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Examining Officer, Agency, and Victim Characteristics in On-Duty Fatal Shootings

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Examining Officer, Agency, and Victim Characteristics in On-Duty Fatal Shootings

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the characteristics of officers, agencies, and victims involved in an on-duty fatal shooting. Previous research has identified that officer gender, experience level, and victim race influence incidents but has often overlooked agency characteristics. This study uses data from the Henry A. Wallace Police Crime Database to examine the relationship between officer, agency, and victim characteristics of officers charged with murder or manslaughter resulting from an on-duty fatal shooting. This analysis aims to inform discussions that could lead to new policies and implications for police agencies.

METHOD

The data for this project 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 2005-2024. The news sources used for this project were primarily discovered through Google News™ search engine and Google Alerts™ email update service. For this project, we narrowed the data from all nonfederal sworn law enforcement officers charged with any crime to solely sworn law enforcement officers who were charged with manslaughter, murder, or homicide due to an on-duty fatal shooting.

Table 1. Demographics of Officers who commit On-Duty Fatal Shootings from 2005-2024 (N= 199)

	n (%)		n (%)
Sex		Officer Race	
Male	193 (97)	Black	29 (14.6)
Female	6 (3)	Non-Black	168 (84.4)
Rank		Officer Disposition	
Line Officer	166 (83.4)	Not Convicted	90 (45.2)
Detective	9 (4.5)	Convicted	62 (31.2)
Corporal/Sergeant	16 (8)	Pending	47 (23.6)
Lieutenant or Higher	8 (4)	Years of Service	
		0-5	59 (29.6)
Final Employment Outcome		6-10	44 (22.1)
No Action	8 (4)	11-15	14 (7)
Suspended, Kept Job	47 (23.6)	16-20	12 (6)
Lost Job	144 (72.4)	21-25	4 (2)
Agency Type		26-30	6 (3)
Municipal Police	144 (72.4)	31+	2 (1)
Sheriff's Department	28 (14.1)	Unknown	58 (29.1)
County Police	10 (5)		
Primary State Police	8 (4)		
Other	9 (4.5)		

