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## Driving While Female: An Exploratory Study Examining Law Enforcement's Abuse of Power Against Female Drivers, 2005-2017

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# Driving While Female: An Exploratory Study Examining Law Enforcement’s Abuse of Power Against Female Drivers, 2005-2017

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to analyze instances where police officers stopped female drivers for alleged traffic violations and abused the power and authority of their position to take advantage of females who may have been vulnerable. Using Stinson’s (2022) dataset for police crime across the United States for years 2005-2017, data have been collected to depict the specific circumstances of these crimes against women. This project presents data on characteristics of arrested officers, female victims, criminal case dispositions, and final adverse employment outcomes. A qualitative content analysis describes the recurring details of these cases.

### 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. 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 against female drivers from the years 2005-2017.

Table 2. Victim Characteristics in Police Crime Arrest Cases, 2005-2017 (n = 282)

	n	(%)		n	(%)
<b>Victim's Relationship to Offender</b>			<b>Victim's Age</b>		
Current Spouse	4	(1.4)	14-17	14	(5.0)
Former Spouse	2	(0.7)	18-21	26	(9.2)
Current Girlfriend	1	(0.4)	22-25	26	(9.2)
Former Girlfriend	3	(1.06)	26-29	13	(4.6)
Unrelated Child	19	(6.7)	30-33	8	(2.8)
Stranger or Acquaintance	240	(85.1)	35-38	15	(5.3)
Missing	13	(4.6)	39-42	8	(2.8)
			43-46	1	(0.4)
<b>Child Victim</b>			47-50	1	(0.4)
No	249	(88.3)	51 or older	2	(0.7)
Yes, victim is a child	19	(6.7)	Missing	168	(59.6)
Missing	14	(5.0)			
<b>Victim is a Sex Worker</b>			<b>Victim Injury</b>		
No	265	(94.0)	No injury	110	(39.0)
Yes, victim is a sex worker	17	(6.0)	Minor Injuries	12	(4.3)
			Serious Injuries	131	(46.5)
			Missing	29	(10.28)

Figure 4

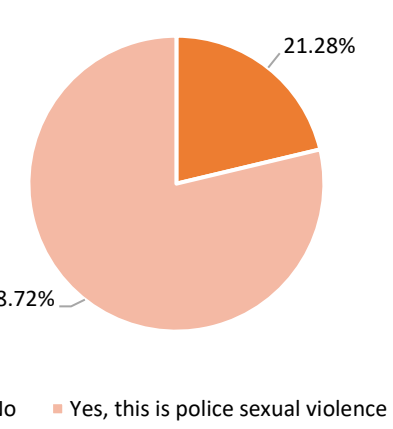


Figure 5

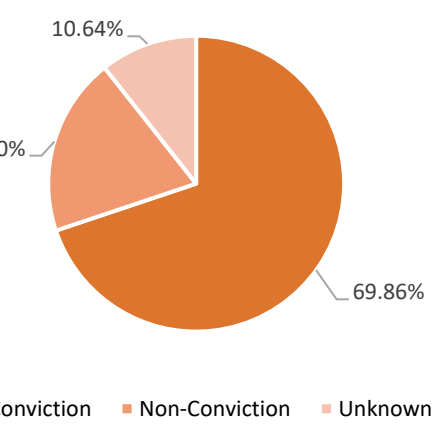
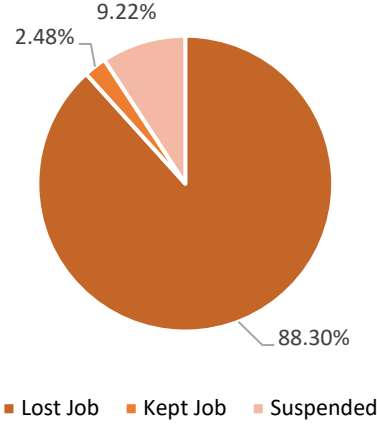


Figure 6



### CASE EXAMPLES

- In 2014 an Oklahoma DPS officer was arrested on the suspicion of sexually assaulting women during traffic stops. During the investigation, three women came forward and a total of 12 counts were charged against the officer, including forcible rape and sodomy, bribery, and soliciting an act of lewdness. The on-duty officer allegedly put the victims in the back of his cruiser, took them to a secluded location, and offered to let them go if they would first have sex with him. The officer plead guilty to lesser charges and was sentenced to eight years and six months in prison.
- In 2017 two NYPD officers pulled over an 18 year-old female and arrested her on possession charges. Both officers allegedly raped the handcuffed victim in the back of their unmarked police van. Each officer was charged with several crimes including sexual abuse, coercion, bribery, and official misconduct. The officers claimed all sexual acts were consensual. Both officers plead guilty to lesser charges and were sentenced to probation.

Table 1. Officer Characteristics in Police Crime Arrest Cases, 2005-2017 (n = 282)

