

Outcomes of Police Sexual Misconduct in the UK

Fay Sweeting *, Peter Arabaci-Hills** and Terri Cole***

Abstract Sexual misconduct in police officers and staff is a serious form of corruption with negative consequences for victims and the reputation of the police. It can include a variety of behaviours ranging from inappropriate sexual comments to colleagues to sexual activity with vulnerable victims of crime. Analysis of publicly accessible data available from proven cases of sexual misconduct in 30 police forces in England and Wales has identified eight categories of sexual misconduct, together with the subsequent disciplinary outcomes. The most frequently recorded type of sexual misconduct involved officers of Constable rank conducting sexual relationships with victims of crime. Conversely, officers of higher ranks were more frequently found to engage in sexual bullying towards junior officers. Consequential dismissal rates varied greatly across different regions of the country. This research focuses on sexual misconduct within English and Welsh police forces and provides the current picture behaviours across regions, ranks, and gender.

Introduction

In 2011, PC Stephen Mitchell of Northumbria police was successfully prosecuted for multiple sexual assaults and rapes he had committed through abusing his position as a police officer. During the court case, it was established he had previously conducted a sexual relationship with a vulnerable female victim of crime yet had not been dismissed. This case was a watershed moment for UK policing and precipitated urgent reviews to investigate the extent, and investigation quality, of such cases

([HMICFRS, 2017](#)). This resulted in changes to police regulations, for example requiring forces to make public the results of misconduct hearings ([Home Office, 2015a](#)).

The National Police Chiefs Council of England and Wales ([NPCC, 2017](#), p. 6) defines abuse of position for sexual gain as ‘any behaviour by a police officer or police staff member, whether on or off duty, that takes advantage of their position as a member of the police service to misuse their position, authority or powers in order to pursue a

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sexual or improper emotional relationship with any member of the public.’ Prior to this definition, but using similar terms, Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC, 2017) identified 436 such cases over a 2-year period. More recently, 1,491 cases of sexual misconduct (including abuse of position) have been reported across 33 police forces in England and Wales over the past 6 years (Jayanetti, 2019).

Considering there are currently 199,753 serving police officers and staff (Home Office, 2019c), these figures reflect that sexual misconduct is relatively rare in England and Wales. Based on an average of 218 cases a year, this equates to 0.001 cases per person or one case in every 1,000 staff. Most officers comply with the high standards of ethics and professional behaviour expected (College of Policing, 2014). However, when such behaviours do occur, such actions not only further victimize some already vulnerable people, but due to media interest, additionally can cause severe damage to the reputation of the police. Potentially, it may also impact the likelihood of other victims of sexual abuse reporting.

Previous research into sexual misconduct in the police is sparse. Maher (2003—adapted from Sapp, 1994), identified eight types of sexual misconduct in North American police: non-sexual contacts (e.g. where the victim is unaware, the contact is sexually motivated), voyeuristic contacts, sexual contacts with crime victims, offenders, or juveniles, ‘sexual shakedown’ (sexual favours in return for police leniency), citizen-initiated sexual contacts, and officer-initiated sexual contacts. In this under-researched area of police corruption, creation of such a typology is a useful start in exploring the behaviours involved.

To date, there has been no similar attempt at categorization of police sexual misconduct in the UK, yet such findings are often incorporated into UK policy (Kautt, 2011). However, there are many differences between the USA and UK; for example, police in the UK are more accountable to central government and employ more female officers than

the US police (30% vs. 12.6%) (Hargreaves *et al.*, 2018; Statista, 2018). In terms of corrupt behaviour, US research presents it as more endemic and intertwined with higher governmental levels, than within the UK (Punch, 2009).

This research is an exploratory attempt using publicly accessible data to establish the current picture of police sexual misconduct in England and Wales. It will attempt to identify whether there are different categories of sexual misconduct and the frequencies of these. It will also examine if there are patterns seen between different groups of perpetrators such as between ranks and genders. The final outcome of cases will also be assessed to understand which behaviours result in dismissal from the Police and if this is even across offence types, rank, and gender.