Figure 1. Years of Service and Employment Outcome

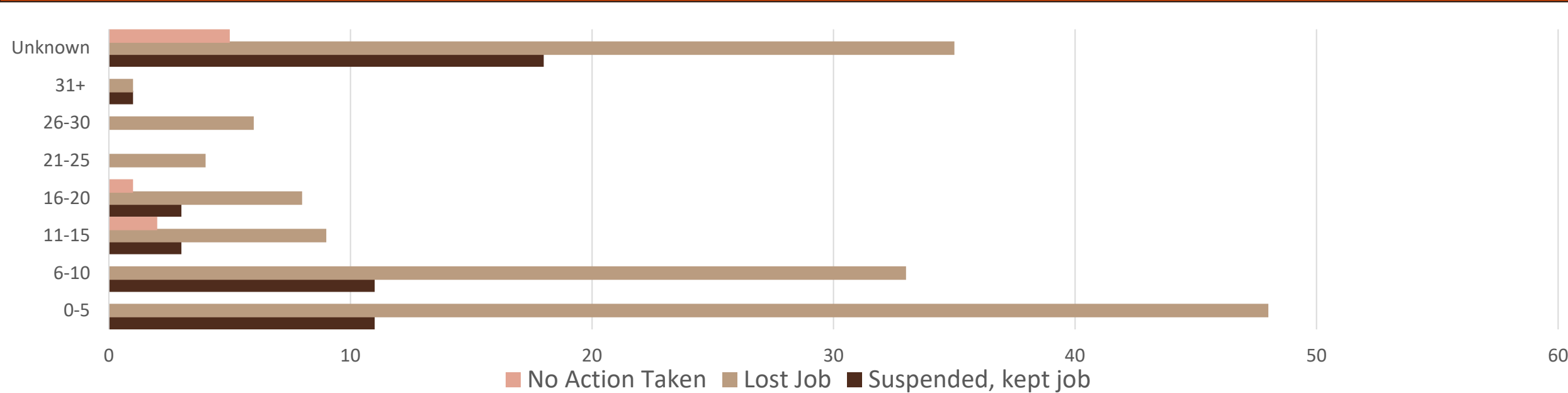


