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Police Officers Arrested for Driving Under the Influence, 2005-2017

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Abstract

The purpose of this updated study is to inform the public about police officers who have been arrested for driving under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol. Previous projects by the Police Integrity Research Group at Bowling Green State University have examined officers arrested for DUI offenses in years 2005-2014. The data from this study uphold the original findings and explore additional variables of interest. This poster describes the incidents of law enforcement officers arrested for DUI offenses in years 2005-2017, including the demographics, criminal case dispositions, and final adverse employment outcomes.

Methods

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 2005-2017. 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 driving under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol while employed by a state or local law enforcement agency.

DUI Arrests, 2005-2017

Figure 1

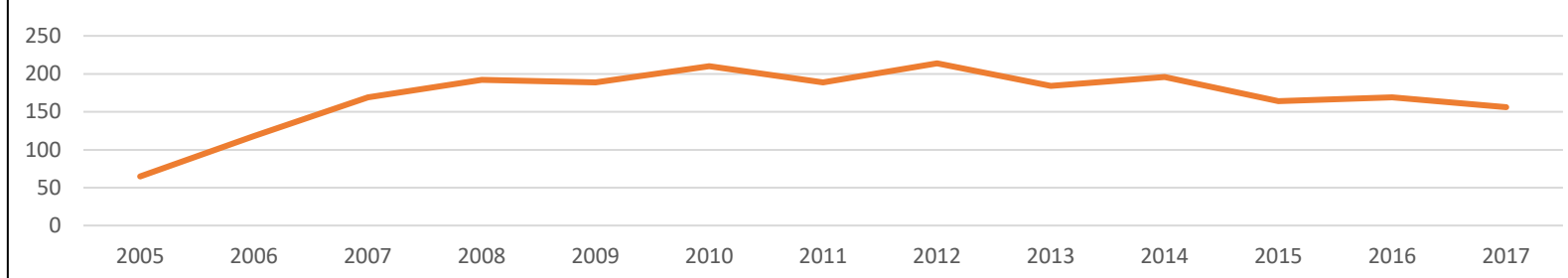


Table 2. Police DUI Criminal Case Dispositions

	<i>n</i>	(%)		<i>n</i>	(%)
Criminal Case Disposition			Most serious sentence (n=963)		
Non-conviction	323	(14.6)	Prison	74	(7.7)
Conviction	963	(43.5)	Jail	213	(22.1)
Missing	929	(41.9)	Probation	379	(39.4)
			Other	248	(25.7)
Conviction level (n= 963)			Missing	49	(5.1)
Misdemeanor	828	(86.0)			
Felony	123	(12.8)	Non-conviction reason (n=323)		
Missing	12	(1.2)	Case nolle prosequi	93	(28.9)
			Case dismissed by judge	66	(20.4)
Type of Conviction (n=963)			Pre-trial diversion	106	(32.8)
Guilty plea	771	(80.0)	Acquitted at bench trial	31	(9.6)
Bench trial	70	(7.4)	Acquitted at jury trial	24	(7.4)
Jury trial	85	(8.8)	Missing	3	(0.9)
Missing	37	(3.8)			

Table 1. Officer Characteristics in Police Crime Arrest Cases, 2005-2017 (n = 2,215)

	<i>n</i>	(%)		<i>n</i>	(%)
Agency Type			Age		
Primary State Police	125	(5.6)	19-23	48	(2.2)
Sheriff's Office	410	(18.5)	24-27	208	(9.4)
County Police Dept.	110	(5.0)	28-31	269	(12.1)
Municipal Police Dept.	1,509	(68.1)	32-35	261	(11.8)
Special Police Dept.	46	(2.1)	36-39	293	(13.2)
Other Agency	15	(0.7)	40-43	296	(13.4)
			44-47	241	(10.9)
Rank			48-51	132	(6.0)
Officer	1,642	(74.1)	52-55	65	(2.9)
Detective	139	(6.3)	56 or older	55	(2.5)
Corporal	44	(2.0)	Missing	347	(15.7)
Sergeant	210	(9.5)			
Lieutenant	71	(3.2)	Years of Service		
Captain	31	(1.4)	0-2	234	(10.6)
Major	8	(0.4)	3-5	266	(12.0)
Colonel	2	(0.1)	6-8	211	(9.5)
Deputy Chief	14	(0.6)	9-11	177	(8.0)
Chief	54	(2.4)	12-14	189	(8.5)
			15-17	145	(6.5)
Sex			18-20	141	(6.4)
Male	2,006	(90.6)	21-23	95	(4.3)
Female	209	(9.4)	24-26	57	(2.6)
			27 or more years	70	(3.2)
Duty Status			Missing	630	(28.4)
On-Duty	234	(10.6)			
Off-Duty	1,981	(89.4)			

