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# An Exploratory Analysis of Drug Arrest Cases Among Police Officers

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## ABSTRACT

Few studies have examined offender characteristics, conviction outcomes, and employment outcomes of officers who have engaged in drug-related crimes. This study explores drug-related criminal arrest cases committed by non-federal sworn law enforcement officers. The purpose of this study is to explore and describe the characteristics of police officers who have committed drug-related crimes. This study uses data involving criminal arrest cases from 2005-2019 from the Henry A. Wallace Police Crime Database ($N$ = 18,032 criminal arrest cases within $N$ = 14,722 officers) to examine the individual characteristics, offense characteristics, criminal case disposition, and employment outcome characteristics of officers who have committed drug-related crimes. Results of this study can be used to implement better drug policies within police organizations and better how drug use and drug crime appear differently in police populations.
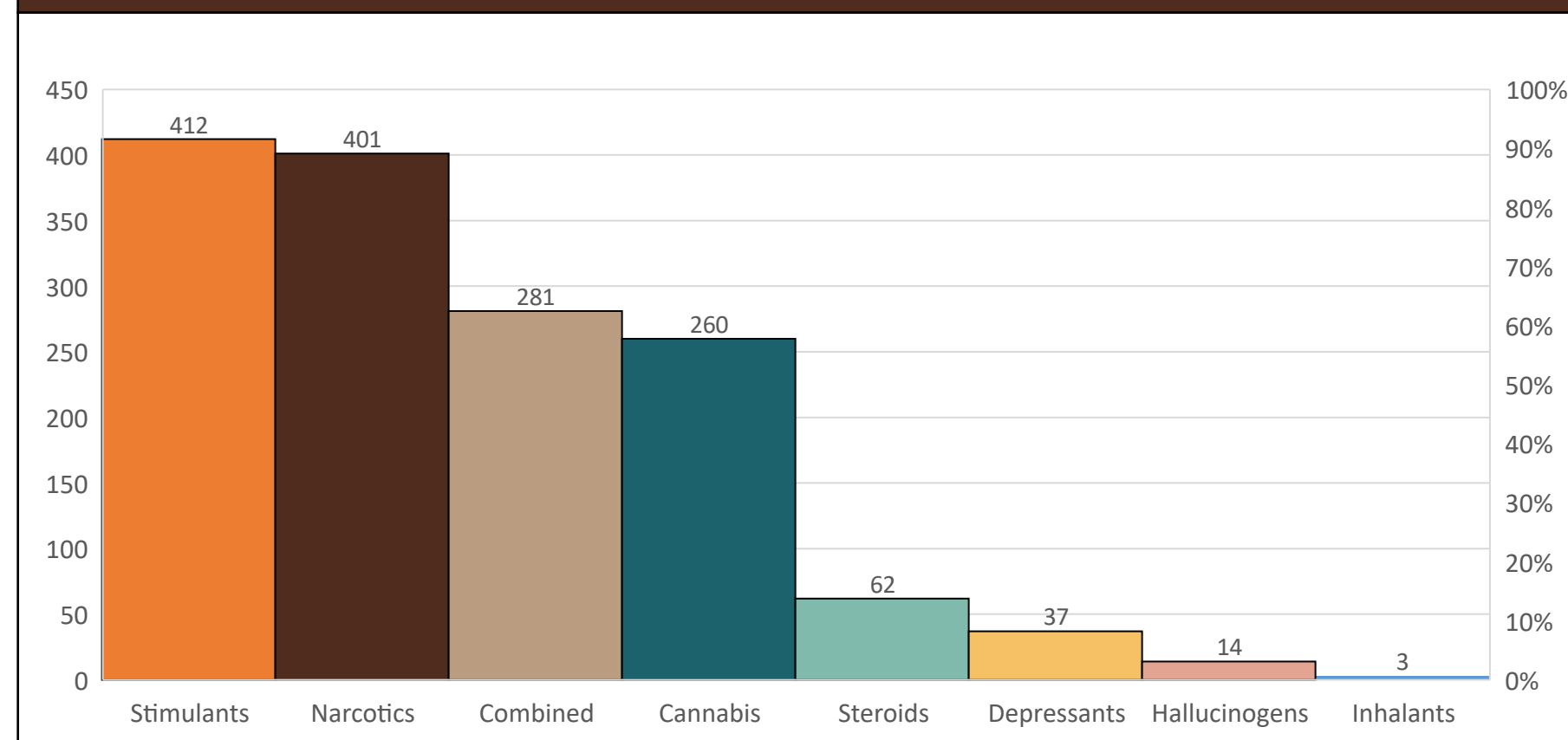
## METHOD