Figure 2. Criminal Case Disposition and Sentencing Length

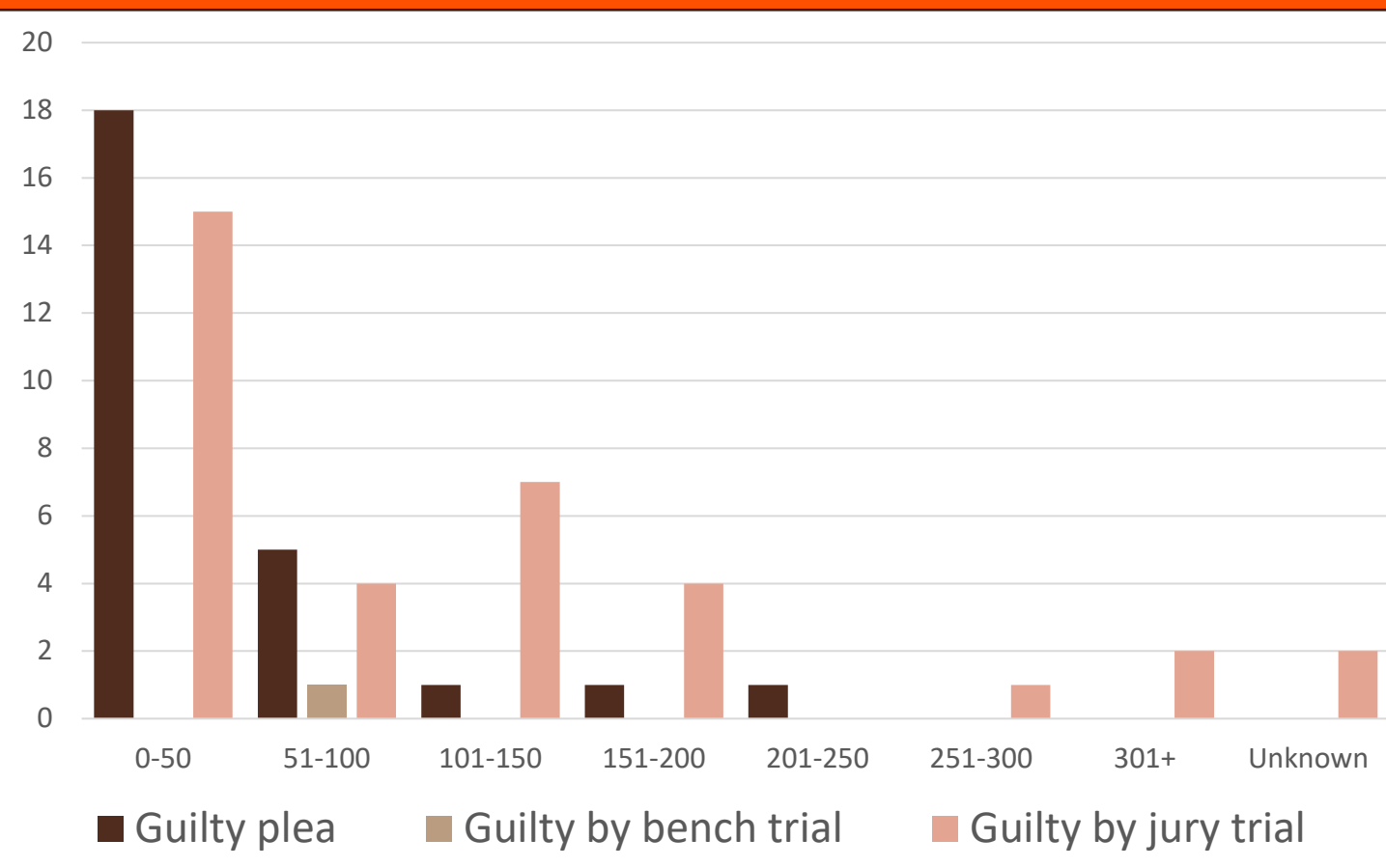


