

3-17-2023

Police Crime Against Sex Workers in the United States, 2005-2017

Jillian G. Grzywna

Bowling Green State University, jgrzywn@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

Grzywna, Jillian G.; Wentzlof, Chloe A.; and Stinson, Philip M., "Police Crime Against Sex Workers in the United States, 2005-2017" (2023). *Criminal Justice Faculty Publications*. 134.

https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/crim_just_pub/134

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

Police Crime Against Sex Workers in the United States, 2005-2017

Jillian G. Grzywna, 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

Sex workers are a victimized population within the United States that are substantially understudied. Criminalization of this vulnerable population reduces their willingness to report their victimization, especially when these crimes were committed by police officers. Researchers suggest that officers may take advantage of opportunities which use their police authority to coerce or sexually manipulate these sex workers (Stinson, Taylor, & Liederbach, 2020).

CURRENT STUDY

The sample for this project is limited to the 190 criminal arrest cases of nonfederal sworn law enforcement officers who were arrested for one or more crimes against sex workers. The descriptive statistics are reported about officer and victim demographics, details of the incident, criminal case dispositions, and final adverse employment outcomes. The methods of the extended study is available on the Henry A. Wallace Police Crime Database website.

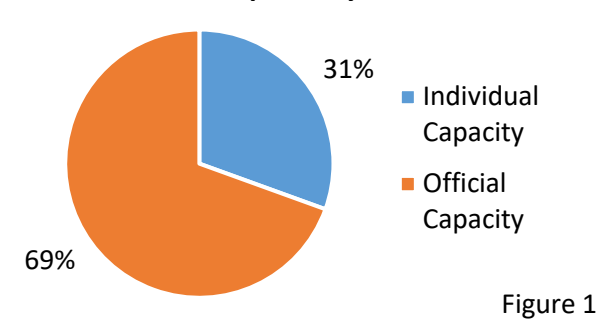
Table 1. Police Crimes Against Sex Workers: Officer Demographics, 2005-2017 (n = 190)

	n	(%)		n	(%)
Age			Sex		
Under 23	2	(1.1)	Male	189	(99.5)
24-27	19	(10.0)	Female	1	(0.5)
28-31	27	(14.2)			
32-35	22	(11.6)	Function		
36-39	21	(11.1)	Patrol and Street Level	167	(87.9)
40-43	34	(17.9)	Line/Field Supervisor	22	(11.6)
44-47	31	(16.3)	Management	1	(0.5)
48-51	14	(7.4)			
52-55	2	(1.1)	Agency Type		
56 or Older	7	(3.7)	Primary State Police	7	(3.7)
Missing	11	(5.8)	Sheriff's Office	30	(15.8)
			County Police Dept.	10	(5.3)
Years of Service			Municipal Police Dept.	133	(70.0)
0-2	25	(13.2)	Special Police Dept.	8	(4.2)
3-5	39	(20.5)	Constable	1	(0.5)
6-8	20	(10.5)	Tribal Police Dept.	0	(0.0)
9-11	12	(6.3)	Regional Police Dept.	1	(0.5)
12-14	9	(4.7)			
15-17	13	(6.8)	Geographic Region		
18-20	18	(9.5)	Northeastern States	19	(10.0)
21-23	11	(5.8)	Midwestern States	41	(21.6)
24-26	7	(3.7)	Southern States	82	(43.2)
27 or More Years	4	(2.1)	Western States	48	(25.3)
Missing	32	(16.8)			
			Arresting Agency		
Officer Duty Status			Own Employer	69	(36.3)
On-Duty	104	(54.7)	Not Own Employer	121	(63.7)
Off-Duty	86	(45.3)			

