

3-17-2023

Family Violence Committed by Law Enforcement Officers in the United States, 2005-2017

Madison Raye Engelbert
Bowling Green State University, engelbm@bgsu.edu

Chloe A. Wentzlof
Bowling Green State University, cawentz@bgsu.edu

Philip M. Stinson
Bowling Green State University, stinspm@bgsu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/crim_just_pub



Part of the [Criminology Commons](#), and the [Criminology and Criminal Justice Commons](#)

How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!

Repository Citation

Engelbert, Madison Raye; Wentzlof, Chloe A.; and Stinson, Philip M., "Family Violence Committed by Law Enforcement Officers in the United States, 2005-2017" (2023). *Criminal Justice Faculty Publications*. 133.
https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/crim_just_pub/133

This Presentation is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Health and Human Services at ScholarWorks@BGSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Criminal Justice Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@BGSU.



Family Violence Committed by Law Enforcement Officers in the United States, 2005-2017

Madison Raye Engelbert, Chloe A. Wentzlof, & Philip M. Stinson
Bowling Green State University

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 Institute of Child Health and Human Development (P2CHD050959).

INTRODUCTION

The importance of this study is to inform the public about law enforcement officers who have been arrested for family violence. Researchers have found that no government entity has a complete data collection on the conviction of non-federal law enforcement officers who have been charged with family violence (Stinson & Liederbach, 2012). Previous research is limited due to researchers using self-report surveys which limits data collection due to officers attempting to protect their career through a code of silence (Stinson & Liederbach, 2012). The current project utilizes a unique methodology of publicly sourced information to gain insights about law enforcement officers arrested for family or domestic violence offenses.

CURRENT STUDY

The current study examines 2,178 criminal arrest cases of sworn non-federal law enforcement officers involved in family violence cases. The data presented are a collection of information on the incident details, offenses charged, officer demographics, victim demographics, criminal case disposition, and final employment outcome. Additional methodology can be found on the Henry A. Wallace Police Crime Database website.

DEFINITION OF FAMILY VIOLENCE

The American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP, 2000) defined family violence as the intentional intimidation or abuse of children, adults, or elders by a family member, intimate partner, or caretaker to gain power and control over the victim. Abuse can take place in many forms, including physical and sexual assault, emotional or psychological mistreatment, threats, intimidation, economic abuse, and violation of individual rights.

Table 1. Family Violence Police Crime: Officer Demographics, 2005-2017 (n = 2,178)