Methodology

Data collection

This research involved quantitative analysis of secondary data held on the public websites of police forces in England and Wales. Websites of all 48 police forces within the UK (including the British Transport Police and Civil Nuclear Constabulary) were accessed in November 2018 and again in April 2019 to ensure inclusivity of cases. By April 2019, many forces also had begun to specify that the outcomes of hearings would only be published for a period of 28 days before being permanently deleted.

All misconduct hearings featuring a clear sexual element or behaviour were recorded. There were a total of 155 cases from 30 forces. Some other forces included misconduct outcomes, but it was impossible to ascertain if the behaviour was sexual and therefore, these cases were excluded.

Analysis

Explanation of outcomes. The type of sexual misconduct was coded into categories. Two cases

involved a perpetrator found guilty of more than one type sexual misconduct. In these, the most serious offence was recorded.

The coding was initially based on the eight types of police sexual misconduct identified by Maher (2003), as similarities were noted in the current sample. These included examples of voyeuristic activity (Category 2); contact with victims (Category 3); or juveniles (Category 5). However, some of Maher's categories were better suited to US data with no equivalent behaviour observed during this sample; for example, sexual shakedowns (demands by a police officer for a sexual service in return for not making an arrest) were not observed (Category 6) and sexual contact with offenders all occurred (in this sample) in apparently consensual relationships (Category 4). Table 1 provides the original Maher coding scheme and the final coding in this study for comparison.

Explanation of outcomes. Five different outcomes were identified from the misconduct hearings.

1. None—where the incident was 'not proven'.
2. Management advice—As per Home Office (2017b) guidance, the officer is advised of the reason; however, no formal disciplinary record was created.
3. Written warning—The officer was informed that the written warning will be held on file for 12 months, and any further incidents of misconduct within this would likely result in a final warning.
4. Final warning—The officer was informed that the warning will be held on file for 18 months, and any further misconduct resulting in more than management advice is likely to result in dismissal.
5. Dismissal—either with or without a 28-day notice period. The officer will be placed on a 'banned' list—preventing them from re-joining any other force. In some cases, within this study, officers resigned from their posts prior

to their misconduct hearings. In these cases, the agreed outcome had they not resigned was recorded—this was dismissal in 100% of such cases.

Results

Descriptive statistics

Types of cases. As seen in Table 2, of the 155 police sexual misconduct cases in this study the most common type of incident, nearly one-thirds cases, involved sexual relationships with victims, witnesses, and vulnerable people. Victims of domestic violence, rape, and sexual assault were frequently recorded. Victims who were vulnerable due to mental health issues, substance abuse, or in one case, the recent death of her spouse, were less common. In a quarter of cases, the officer involved was in relationships with more than one victim.

The second largest category was incidents involving sexual behaviour towards colleagues. In addition, it is concerning to note sexual contact and behaviour involving juveniles accounted for 13% of all cases—higher than sex on duty for example. Regional variation has also been noted in the prevalence for different types of case as shown in Tables 3 and 5. The most common sexual misconduct type across all but two regions being sex with victims with exception of London (juveniles) and the South East (behaviour towards colleagues).

Perpetrators. Of the 155 cases in this study, 94.8% police sexual misconduct cases involved male officers and 5.2% involved female officers. In terms of rank, the majority of officers were Police Constables (67.1%) followed by Sergeants and Detective Sergeants (11.6%). Police staff, Special Constable, and higher-ranking officers—those holding the rank of Inspector or above accounted for 5.8%, 7.7%, and 2.6%, respectively. The higher-ranking officers comprised of two Chief

Table 1: Comparison of USA and UK sexual misconduct categories—unless stated otherwise, ‘officer’ is inclusive of police staff, Police Community Support Officers, and Special Constables

