

3-18-2022

Fatal Victims of Police Crime: An Exploratory Study of Law Enforcement Officers Arrested for Fatal Crimes, 2005-2016

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Sir Louis, Alexa J.; Wentzlof, Chloe A.; and Stinson, Philip M., "Fatal Victims of Police Crime: An Exploratory Study of Law Enforcement Officers Arrested for Fatal Crimes, 2005-2016" (2022). *Criminal Justice Faculty Publications*. 126.

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Fatal Victims of Police Crime: An Exploratory Study of Law Enforcement Officers Arrested for Fatal Crimes, 2005-2016

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Support for this project was provided by the Wallace Action Fund of Tides Foundation. This research was also supported in part by the Center for Family and Demographic Research, Bowling Green State University, which has core funding from the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institutes of Child Health and Human Development (P2CHD050959).

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this project was to analyze all types of encounters that resulted in the death of another person and an officer's arrest. Using Stinson's (2021) data set for police crime across the United States, this sample consists of 406 criminal cases where an officer was arrested for, or involved in, a fatal encounter. Data are presented on details of the arrested officers, the deceased victims, criminal case dispositions, crime type, and final adverse employment outcomes.

METHOD

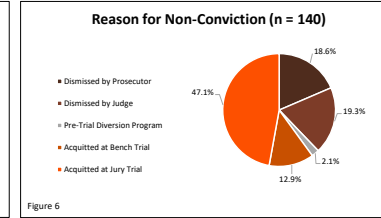
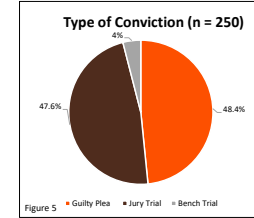
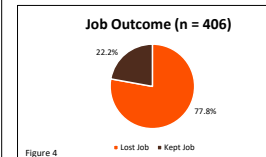
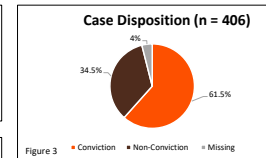
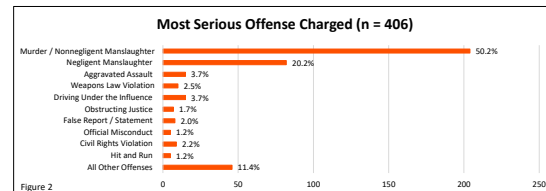
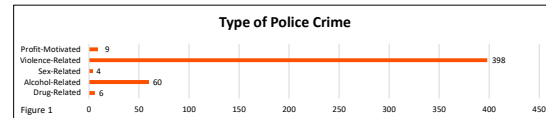
The data for this project were collected as part of a larger research study on police crime. The data were compiled from news sources and court documents from the years 2005-2016. The news sources used for this project were primarily discovered through the Google News™ search engine and the Google Alerts™ email update service. The sample for this project is limited to criminal cases of nonfederal sworn law enforcement officers who were arrested for one or more crimes that resulted in the death of an individual.

Table 1. Victim Characteristics in Police Crime Arrest Cases, 2005-2016 (n = 406)

n (%)		n (%)	
Victim's Sex		Victim's Relationship to Offender	
Male	278 (68.5)	Current Spouse	23 (5.7)
Female	127 (31.3)	Former Spouse	4 (1.0)
Missing	1 (0.2)	Current Girlfriend or Boyfriend	7 (1.7)
		Former Girlfriend or Boyfriend	9 (2.2)
Victim's Age		Child or Stepchild	11 (2.7)
0-10	23 (5.7)	Some Other Relative	6 (1.5)
11-15	9 (2.2)	Unrelated Child	39 (9.6)
16-21	61 (15.0)	Stranger or Acquaintance	307 (75.6)
22-27	86 (21.2)		
28-33	60 (14.8)	Victim's Law Enforcement Status	
34-39	37 (9.1)	No, victim was not a police officer	395 (97.3)
40-44	29 (7.1)	Yes, victim was a police officer	11 (2.7)
45-49	21 (5.2)		
50-54	19 (4.7)	Child Victim	
55 or older	52 (12.8)	No	356 (87.7)
Missing	9 (2.2)	Yes, victim was a child	50 (12.3)
Victim's Race		Victim's Ethnicity	
White	159 (39.2)	Hispanic	33 (8.1)
Black	143 (35.2)	Non-Hispanic	277 (68.2)
Missing	104 (25.6)	Missing	96 (23.6)