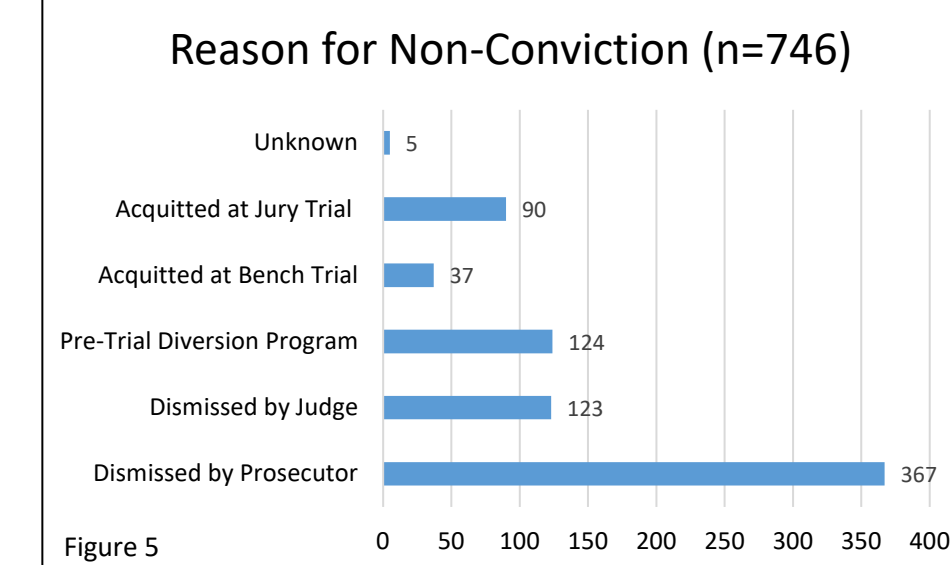
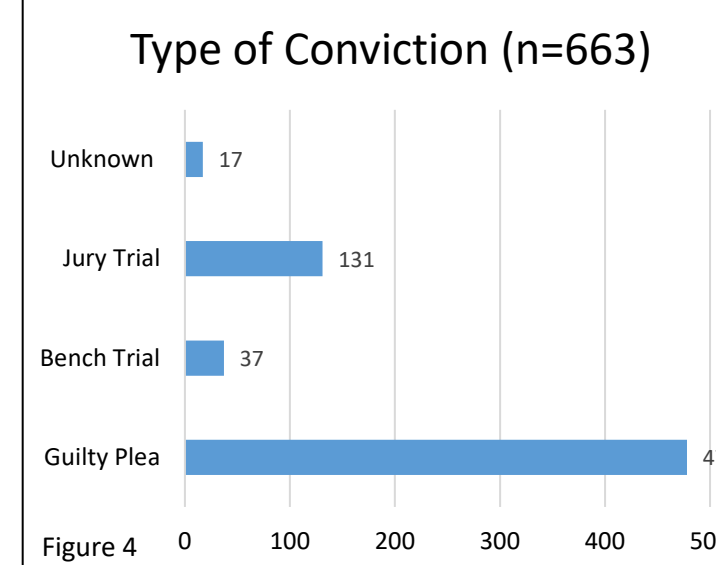
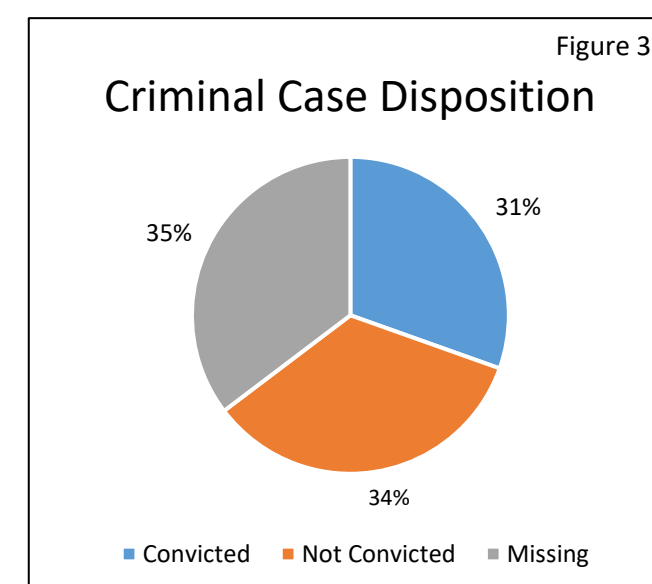
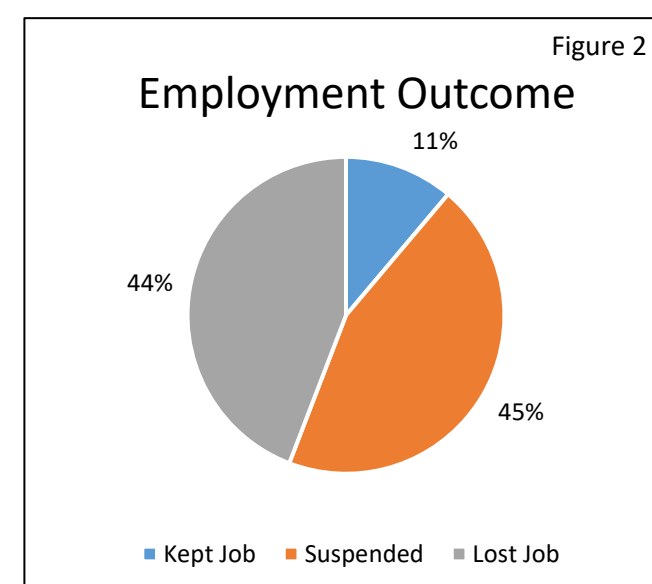
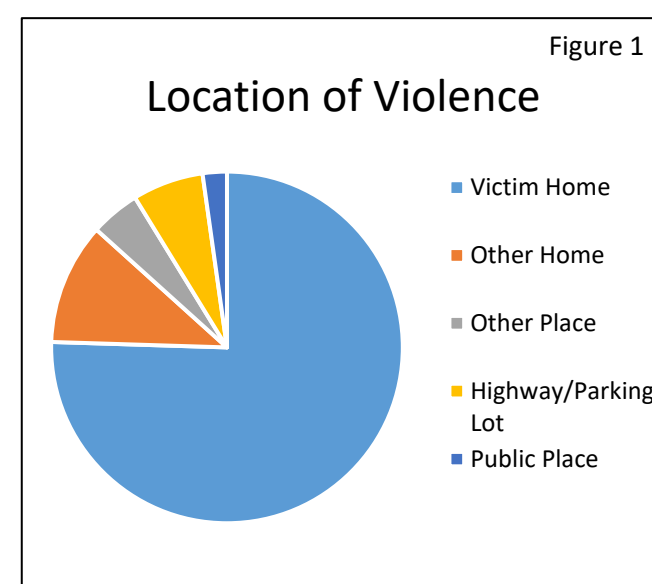
	n	(%)		n	(%)
Age			Years of Service		
19-23	34	(1.6)	0-2	204	(9.4)
24-27	138	(6.3)	3-5	285	(13.1)
28-31	261	(12.0)	6-8	233	(10.7)
32-35	386	(17.7)	9-11	211	(9.7)
36-39	346	(15.9)	12-14	183	(8.4)
40-43	318	(14.6)	15-17	165	(7.6)
44-47	241	(11.1)	18-20	131	(6.0)
48-51	129	(5.9)	21-23	71	(3.3)
52-55	71	(3.3)	24-26	40	(1.8)
56 or older	52	(2.4)	27 or More Years	54	(2.5)
Missing	202	(9.3)	Missing	601	(27.6)
Arresting Agency			Sex		
Own Employer	693	(31.8)	Female	134	(6.2)
Not Own Employer	1,485	(68.2)	Male	2,044	(93.8)