Maher (2003) Police sexual misconduct categories	Final coding scheme in this study	Notable differences
Non-sexual contacts that are sexually motivated: For example, an unnecessary traffic stop to get a better look at car occupants	No equivalent behaviour recorded	
Voyeuristic contacts: An officer seeks opportunities to view victim in a state of undress, e.g. looking into windows	Voyeurism: Misuse of authority/police equipment to view members of the public for a sexual motivate, e.g. using the police helicopter to view women sunbathing	
Contacts with crime victims: An officer takes advantage of contacting a victim for the purpose of initiating sexual contact, e.g. unnecessary home visits	Sexual and attempted sexual relationships with victims, witnesses, and vulnerable persons: Often involving female victims of domestic abuse and/or sexual assault	Inclusion of witnesses and vulnerable persons
Contacts with offenders: Taking advantage of suspected offenders, e.g. unnecessary body searches	Sexual relationships with offenders: Developing a sexual relationship with a suspect	No examples of sexually motivated harassment such as unnecessary body searches, however, sexual relationships were recorded
Contacts with juveniles: An officer accepting or instigating sexual contact with a juvenile	Sexual contact/behaviour involving juveniles or children: Making inappropriate contact with juveniles met during the course of their duties in person or by text message/social media. Includes making or possessing pornographic images of juveniles	Inclusion of making and/or possessing pornographic images of juveniles
Sexual shakedowns: Demand of a sexual service in return for police leniency, e.g. requesting sex from a citizen in return for not arresting them	No equivalent behaviour recorded	
Citizen-initiated sexual contact: Accepting sexual contact initiated by a citizen	No equivalent behaviour recorded	
Officer-initiated sexual contact: Initiating contact with a citizen who willingly participates	Sex on duty: Having sex during work hours with a colleague or partner	In this sample, officers were on duty at the time and participants knew them
No equivalent behaviour	Unwanted attempts to establish sexual contact with members of the public: Who were not victims, witnesses, or otherwise vulnerable people. This often involved misuse of police systems by officers to obtain addresses, phone numbers, and social media accounts	
No equivalent behaviour	Pornography (adult): Using police equipment to make pornographic videos (with consent) or posting intimate images of former partners on ‘revenge porn’ websites	

Table 2: Category of incident by gender and rank

Category	Total cases	Gender		Rank					
		Male	Female	Staff	Special	PC	DC	Sgt	Inspector
1. Voyeurism	4 (2.6)	4 (100)	–	–	–	4 (100)	–	–	–
2. Sex with victims	51 (32.9)	49 (96)	2 (4)	2 (4)	1 (2)	40 (78)	4 (8)	3 (6)	1 (2)
3. Juveniles	20 (13)	20 (100)	–	1 (5)	4 (20)	13 (65)	1 (5)	1 (5)	–
4. Sex with offenders	10 (6.5)	5 (50)	5 (50)	–	2 (20)	4 (40)	3 (30)	1 (10)	–
5. Behaviour towards staff	34 (21.9)	33 (97.1)	1 (2.9)	1 (2.9)	3 (8.6)	18 (52.9)	–	10 (28.6)	2 (5.7)
6. Sex on duty	10 (6.5)	10 (100)	–	2 (20)	–	7 (70)	–	1 (10)	–
7. Contact with MOP	22 (14.2)	22 (100)	–	3 (13.6)	2 (9.1)	15 (68.2)	–	1 (4.5)	1 (4.5)
8. Pornography	4 (2.6)	4 (100)	–	–	–	3 (75)	–	1 (25)	–
Totals	155 (100)	147 (94.8)	8 (5.2)	9 (5.8)	12 (7.7)	104 (67.1)	8 (5.2)	18 (11.6)	4 (2.6)

The bold values are the column totals. Data in parentheses indicate percentage.

Table 3: Most frequently recorded misconduct type by region

Region	Category
South West	2—Sex with victims/witnesses
South East	5—Behaviour towards colleagues
Greater London	7—Juveniles
West Midlands	2—Sex with victims/witnesses
East Midlands	2—Sex with victims/witnesses
East Anglia	5—Behaviour towards colleagues
North East	2—Sex with victims/witnesses
Yorkshire and The Humber	2—Sex with victims/witnesses

Inspectors, one Inspector, and one Chief Superintendent. The police staff comprised of two Police Community Support Officers and seven civilian police employees whose roles were unspecified.