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, data were restricted to criminal arrest cases of nonfederal sworn law enforcement officers who were arrested for drug-related crimes from 2005-2019.
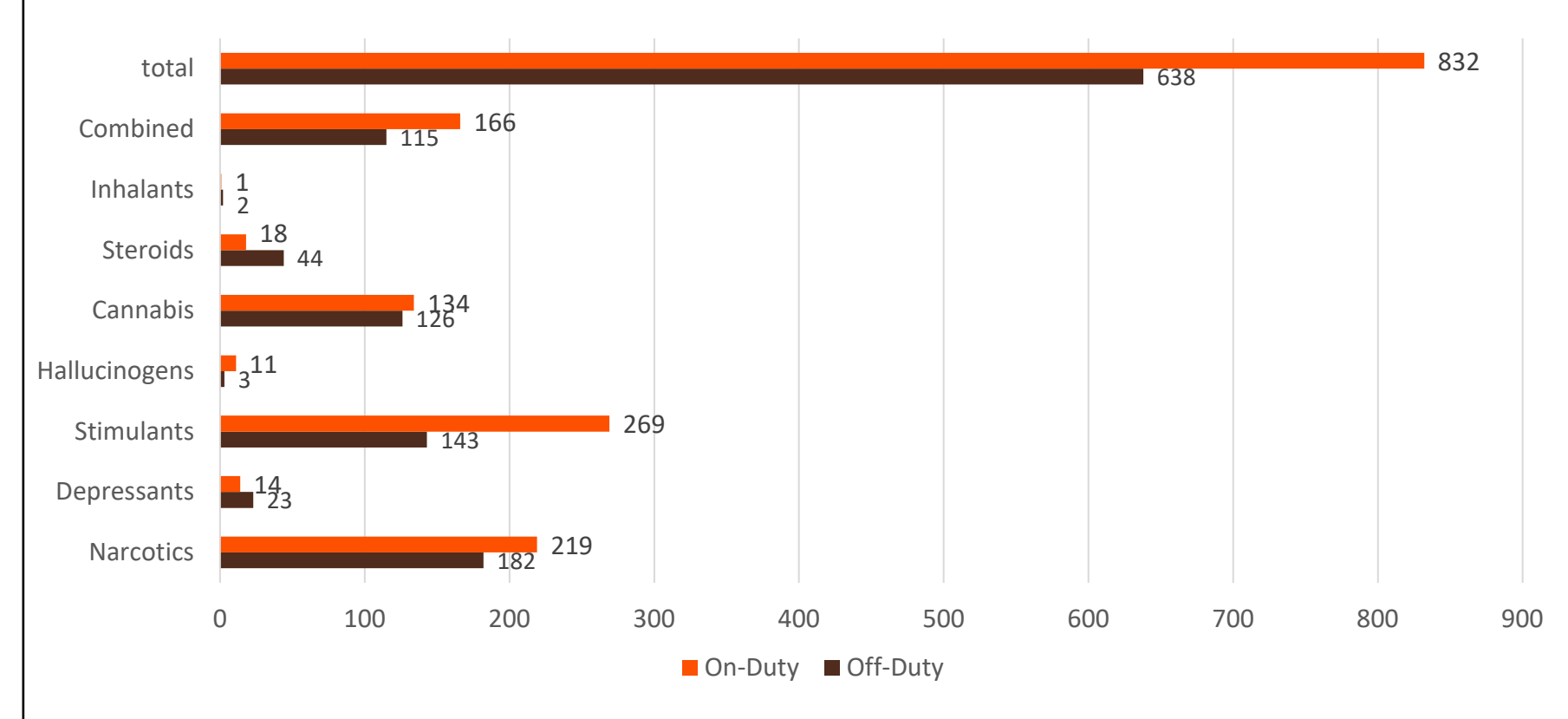
## Table 1. Officer Characteristics for Criminal Arrest Cases for Drug-Related Crimes from 2005-2019 (*N*= 1,700)