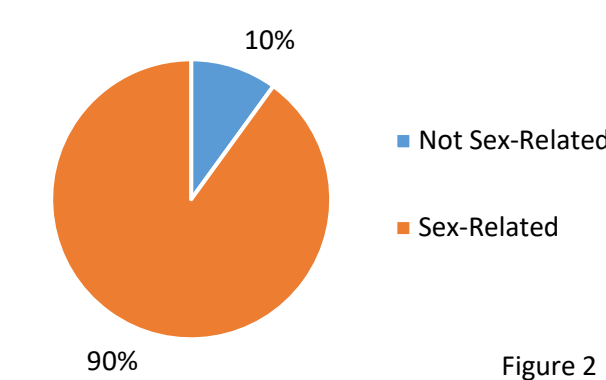
Table 2. Police Crime Against Sex Workers: Victim Demographics, 2005-2017 (n = 190)

	n	(%)		n	(%)
Victim Age			Victim Sex		
0-9	0	(0.0)	Male	7	(3.7)
10-12	0	(0.0)	Female	178	(93.7)
13-15	6	(3.2)	Missing	5	(2.6)
16-18	10	(5.3)			
19-21	7	(3.7)	Relationship to Officer		
22-24	8	(4.2)	Current Spouse	3	(1.6)
25-27	10	(5.3)	Ex-Spouse	0	(0.0)
28-30	4	(2.1)	Current Romantic Partner	2	(1.1)
31-33	6	(3.2)	Former Romantic Partner	1	(0.5)
34-36	5	(2.6)	Child or Stepchild	0	(0.0)
37-39	3	(1.6)	Other Relative	0	(0.0)
40-44	6	(3.2)	Unrelated Child	17	(8.9)
45 or Older	4	(2.1)	Stranger or Acquaintance	167	(87.9)
Missing	121	(63.7)			
			Victim Injury		
Child Victim			No Injury	65	(34.2)
Yes	17	(8.9)	Minor Injury	6	(3.2)
No	173	(91.1)	Serious Injury	76	(40.0)
Missing	0	(0.0)	Fatal Injury	6	(3.2)
			Missing	37	(19.5)

Official vs. Individual Capacity



Sex-Related Crime



Violence-Related Crime

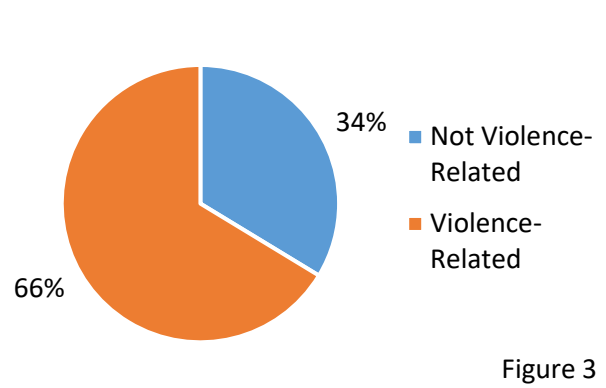


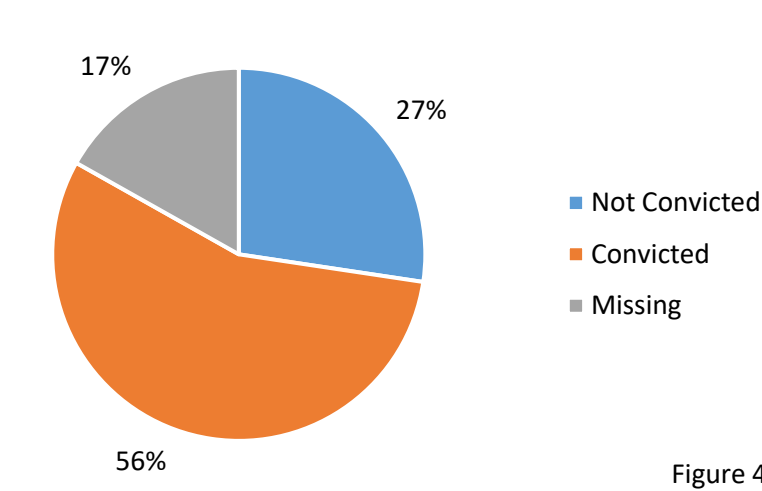
Table 3. Case Characteristics (n = 190)

	n	(%)
Police Sexual Violence	92	(48.4)
Threats or Brandishing Gun	30	(15.8)
Profit-Motivated	23	(12.1)
Known Victim Race	21	(11.1)
Driving-While-Female Encounter	17	(8.9)
Drug-Related	6	(3.2)
Alcohol-Related	5	(2.6)

