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Research Brief One-Sheet No.7: Police Integrity Lost: Introducing a Study of Law Enforcement Officers Arrested

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Statement of the Problem

There are no comprehensive statistics available on problems with police integrity, and no government entity collects data on all criminal arrests of law enforcement officers in the United States. Police crimes are those crimes committed by sworn law enforcement officers with the general powers of arrest. These crimes can occur while the officer is either on- or off-duty and include offenses committed by officers employed by state and local law enforcement agencies. This study provides a wealth of data on a phenomena that relates directly to police integrity—data that previously did not exist in any useable format. Surprisingly little is known about the crimes committed by law enforcement officers, in part because there are virtually no official nationwide data collected, maintained, disseminated, and/or available for research analyses. Researchers have utilized other methodologies to study police misconduct and crime in the absence of any substantive official data, including surveys, field studies, quasi-experiments, internal agency records, and the investigative reports of various independent commissions delegated to report on this phenomenon within particular jurisdictions. These methodologies have thus far failed to produce systematic, nationwide data on police crime. The lack of data on police crime is clearly a problem, since the development of strategies to mitigate police crime in the least requires that they be documented and described in some sort of systematic and generalizable manner. From an organizational perspective, more comprehensive data could provide comparisons among agencies on rates of police crime, and subsequently contribute to the development and implementation of policies to deter police crime and lessen damage to police-community relations in their aftermath. From a scholarly perspective, the collection, analysis, and dissemination of more comprehensive police crime data could instigate studies designed to identify significant correlates, explore relationships between police crimes and more general forms of police deviance, and provide information on how police culture and socialization potentially contribute to the problem. Scholars have yet to fully pursue these and other important issues associated with the problem of police crime because we lack any sort of comprehensive data on the types of crime that police commit and how frequently they commit them.

Goals and Objectives

The first goal of the study is to determine the nature and extent of police crime in the United States. The objective for this goal is to determine the incidence and prevalence of officers arrested. A second goal is to determine what factors influence how an agency responds to arrests of its officers. Objectives for this goal are to determine whether certain factors influence agency response and employment outcomes: (a) severity of crimes for which officers are arrested; (b) level of urbanization for each employing agency; (c) geographic location for each employing agency; (d) length of service and age of arrested officers; and, (e) criminal case outcomes. A final goal is to foster police integrity by exploring whether officer arrests correlate with other forms of police misconduct. Objectives for this goal are to determine whether arrested officers were also named as a civil defendant in any 42 U.S.C. §1983 federal court actions during their careers, and to inform practitioners and policymakers of strategies that will better identify problem officers and those at risk for engaging in police crime and its correlates.

Purpose of the Study

The advent of nationwide, objective, and verifiable data on the law-breaking behavior of sworn officers and provides potential benefits to law enforcement agencies that connect the technical expertise of researchers to criminal justice policymakers and practitioners. These data provide direct guidance in three areas. First, the study provides agencies information on the types of crime that are most frequently perpetrated by police officers. Second, the research provides information on the relationship between police crimes and other types of misbehavior that collectively comprise the problem officer. Third, nationwide data on police crimes and the

manner in which arrested officers are organizationally sanctioned provides points of comparison for law enforcement agencies that confront these problems, as well as information on the degree to which law enforcement agencies tend to sanction or ignore certain crimes committed by officers.

Methods
This is a quantitative content analysis study of archived records reporting several thousand arrests of police officers during the years 2005-2011. The primary information source is the Google News™ search engine and its Google Alerts™ email update service. Chi-Square was used to measure the statistical significance of the association between two variables measured at the nominal level. Cramer's V was utilized to measure the strength of the Chi-Square association. Stepwise binary logistic regression was used to determine which of the predictor variables are statistically significant in multivariate models. Classification tree analysis was utilized to uncover the causal pathways between independent predictors and outcome variables.

Summary of Findings
Findings from the study provide three general observations about the nature of police crime overall. First, police crimes are not uncommon. The study identified 6,724 arrest cases from 2005-2011 involving 5,545 sworn law enforcement officers. The arrested sworn law enforcement officers were employed by 2,529 state and local law enforcement agencies located in 1,205 counties and independent cities in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Sworn law enforcement officers were arrested at a rate of 0.72 per 1,000 officers and 1.7 per 100,000 of the population. Second, police crime is an occupationally-derived phenomenon. Police work is conducive to all sorts of criminal behavior, largely because of plentiful opportunities provided by the nature of the work and police-citizen interactions. Third, police crime is complex and multivariate. Police crime can be alcohol-related, drug-related, sex-related, violence-related, or profit-motivated. These five types of police crime are not mutually exclusive, and there are numerous significant predictors of (a) each type of police crime, (b) adverse employment outcomes, and (c) criminal case dispositions. Distinctions between on- and off-duty police crime are often difficult to make. Aside from these general observations, the findings can be summarized in terms of both the full data set and the five types of police crime. The most common most serious offense charged in the cases overall were simple assault (13%), driving under the influence (12.5%), aggravated assault (8.5%), forcible fondling (5.2%), and forcible rape (4.8%). Slightly more than one-half of the cases (54%) ultimately resulted in job loss for arrested officers. The factors that influence whether an arrested officer will be criminally convicted or lose his or her job are numerous and complex, and include both legal factors (e.g., most serious offense charged) and extralegal factors (e.g., age, years of service as a sworn law enforcement officer, relationship of victim to the arrested officer). In terms of case outcomes, the events of job loss and criminal conviction are not isolated. Job loss provides a context for the incidence of criminal conviction and vice versa. The number of cases and officers arrested in terms of five types of police crime were as follows: sex-related police crime included 1,475 arrest cases of 1,070 sworn officers; alcohol-related police crime included 1,405 arrest cases of 1,283 sworn officers; drug-related police crime included 739 arrest cases of 665 sworn officers; violence-related police crime included 3,328 arrest cases of 2,586 sworn officers; and, profit-motivated police crime included 1,592 cases of 1,396 sworn officers.

The Ongoing Research Project
The research continues as a longitudinal study of police crime across the United States. The research group includes approximately twenty undergraduate and graduate student research assistants who work with the professors on all aspects of this project. The project is now in the 12th year of data collection, coding and analyses.

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