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Police Sexual Violence: A Few Bad Apples or a Cultural Norm?

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Abstract

Approximately 1,600 police officers across the United States were arrested for sex-related crimes during the ten year period 2005-2014. The arrested officers were employed by more than 1,100 state and local law enforcement agencies located in all fifty states and the District of Columbia. These data suggest that police sexual violence is a problem involving more than a few “bad apples” and that the phenomenon of police sexual violence may be a cultural norm within many state and local law enforcement agencies.

Method

The data for this study were collected as part of a larger research project on police crime. The data were compiled from multiple news sources and court documents from the years 2005-2014. The news sources used for this project were primarily discovered through Google News™ search engine and Google Alerts™ email update service. For this study, we narrowed the data from all nonfederal sworn law enforcement officers charged with sex-related crimes.

Table 1. Criminal Offenses

Offense	n	n
Forcible Fondling	705	100
Forcible Rape	462	97
Official Misconduct	383	94
Other Sex Crime	356	74
Forcible Sodomy	250	70
Pornography/Obscene Material	215	59
Statutory Rape	206	54
Kidnapping/Abduction	192	45
Indecent Exposure	127	32
Simple Assault	115	22
Intimidation		
Bribery		
On-Line Solicitation of a Child		
Prostitution		
Aggravated Assault		
Sexual Assault with an Object		
Assisting or Promoting Prostitution		
Civil Rights Violation		
Peeping Tom		
Incest		



Table 2. Type of Crime (N=2,221)

Type of Crime	n (%)
Violence-Related	1,529 (68.8)
Alcohol-Related	107 (4.8)
Drug-Related	56 (2.5)
Profit-Motivated	44 (2.0)

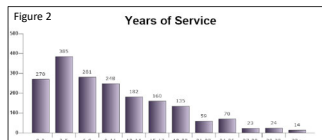


Table 3. Police Sexual Violence (N=2,221)

Category	n (%)
Official Capacity	1,064 (47.9)
Police Sexual Violence	885 (39.8)
Self Identified as Officer	80 (3.6)
Brandished Gun	66 (3.0)

Sex-Related Police Crime, 2005-2014

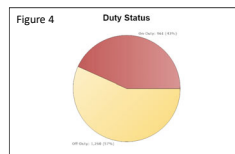
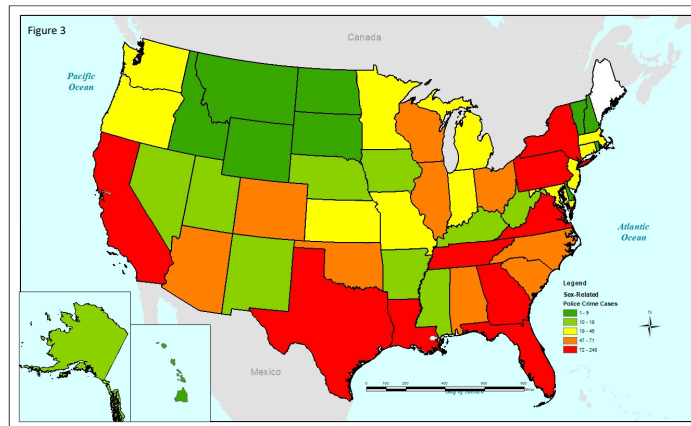


Table 4. Criminal Case Dispositions (N = 2,221)

n (%)		n (%)	
Criminal Case Disposition		Most serious sentence (n = 1,444)	
Non-conviction	405 (18.2)	Prison	783 (54.2)
Conviction	1,444 (65.0)	Jail	263 (18.2)
Missing	372 (16.7)	Probation	335 (23.2)
		Other	44 (3.0)
Conviction level (n = 1,444)		Missing	19 (1.3)
Misdemeanor	388 (26.9)		
Felony	1,056 (73.1)	Reason for non-conviction (n = 405)	
		Case nolle prosequi	163 (40.2)
Type of Conviction (n = 1,444)		Case dismissed by judge	50 (12.3)
Guilty plea	1,037 (71.8)	Pre-trial diversion program	31 (7.7)
Bench trial	54 (3.7)	Acquitted at bench trial	11 (2.7)
Jury trial	341 (23.6)	Acquitted at jury trial	150 (37.0)
Missing	12 (0.8)		

Results

- Sex-related police crime makes up 21.6% of the cases in our data set of officers arrested nationwide in years 2005-2014.
- The most common sex-related offense for which officers are arrested is forcible fondling (Table 1).
- The arrested officers are, on average, slightly above age 38, with 10 years of service as a sworn law enforcement officer (Figure 1-2).
- Of the sex-related arrests, 47.9% occurred as a result of an incident where the officer was in their official capacity (Table 3).
- The majority (n=1,260, 56.7%) of the sex-related police arrest cases were committed while off-duty (Figure 4).
- Victims of sex-related police crime are most commonly 14-years-old with an average age of 17.72 (n=1,205) (Figure 5).
- Police officers are convicted in 78.1% of the arrest cases where the criminal case disposition is known (Table 4).
- Victims of sex-related police crime arrest cases are most frequently strangers to the officer (Table 5).
- Police officers who have been arrested for sex-related crimes lose their job 84.0% of the time (Figure 6).
- The majority (n=1,529, 68.8%) of sex-related police arrests are also violence-related. (Table 2).
- In sex-related arrests the officer was most commonly a male with a female victim (n=1,713) and least commonly a female officer with a male victim (n=3) (Table 6).

Discussion

- Based on our identification of 2,221 cases of sex-related officer arrests across the country during the 10 year window of this study, our findings suggest that police sexual violence may be a cultural norm within many police agencies that it is not limited to a few “bad apples.”
- Officers arrested for a sex-related crime lost their job 84% of the time, while only 55.8% of officers arrested for a non-sex-related crime lost their job.

Table 5. Victim's Relationship to Offender (N=2,221)

Relationship	n	(%)	Valid %
Current spouse	17	0.8	0.8
Ex-spouse	6	0.3	0.3
Current boy/girlfriend	14	0.6	0.7
Former boy/girlfriend	19	0.9	0.9
Child/stepchild	77	3.5	3.8
Other relative	85	3.8	4.2
Unrelated child	832	37.5	41.5
Stranger	953	42.9	47.6
Missing	218	9.8	

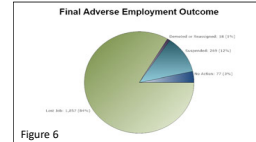


Table 6. Victim and Officer Sex

Victim's Sex	Officer's Sex	Male	Female
Male		207	3
Female		1,713	8
Missing		287	3