Table 2. Family Violence Police Crime: Victim Demographics, 2005-2017 (n = 2,178)

	n	(%)		n	(%)
Victim Age			Victim Sex		
0-9	126	(5.8)	Female	1,765	(81.0)
10-12	79	(3.6)	Male	560	(11.9)
13-15	95	(4.4)	Missing	153	(7.0)
16-18	58	(2.7)			
19-21	27	(1.2)	Relationship to Officer		
22-24	48	(2.2)	Current Spouse	736	(33.8)
25-27	37	(1.7)	Ex-Spouse	91	(4.2)
28-30	46	(2.1)	Current Romantic Partner	481	(22.1)
31-33	50	(2.3)	Former Romantic Partner	189	(8.7)
34-36	31	(1.4)	Child or Stepchild	342	(15.7)
37-39	42	(1.9)	Other Relative	134	(6.2)
40-44	59	(2.7)	Unrelated Child	61	(2.8)
45 or Older	50	(2.3)	Stranger or Acquaintance	26	(1.2)
Missing	1,430	(65.7)			
			Victim Injury		
Child Victim			No Injury	1,007	(46.2)
No	1,670	(76.7)	Minor Injury	812	(37.3)
Yes	435	(20.0)	Serious Injury	270	(12.4)
Missing	73	(3.4)	Fatal Injury	51	(2.3)

Table 3. Family Violence Specific Variables (n = 2,178)

	n	(%)		n	(%)
Weapon Type			Case Characteristics		
Hands/Fists	1,351	(62.0)	Officer's Gun was Confiscated	307	(14.1)
Verbal Threats	334	(15.3)	Confiscated Gun was Later Returned	37	(1.7)
Other Body Parts	229	(10.5)	Officer Can't Carry a Gun if Convicted	117	(5.4)
Gun-Personally-Owned	218	(10.0)	Restraining Order Filed Against Officer	424	(19.5)
Miscellaneous Objects	201	(9.2)	Violated Existing Restraining Order	80	(3.7)
Department-Issued Firearm	105	(4.8)			
Knife	32	(1.5)			



RESULTS

- Nearly all of the criminal arrest cases of police officers arrested for family violence incidents involve a male officer (Table 1).
- We identified that in 68.2% of family violence police crime cases the officer was ultimately arrested by an outside agency (Table 1).
- The most common relationship to the arrested officer was a current spouse, followed by current romantic partner (Table 2).
- In over half of these family violence police crime cases there was an injury known to us. The victims in 51 cases were killed by the arrested officer (Table 2).
- The most common weapon used in family violence police crime was hands/fists at 1,351 instances (Table 3).
- In 19.4% of these cases a restraining order was filed against the officer (Table 3).
- The most common location of violence for family violence was in or near the victim's home at 1,525 offenses (Figure 1).
- Less than half of these cases involved the officer losing their job (Figure 2).
- Criminal case disposition is fairly evenly split between convicted (n=663, 31%), not convicted (n=746, 34%), and unknown (n=769, 35%) (Figure 3).
- Of the 663 criminal convictions, the majority resulted for the arrested officer pleading guilty (Figure 4).
- Of the 746 non-convictions, 367 were dismissed by the prosecutor (Figure 5).

DISCUSSION AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- The expanded definition of family violence allows our research to capture the full breadth of criminal arrest cases of officers charged for crimes against this particularly vulnerable population.
- The victims of these police crime cases are unique compared to other family violence cases because of the expectation that is the perpetrator is among those enforcing these very laws.
- Our data capture the limited application of the law in family violence cases. Unreported cases or cases in which criminal charges were never presented are not captured within these data. Our data show many of these officers are never convicted and remain a sworn police officer despite these charges.
- Additional data would be needed for future research capturing the full extent of criminal behavior beyond just criminal arrest cases.