Table 2. Officer Characteristics in Police Crime Arrest Cases, 2005-2016 (n = 406)

n (%)		n (%)		n (%)	
Sex		Duty Status		Agency Type	
Male	376 (92.6)	On-Duty	216 (53.2)	Primary State Police	24 (5.9)
Female	30 (7.4)	Off-Duty	190 (46.8)	Sheriff's Office	58 (14.3)
				County Police Dept.	22 (5.4)
		Rank		Municipal Police Dept.	281 (69.2)
Age		Officer	327 (80.5)	Special Police Dept.	17 (4.2)
21-23	13 (3.2)	Detective	24 (5.9)	Constable	2 (0.5)
24-27	53 (13.1)	Corporal	9 (2.2)	Tribal Police Dept.	2 (0.5)
28-31	60 (14.8)	Sergeant	30 (7.4)		
31-35	71 (17.5)	Lieutenant	5 (1.2)	Military Status	
36-39	57 (14.0)	Captain	3 (0.7)	Veteran	36 (8.9)
40-43	48 (11.8)	Deputy Chief	1 (0.2)	Non-Veteran	370 (91.1)
44-47	27 (6.7)	Chief	7 (1.7)		
48-51	22 (5.4)			History of PTSD	
52-55	9 (2.2)	Function		Yes, article mentions a history of PTSD	1 (0.2)
56 or older	14 (3.4)	Patrol & Street Level	351 (86.4)	No	405 (99.8)
Missing	32 (7.9)	Line/Field Supervisor	44 (10.8)		
		Management	11 (2.6)	Years of Service	
				0-2	50 (12.3)
Race		Region of United States		3-5	64 (15.8)
White	274 (67.5)	Northeastern States	85 (20.9)	6-8	48 (11.8)
Black	83 (20.4)	Midwestern States	82 (20.2)	9-11	34 (8.4)
Missing	49 (12.1)	Southern States	187 (46.1)	12-14	22 (5.4)
		Western States	52 (12.8)	15-17	19 (4.7)
				18-20	22 (5.4)
Ethnicity		Level of Rurality		21-23	7 (1.7)
Hispanic	22 (5.4)	Metropolitan County	356 (87.7)	24-26	6 (1.5)
Non-Hispanic	335 (82.5)	Non-Metro County	50 (12.4)	27 or more years	12 (3.0)
Missing	49 (12.1)			Missing	122 (30.0)



RESULTS

- Of the 406 criminal arrest cases, 75.6% involved victims who were strangers or unrelated acquaintances to the arrested officer (Table 1).
- There were 50 criminal arrest cases which involved child victims. This accounts for 12.3% of the 406 cases (Table 1).
- Just over half of the arrest cases (53.2%) involved an officer who was on-duty at the commission of the crime (Table 2).
- There were 398 criminal arrest cases that were violence-related followed by the next highest typology: alcohol-related crimes (Figure 1). The police crime typology variables are binary and not mutually exclusive categories.
- Officers who were charged with murder or manslaughter accounted for 70.4% of the criminal arrest cases (Figure 2).
- Of the 406 criminal arrest cases, 61.5% of all officer-involved fatal encounters resulted in a conviction (Figure 3).
- There were 90 criminal arrest cases (22.2%) in which the officer was able to keep his or her job (Figure 4).
- Of the 250 criminal convictions, about half of these arrest cases (47.6%) went to a jury trial. The remaining arrest cases resulted in a guilty or no contest plea (48.4%) or were convicted following a bench trial (4.0%) (Figure 5).
- Of the 140 non-convictions, 66 of the arrest cases (47.1%) were acquitted of all charges by a jury (Figure 6).

DISCUSSION AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- Between 940 and 1,060 people are shot and killed each year by on-duty police officers across the United States (Washington Post, 2022). We are not aware of any research counting fatal encounters involving off-duty officers who were not arrested. Future research should consider capturing this phenomenon.
- Our data captures the use of weapons such as firearms, tasers, knives, or fists in domestic violence arrest cases. Our future methodology should consider examining weapon types for all criminal arrest cases, including these fatal encounters. Additionally, the type of firearm used should be examined to determine future development of gun policies in law enforcement agencies.
- Future research should more closely analyze off-duty use of firearms. Policymakers can utilize these findings to inform evidence-based policy about the risks of off-duty weapon use.