Figure 3. Officer and Victim Age

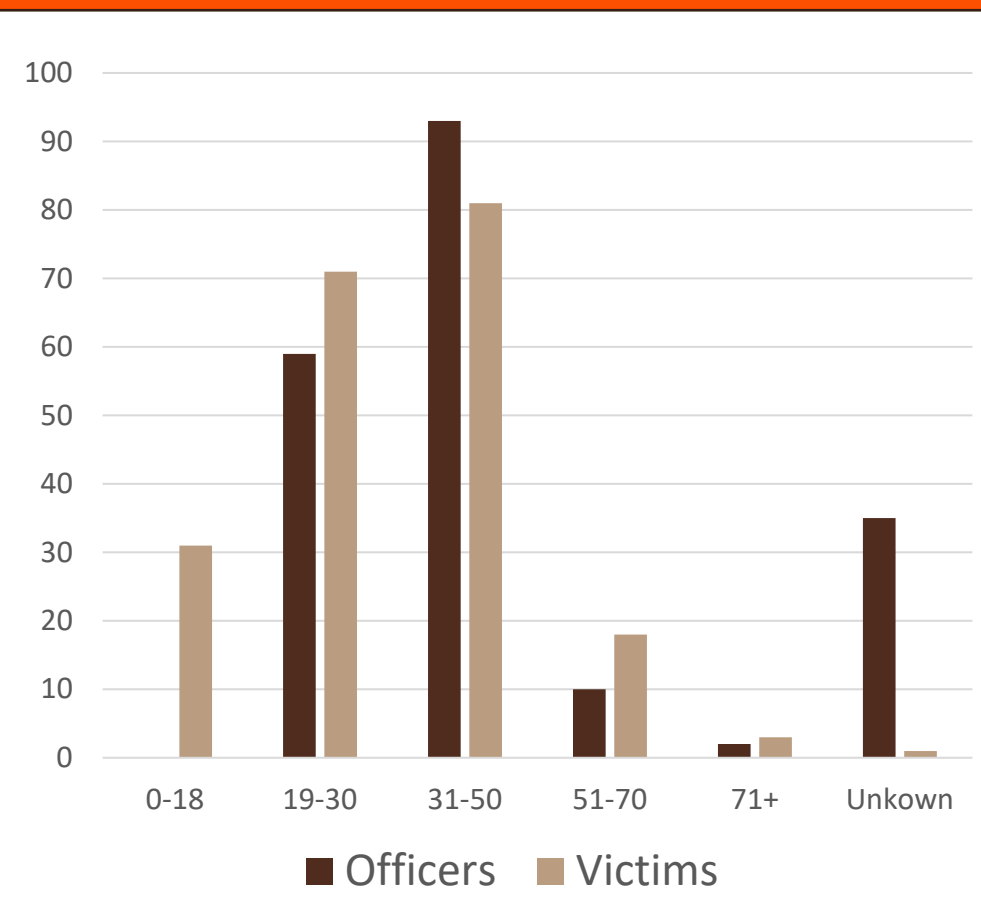
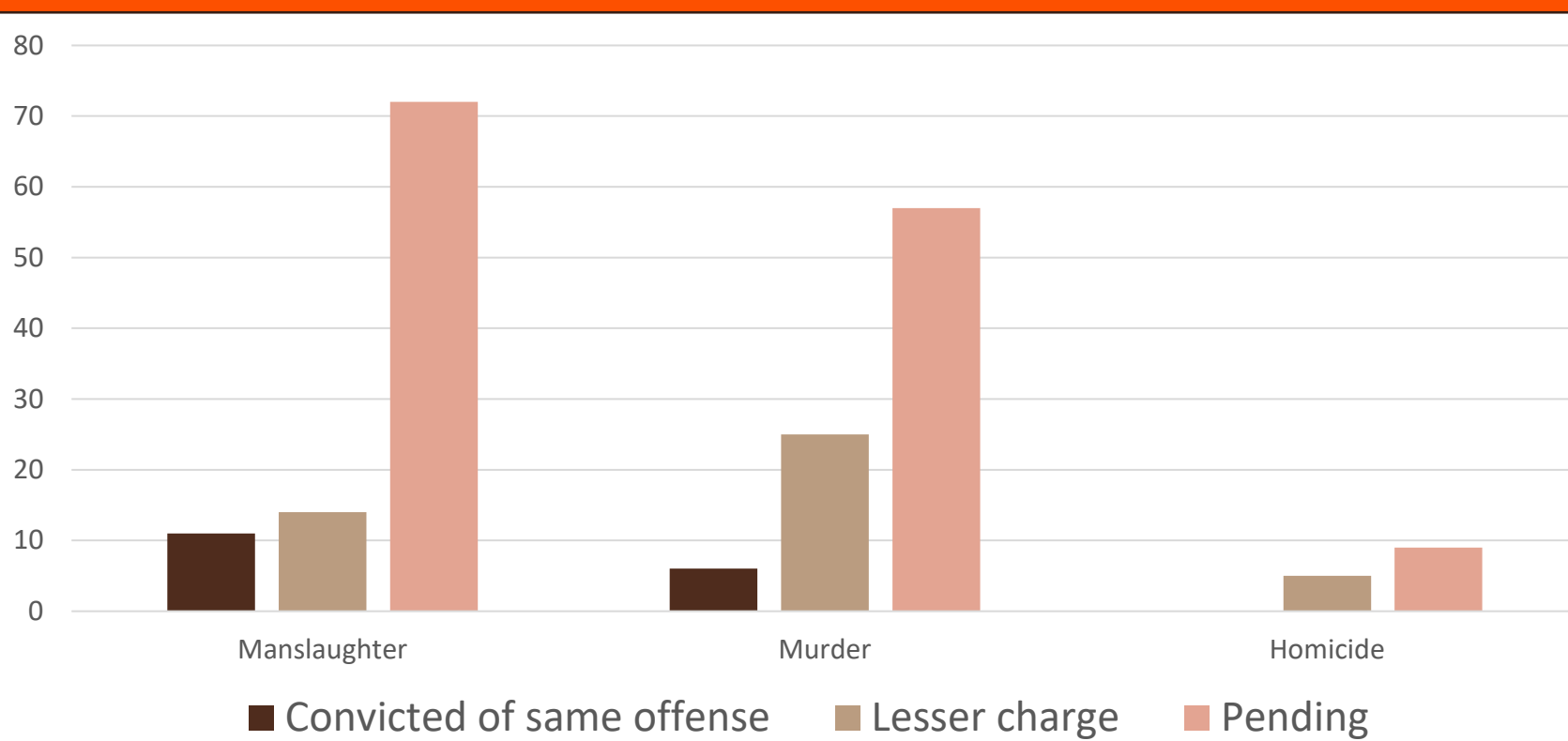