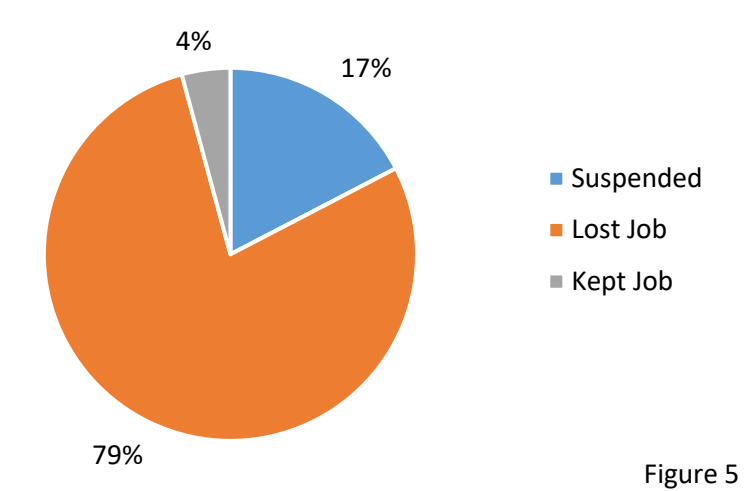
Table 4. Offense Variables (n = 190)

	n	(%)
Official Misconduct	47	(24.7)
Prostitution	42	(22.1)
Forcible Rape	40	(21.1)
Promoting Prostitution	37	(19.5)
Forcible Sodomy	25	(13.2)
Forcible Fondling	25	(13.2)
Kidnapping	24	(12.6)
Aggravated Assault	17	(8.9)
Simple Assault	16	(8.4)
Civil Rights Violations	12	(6.3)
Murder	4	(2.1)

Criminal Case Disposition



Employment Outcome



RESULTS

- Nearly all non-federal sworn law enforcement officers arrested for crimes against sex workers are male (Table 1).
- Over half of these crimes were committed while on-duty (Table 1) and nearly 70% were committed using their authority as a law enforcement officer (Figure 1).
- The majority of these cases involved the officer being arrested by an agency other than their own employer (Table 1).
- The specific age of the victims are often unknown but over 90% of the victim were identified as adults (Table 2).
- Nearly all victims are female adults whose relationship with the officer are either a stranger or acquaintance (Table 2).
- All child sex worker victims were unrelated to the arrested officer (Table 2).
- Nearly half of these cases (n=92) were identified as police sexual violence – where an officer used their official capacity to commit a violent sexual act (Table 3). We also identified cases which were not sex- nor violence-related (Figures 2 and 3).
- We were unable to identify victim race for the majority of these cases (Table 3).
- The arrested officer brandished a firearm in over 15% of these cases (Table 3).
- The most common offense variables are official misconduct, prostitution, forcible rape, and promoting prostitution (Table 4).
- Over half of these cases resulted in a criminal conviction (Figure 5).
- Only 4% of these cases resulting in the officer maintaining their job as a law enforcement officer (Figure 5).

DISCUSSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- The arrested officers involved in police crime cases against sex workers range in officer demographics such as age, years of service, geographic region, and rank. This would suggest this understudied phenomenon is not isolated to a specific group of officers but rather it is a vast problem.
- Our data are limited to publicly available information. Victims of these crimes are often protected and certain demographics are not reported by news media. Additional data and future research would be needed for any meaningful information about the victim's race and ethnicity.
- Due to the vulnerability of the sex worker occupation, there are likely many more cases of police crime against sex workers which have gone unreported or criminal charges were never filed.
- Police crime against sex workers are not limited to sex-related offenses. We have identified many cases in which officer may coerce the victim into non-consensual sexual acts, but we also identified cases of assault, harassment, theft, false imprisonment, and murder.