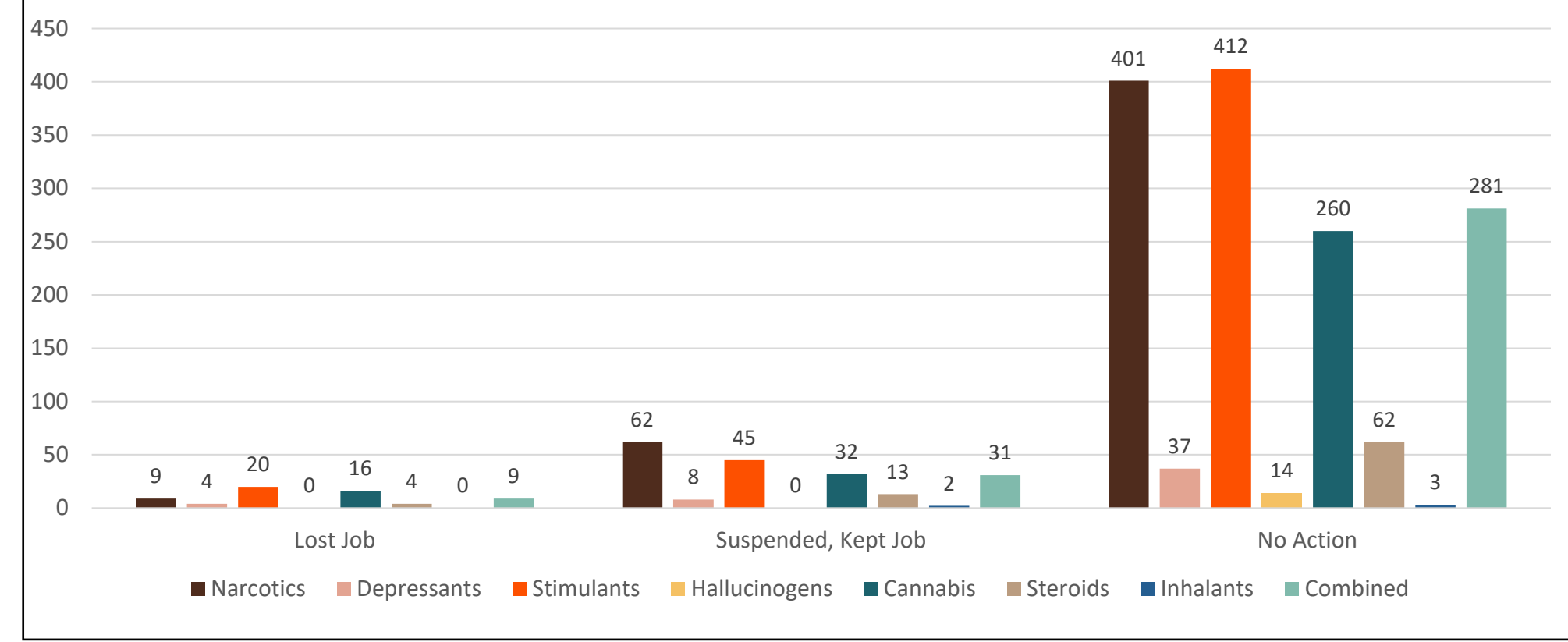| | n (%) | | n (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Race** | | **Years of Service** | |
| White | 979 (57.6) | 0-5 | 390 (22.9) |
| Black | 231 (13.6) | 6-10 | 278 (16.4) |
| American Indian or Alaskan Native | 1 (0.1) | 11-15 | 247 (14.5) |
| Asian | 10 (0.6) | 16-20 | 172 (10.1) |
| Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander | 7 (0.4) | 21-25 | 76 (4.5) |
| Missing | 472 (27.8) | 26-30 | 31 (1.8) |
| **Gender** | | 31+ | 16 (0.9) |
| Male | 1584 (93.2) | Missing | 490 (28.8) |
| Female | 116 (6.8) | **Duty Status** | |
| **Type of Agency** | | Off-duty | 734 (43.2) |
| Primary State Police Agency | 51 (3.0) | On-duty | 966 (56.8) |
| Sheriff's Office | 428 (25.2) | **Rank** | |
| County Police Department | 63 (3.7) | Officer/Deputy/Trooper | 1252 (73.6) |
| Municipal Police Department | 1096 (64.5) | Detective | 140 (8.2) |
| Special Police Department | 47 (2.8) | Corporal/Sergeant | 146 (8.6) |
| Constable | 11 (0.6) | Lieutenant or higher | 162 (9.5) |
| Tribal Police Department | 2 (0.1) | | |
| Regional Police Department | 1 (0.1) | | |