Table 3. Police DUI Arrest Cases: Incident Events, 2005-2017 (n= 2,215)

	<i>n</i>	(%)		<i>n</i>	(%)
DUI-related traffic accident	1,108	(49.1)	DUI accident: Fatality	73	(3.3)
Injuries in DUI-related traffic accident	450	(20.3)	DUI accident: Motorcycle	30	(1.4)
DUI accident: fled scene	227	(10.2)	DUI accident: Pileup	18	(0.8)
DUI accident: Flipped	79	(3.6)	DUI accident: Denied driving	26	(1.2)
DUI accident: Victim flip	12	(0.5)	Refused BAC test	494	(22.3)
DUI accident: While evading	16	(0.7)	Self-identified as an officer	161	(7.3)
DUI accident: Opposite direction	54	(2.4)	Ordinance on-duty 24 hours	23	(1.0)
In uniform	10	(0.5)	Off-Duty: flashed badge	34	(1.5)
Refused field sobriety test	238	(10.7)	Officer resisted arrest	76	(3.4)
Possession of a firearm when arrested	195	(8.8)			

RESULTS

- The majority of DUI criminal arrest cases happen when the sworn law enforcement officers were off-duty (Table 1), but 4.8% happened while actually on-duty driving a police vehicle (Figure 3).
- A majority of officers arrested for DUI were employed by a municipal police department (Table 1).
- The pattern of police officers arrested for DUI has stayed consistent through the years 2005-2017 (Figure 1).
- Less than half of these DUI cases resulted in a conviction, most of which occurred by the officer entering a guilty plea (Table 2).
- Of the convictions, 39.4% resulted in the officers receiving a probation sentence (Table 2).
- The most common reason for non-conviction is a plea for a pre-trial diversion program (Table 2).
- Nearly half of DUI cases are a result of a traffic accident with over 20% involving injuries (Table 3).
- The arrested officers refused a BAC test in 22.3% of the DUI cases (Table 3).
- The most common employment outcome is suspension. This happens 46.4% of the time in DUI arrests. (Figure 2).
- Of the criminal arrest cases 76.4% of the officers are driving a personal vehicle at the time of the offense (Figure 3).

Employment Outcome

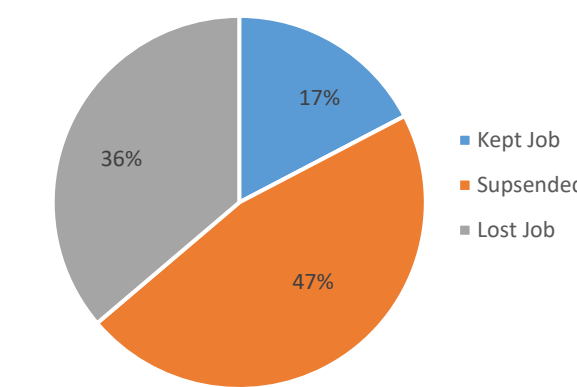


Figure 2

Vehicle Type

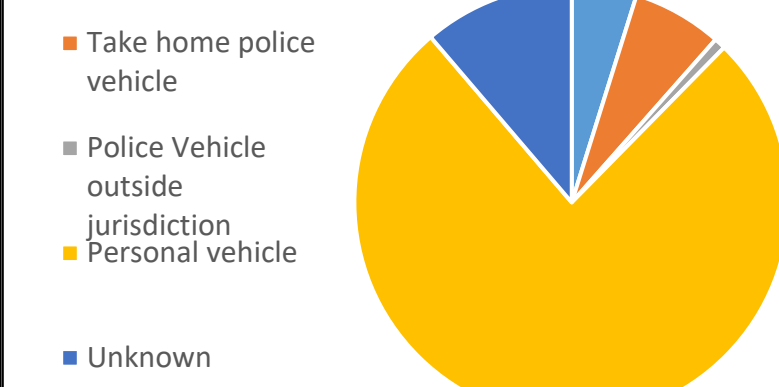


Figure 3

DISCUSSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- There are more than 2,200 criminal arrest cases of sworn law enforcement officers from all 50 states and the District of Columbia for DUI during the study years, suggesting that there is a nationwide problem of alcohol abuse among police officers.
- A lot of these DUI cases have missing or unknown values for several variables. This is likely due to the common and uninteresting nature of a misdemeanor DUI arrest.
- The officers involved in these DUI cases are most often a patrol-level rank, but there is not an obvious pattern about the officers' ages or years of service. This would suggest this problem is not isolated to a specific group of law enforcement officers, but rather affects everyone in the occupation.
- Counseling needs to be put in place to help officers manage their alcohol abuse and learn to deal with the stress of the job in a healthier and safer way.