On-Duty Police Shootings: Officers Charged with Murder or Manslaughter 2005-2018

Philip M. Stinson  
_Bowling Green State University_, stinspm@bgsu.edu

Chloe A. Wentzlof  
_Bowling Green State University_, cawentz@bgsu.edu

Megan L. Swinehart  
_Bowling Green State University_, megswin@bgsu.edu

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Philip M. Stinson, Chloe A. Wentzlof & Megan L. Swinehart
Bowling Green State University

ABSTRACT

There were 97 nonfederal sworn law enforcement officers with the general powers of police, and related variables.

RESULTS

• 26 of the officers charged with murder or manslaughter resulting from an on-duty shooting had under 5 years of service as a sworn officer at time of arrest.
• 19 officers were found guilty at a jury trial and 16 entered guilty pleas.
• As to the cases with video evidence, 14 officers were convicted, 13 were not convicted and the criminal cases for 11 of the officers are currently pending.
• All data current as of March 21, 2019

METHOD

The data for this project were collected as part of a larger research study on police crime in the United States. It is a quantitative content analysis of data compiled from available news sources and court documents. Cases were identified using the Google News™ search engine and Google Alerts™ email update service. The sample for this project consists of nonfederal sworn law enforcement officers charged in years 2005-2018 with murder or manslaughter resulting from an on-duty shooting.

DISCUSSION

• Between 900 and 1,000 people are killed each year by on-duty police across the United States, but relatively few officers are criminally charged (Washington Post, 2019).
• Officers are justified in using deadly force when an officer has a reasonable apprehension of an imminent threat of serious bodily injury or death being imposed against the officer or someone else.
• Few officers are convicted because juries and courts are reluctant to second-guess split-second life-or-death decisions of police officers in potentially violent street encounters.