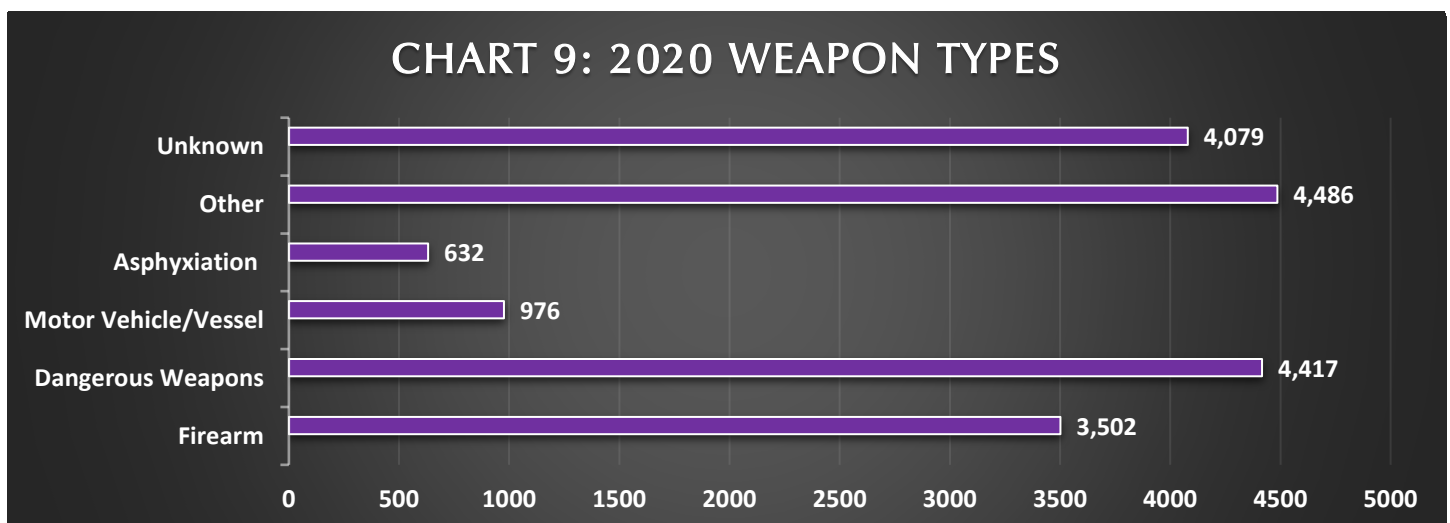
The Victim to Offender relationship of Child or Stepchild denotes the offender as being the parent or stepparent (mother or father) of the victim. A total of 5,623 such relationships were reported in domestic violence offenses with the majority of victims reported as White and Black or African American. American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander comprised 1.2% in 2020. This particular TIBRS data element, when specifically addressing juvenile victims, can be considered a direct indication of child abuse. The majority of domestic violence incidents indicating a Child or Stepchild Victim to Offender relationship reported to TIBRS in 2020 had victims of Females. Several local and state agencies such as the Department of Children’s Services and Prevent Child Abuse Tennessee advocate strongly on behalf of juveniles that are abused and/or neglected and try to prevent future abuse. Chart 10, as shown below, illustrates the difference of victimization rates by Race and Gender.



Child and Stepchild accounted for 8.1% of reported domestic violence victims in 2020. More specifically, White females under age 18 comprised the greater portion of all Child or Stepchild Victim to Offender relationships at 1,829. This demographic group was victimized at a higher rate than any other combination of race, sex, and age group when analyzing Child or Stepchild Victim to Offender relationship. Victims identified as White were victimized by their parent(s) or stepparent(s) at a higher rate than Black or African-American victims.

### WEAPONS USED IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Per TIBRS, up to three weapons can be submitted per offense when reporting weapons used in a domestic violence event. A total of 60,730 weapon types were reported in 2020. The most commonly reported weapon was Personal (hands, feet, teeth, etc.) at 42,501 making it the most used weapon in Simple Assault situations.