	n	(%)		n	(%)		n	(%)
<b>Sex</b>			<b>Years of Service</b>			<b>Agency Type</b>		
Male	276	(97.9)	0-2	52	(18.4)	Primary State Police	23	(8.2)
Female	6	(2.1)	3-5	68	(24.1)	Sheriff's Office	36	(12.8)
			6-8	26	(9.2)	County Police Dept.	25	(8.9)
<b>Age</b>			9-11	24	(8.5)	Municipal Police Dept.	192	(68.1)
19-23	4	(1.4)	12-14	17	(6.0)	Special Police Dept.	2	(0.7)
24-27	45	(16.0)	15-17	17	(6.0)	Constable	3	(1.1)
28-31	30	(10.6)	18-20	15	(5.3)	Tribal Police Dept.	1	(0.4)
32-35	47	(16.7)	21-23	4	(1.4)			
36-39	52	(18.4)	24-26	3	(1.1)	<b>Level of Rurality</b>		
40-43	49	(17.4)	27 or more years	6	(2.1)	Metropolitan County	243	(86.2)
44-47	19	(6.7)	Missing	50	(17.7)	Non-Metro County	39	(13.8)
48-51	13	(4.6)						
52-55	8	(2.8)	<b>Rank</b>			<b>Region of United States</b>		
56 or older	7	(2.5)	Officer	252	(89.4)	Northeastern States	38	(13.5)
Missing	8	(2.8)	Detective	7	(2.5)	Midwestern States	46	(16.3)
<b>Duty Status</b>			Corporal	2	(0.7)	Southern States	135	(47.9)
On-Duty	251	(89.0)	Sergeant	16	(5.7)	Western States	63	(22.3)
Off-Duty	31	(11.0)	Lieutenant	4	(1.4)			
			Chief	1	(0.4)			

Figure 1

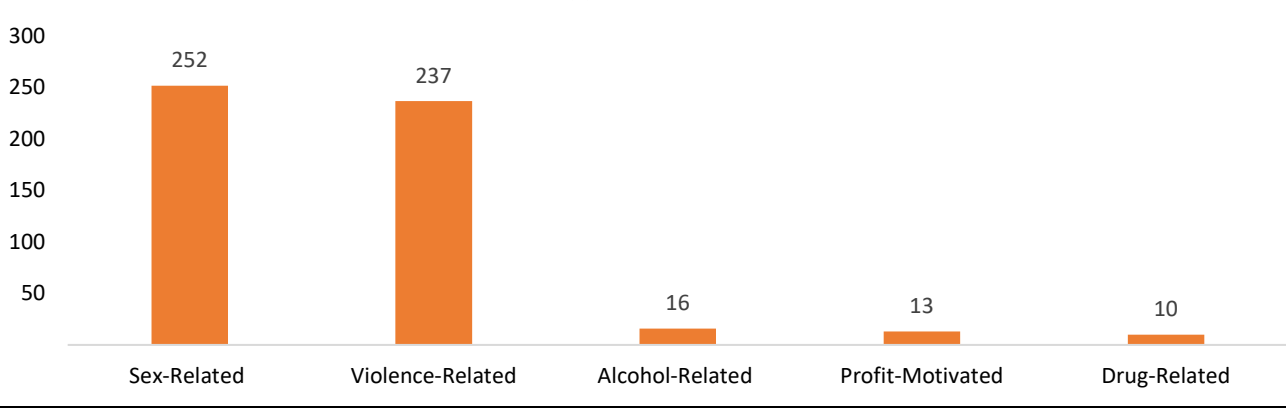
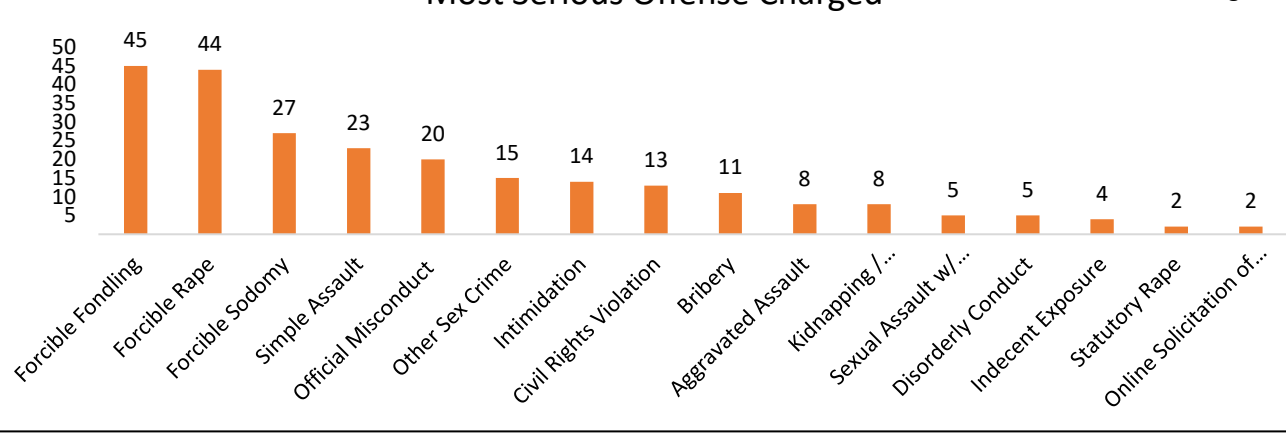


Figure 2



Figure 3



### RESULTS

- Officers arrested for crimes involving the abuse of power against female drivers were primarily male, patrol-level officers (Table 1).
- The victims in these cases were often young women and girls unrelated to the officer (Table 2).
- The majority of these crimes were violence- and sex-related (Figure 1). These arrested officers often used their police authority to commit sexual violence against these victims (Figure 4).
- Around half of these crimes occurred on a highway, road, or in a parking lot but some crimes were committed at a secondary location such as the victim or officer’s home (Figure 2).
- The most serious offense charged is often a sexual offense (Figure 3).
- A conviction occurred in 69.86% of these cases (Figure 5) and it is known to us that the officers in 88.30% of these cases lost their job.

### DISCUSSION AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- The cases examined for this project are incidents in which the officers were charged with one of more criminal offenses. It is important to note this does not capture all police crime against female drivers.
- This research emphasizes the importance of states needing laws against sexual encounters occurring while the victim is in police custody.
- Future research should examine how driving while female offenses are similar and different from driving while Black offenses. These research ideas could be used to develop evidence-based policies which prohibit unnecessary traffic stops of potentially vulnerable populations.