Figure 4. Most Serious Offense Charged and Final Conviction Outcome



Figures 5. Officer and Victim Race

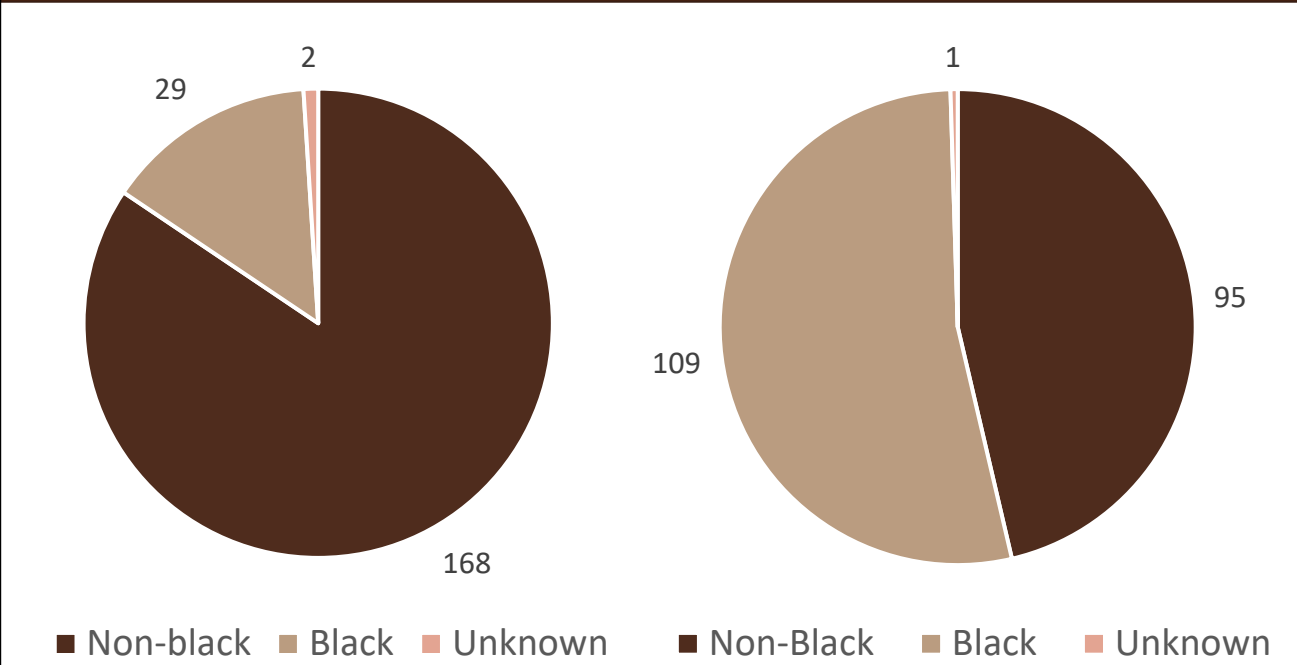


Figure 5a. Officer Race

Figure 5b. Victim Race

Figures 6. Officer and Victim Gender

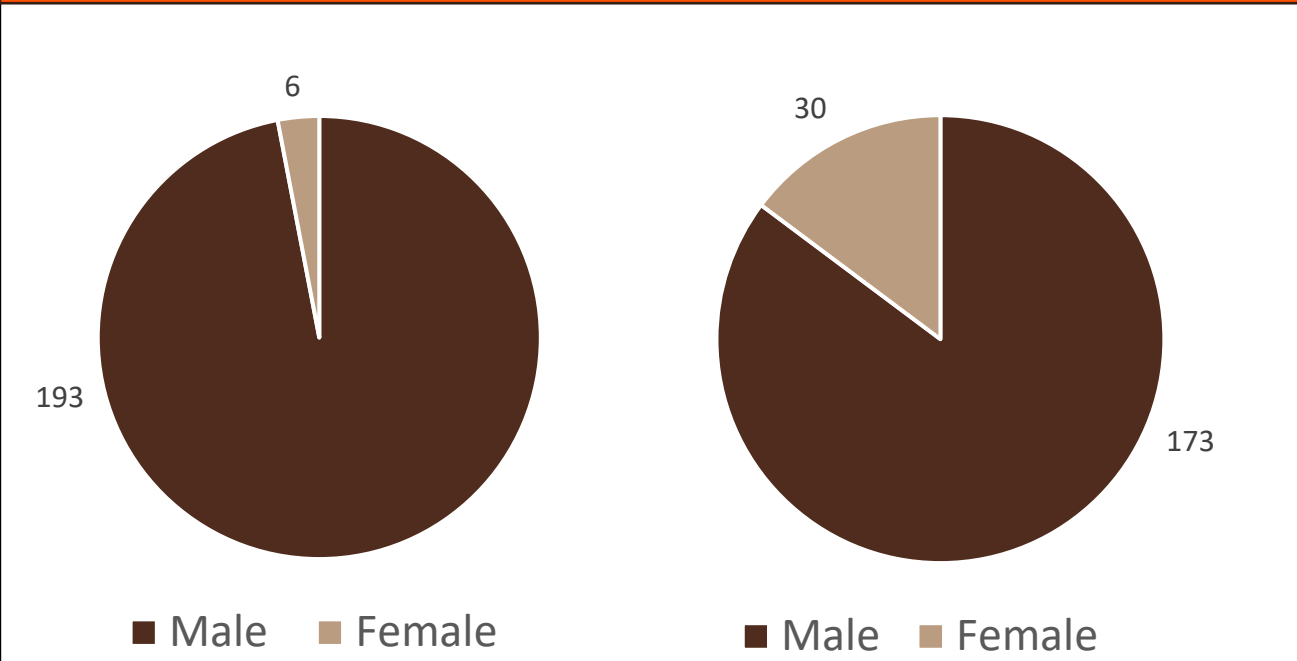


Figure 6a. Officer Gender

Figure 6b. Victim Gender

DISCUSSION

Employment Outcomes

- Officers with five or fewer years of service were more likely to commit an on-duty fatal shooting, possibly due to lack of training. However, officers with more years of service were less likely to lose their jobs compared to officers with fewer years of service.
- On-duty fatal shootings committed by officers with more than 10 years of service employment outcomes may be taken less seriously than those committed by officers with fewer than 10 years of service, due to their longer tenure with the department.

Case Disposition

- Cases where officers were charged with manslaughter may be taken less seriously compared to officers charged with murder or homicide.
- On-duty fatal shootings committed by officers who pled guilty were more likely to be sentenced to 50 months or less compared to any other criminal case disposition.