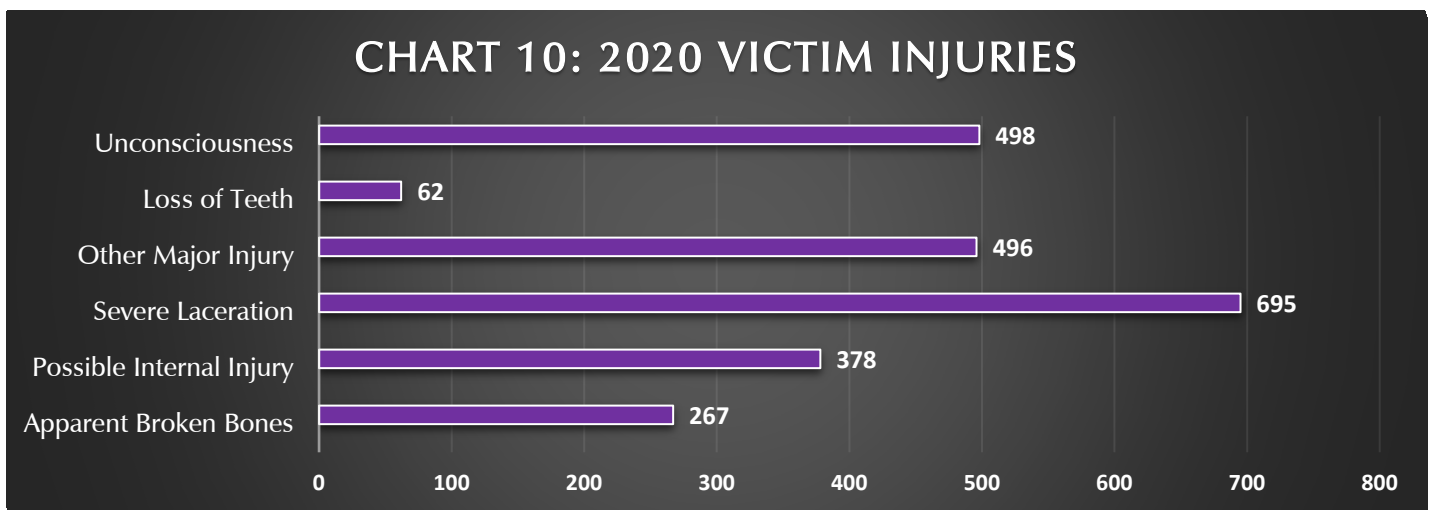
Note: The weapon types of Personal Weapons, Poison/Drugs, and Fire/Explosives are not included in the graph above.

### Weapon Types Continued

The second most frequently reported weapon type in 2020 was Other Weapon, followed by Dangerous Weapons. 54 domestic violence offenses involving a firearm resulted in Murder in 2020. The majority of Aggravated Assault cases also involved a Dangerous Weapon during the same reporting period. Additional findings revealed 976 domestic violence cases involved the use of a Motor Vehicle/ Vessel.

## VICTIM INJURIES

When reporting domestic violence offenses to TIBRS, up to five injury types may be reported for offenses requiring an Injury code. The two most predominate injuries types reported in 2020 were None (50.3%) and Apparent Minor Injuries (45.7%). A total of 23,144 domestic related Simple Assault cases were reported with an injury type of Apparent Minor Injury.



Note: The chart above excludes None (30,807) and Apparent Minor injuries (28,664).

Additionally, the injury type of Severe Laceration made up the third most frequently reported injury type in 2020, with Aggravated Assault being the most common offense. Notably, of the 498 Unconsciousness injury types shown in Chart 12, 468 instances were the result of an Aggravated Assault.

## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ARRESTS

**TABLE 6: 2020 DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ARRESTS**

OFFENSE TYPE	NUMBER OF ARRESTS
Simple Assault	22,248
Aggravated Assault	6,689
Intimidation	1,488
Kidnapping/Abduction	629
Stalking	231
Forcible Rape	109
Forcible Fondling	74
Murder	59
Forcible Sodomy	28
Statutory Rape	24
Sexual Assault W/Object	9
Incest	7
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>31,588</b>

## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE EXCEPTIONAL CLEARANCES

Domestic violence incidents can be difficult when considering the compounding factors which contribute to the cooperation of victims and potential witnesses. Due to the very nature of domestic violence and the close interpersonal relationships existing between the victim and offender, these situations can be dangerous for responding law enforcement, difficult to determine primary aggressors and/or take the offender into custody. Cohabiting domestic violence victims and offenders present an obvious challenge when victims fear continuing or subsequent abuse and turmoil within the household.