Figure 1. Drug Classes for Criminal Arrest Cases Involving Drug-Related Crimes
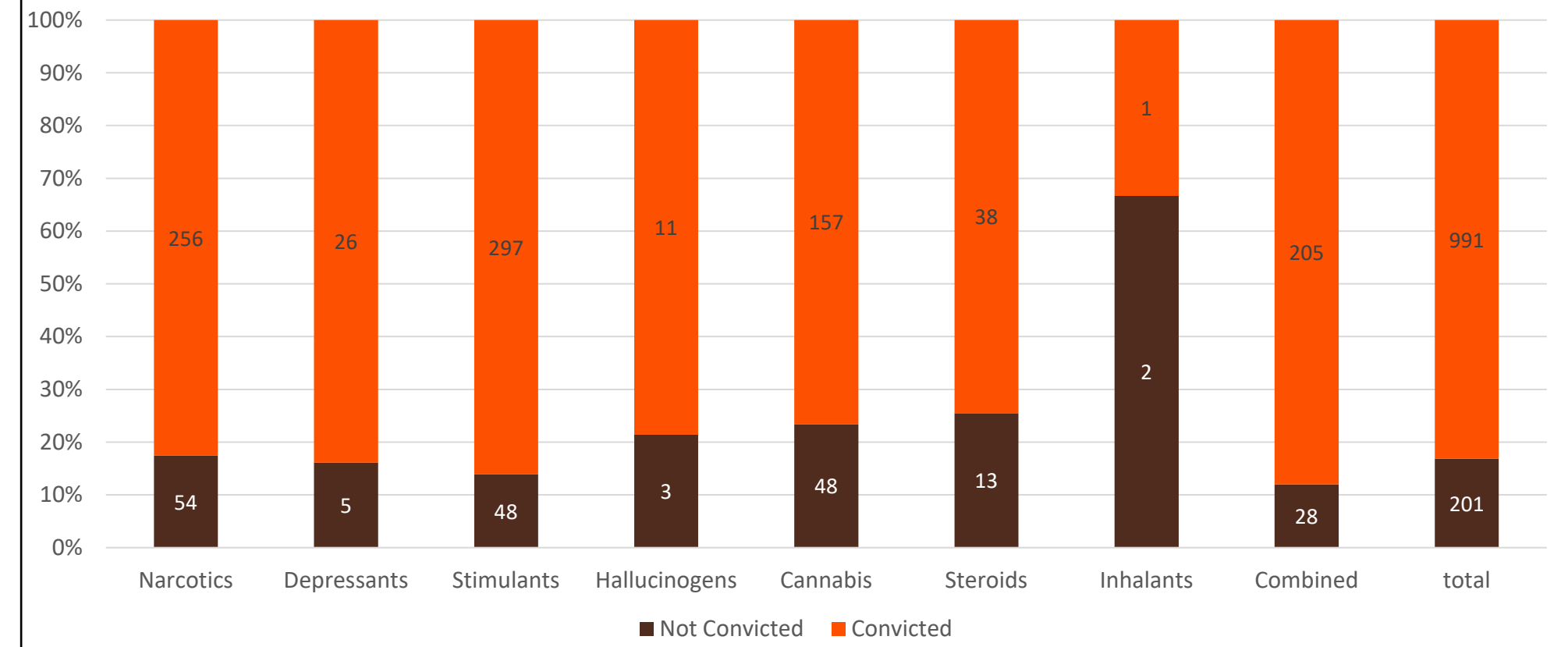


Figure 2. Drug Classes and Duty Status for Criminal Arrest Cases Involving Drug-Related Crimes



Figure 3. Employment Outcome by Drug Class for Criminal Arrest Cases Involving Drug-Related Crimes



Figure 4. Criminal Case Disposition by Drug Class for Criminal Arrest Cases Involving Drug-Related Crimes

## DISCUSSION

**Drug Class**
- Stimulants and narcotics were the most common drug of abuse classes involved in criminal arrests of police officers for drug-related crimes. This could be due to the higher prevalence and visibility of these substances, potentially making officers more susceptible to involvement. It may also reflect broader patterns in the general population, where stimulant and narcotic use is more common, increasing the chances of these drugs of abuse appearing in criminal cases.

**Duty Status**
- Arrests involving stimulants and cannabis occur more frequently while officers are off-duty, indicating that drug use among police officers may predominantly occur outside of work hours.

**Employment Outcome**
- The most common employment outcome for arrested officers across most drug classes is termination. This pattern reinforces the severity with which law enforcement agencies respond to such incidents. However, for certain drugs like hallucinogens and inhalants, there are instances where officers retained their positions, which may indicate variability in agency responses based on the drug class or context of the arrest.

**Criminal Case Disposition**
- Conviction rates across drug classes are high, especially for stimulants, depressants, and combined drug cases, highlighting that most arrested officers face legal consequences for drug-related crimes.