As with all TIBRS offenses, an offense can be “cleared” by one of two means. An offense is considered cleared if an arrest is made or by Exceptional Clearance means. In an exceptional clearance, certain criteria must be met for law enforcement agencies to report the incident cleared without making an arrest. The criteria include knowing the exact and present location of the offender so an arrest could be made, have probable cause in order to make the arrest, know the identity of at least one offender (including sex, race, and ethnicity) and there must be a reason outside of law enforcement control preventing the arrest. Table 7 displays the different exceptional clearance types including Victim Refused to Cooperate. In 2020, 57.7% of domestic violence victims stated or made it known to the reporting law enforcement agency that they refused to cooperate in, or pursue, prosecution of the offender. This, in addition to meeting all previously mentioned criteria for exceptional clearances, resulted in the clearance of these cases.

**TABLE 7: 2020 DOMESTIC VIOLENCE EXCEPTIONAL CLEARANCES**

OFFENSE TYPE	CLEARANCE TYPE
Victim Refused to Cooperate	7,083
Prosecution Declined	1,237
Death of the Offender	70
Juvenile/No Custody	65
In Custody of Other Jurisdiction	4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8,459</b>

### SUMMARY

Findings of the study revealed that the number of domestic incidents decreased 2.6% from 2019 to 2020. Overall, females were three times more likely to be reported as victims than males, and victim Race was most often documented as White (57.4%). Victim demographic information gives insight into what populations are most at risk for domestic violence in the state. Although the injury type of None (30,330) accounted for the highest reported injury type in 2020, Apparent Minor Injury (27,547) was often reported in Simple Assault cases.

TIBRS crime data is fluid in that agencies can report incidents which may have occurred and gone unreported in previous weeks, months, and even years. For example, an incident that occurred in April of 2020 can be reported in March of 2021 if law enforcement were just recently made aware of the crime occurrence. The date of occurrence is a required field in the TIBRS submission process and will be captured when the incident is submitted to TBI. This capability may have an impact on future statistics relating to domestic violence. With the COVID pandemic came closures of work places, schools, daycares, extracurricular activities, church services and many other community-based social venues. As victims found themselves more secluded, it would become even more difficult to report abuse or for acquaintances to notice suspected abuse. While some situations will allow a victim the opportunity to contact law enforcement, many victims will not for fear of reprisal in an already uncertain environment. In addition, children will be found to be in similar, though slightly different, situations. With the loss of jobs, economic impact, self-isolation due to COVID, and the stress of uncertainty, children may suffer as a result. As they do not have the same capabilities for self-care and preservation as adults, they become



*Summary Continued*

more vulnerable and many non-familial acquaintances and confidants are no longer available to them. It has also been widely reported that many in the medical field have voiced a growing concern that Tennessee residents of all ages, as well as others across the U.S., have failed to receive regularly scheduled check-ups, immunizations, and tests due to a growing concern of contracting COVID in a medical setting. However, it is in this type of setting that many abuse victims feel comfortable and safe enough to divulge information concerning many issues, including abuse. As such, in the future, with the return of more social interactions for both children and adults, it is expected that law enforcement will be made aware of incidents occurring during the pandemic which, in turn, is expected to cause an increase in offenses occurring during the reporting periods affected by the pandemic.

TIBRS data supports the fact that women and children generally have the highest potential for domestic abuse victimization. Local, state, and national agencies across several disciplines, including law enforcement and social and child services avidly oppose domestic violence and advocate for its victims. These various institutions and coalitions battle domestic abuse by providing prevention training, intervention, shelter, and counseling for both victims and potential victims of domestic violence. Hopefully, the current assessment of domestic violence in Tennessee exposes the need for continued and increased efforts in the battle against domestic abuse within our community.



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