A significant association was found between perpetrators of constable rank (Police Constable and Detective Constable) and victim type $\chi^2(1) =$

5.815, $P = 0.045$. Detective constables were 1.8 times more likely to target offenders than Police Constables. The most commonly observed misconduct types in the Police Constable group were sex with victims and attempting to establish a sexual relationship with members of the public.

There was a significant association between higher perpetrator rank and type of sexual misconduct, $\chi^2(1) = 11.354$, $P = 0.001$. Officers holding the rank of Sergeant or above were 7.44 times more likely to be involved in sexual misconduct towards colleagues than those of Constable rank. In 9 out of 12 cases, the behaviour involved direct comments and/or non-consensual touching and was directed towards female colleagues, of a lower rank. A third of cases involving Special Constables involved in sexual/contact and behaviour towards juveniles.

Outcomes. Of note are the differences in outcomes in many of the misconduct categories. Offences related to voyeurism and sex with

Table 4: Outcomes across misconduct category

Category	Outcomes				
	None	Management advice	Written warning	Final warning	Dismissal
1. Voyeurism	–	–	–	–	4 (100)
2. Sex with victims	2 (4)	–	2 (4)	7 (14)	39 (78)
3. Juveniles	–	–	–	1 (5)	19 (95)
4. Sex with offenders	–	–	–	–	10 (100)
5. Behaviour towards staff	2 (5.7)	1 (2.9)	3 (8.6)	13 (37.1)	15 (44.1)
6. Sex on duty	–	2 (20)	–	3 (30)	5 (50)
7. Contact with MOP	2 (9.1)	–	1 (4.5)	6 (27.3)	13 (59.1)
8. Pornography	–	–	–	2 (50)	2 (50)
Totals	6 (3.9)	3 (1.9)	6 (3.9)	32 (20.6)	107 (69)

Figures in parenthesis indicate percentages.

offenders were found to have a 100% dismissal rate. Conversely, sexual relationships with victims of crime or making unwanted sexually motivated contact with members of the public did not always result in dismissal. The lowest outcome given for having a proven sexual relationship with a vulnerable victim of crime (two cases involving constables) was a final warning.

Similar apparently inconsistent outcomes were observed in the sex on duty category. The lowest level of discipline for having sex on duty was a verbal warning given in two cases to a member of police staff and a sergeant. Two police constables from the same force were given final warnings for having sex on duty in two unconnected incidents; however, the majority of police constables who did this were dismissed. One police constable who sent sexual text messages to a juvenile was given a final warning where 100% of other officers who did this were dismissed. [Table 4](#) highlights disparities in case outcome.

To explore the differences in outcomes, cases were categorized into regions as shown in [Table 5](#). There appear to be regional differences in misconduct outcomes—for example, the dismissal rate for sex with a victim of crime (Category 2) in the South is recorded at 94.4%, 72.7% in the Midlands, and 66.7% in the North. Other differences are in dismissal rates appear in relation to behaviour towards staff, sex on duty, contact with members of the public, and pornography.

No significant difference was found in dismissal rates between officers of lower and higher ranks. There were too few female officers in the sample to test for differences in outcome and gender; however, all eight female officers included in this research were dismissed. Five of the eight had relationships with offenders—a category with a 100% dismissal rate. Of the remaining three, two had relationships with victims of crime and one was found to have demonstrated a protracted pattern of inappropriate sexual behaviour at work

Table 5: Regional differences in outcomes

	Regions—number of cases and percentage dismissed		
	South	Midlands	North
1. Voyeurism	No cases	No cases	4 100% dismissed
2. Sex with victims	18 94.4% dismissed	11 72.7% dismissed	21 66.7% dismissed
3. Juveniles	13 92.3% dismissed	2 100% dismissed	5 100% dismissed
4. Sex with offenders	4 100% dismissed	4 100% dismissed	2 100% dismissed
5. Behaviour towards staff	17 64.7% dismissed	5 0% dismissed	12 25% dismissed
6. Sex on duty	5 80% dismissed	2 100% dismissed	2 50% dismissed
7. Contact with MOP	10 70% dismissed	1 100% dismissed	10 40% dismissed
8. Pornography	3 33.3% dismissed	No cases	1 100% dismissed

where many colleagues provided evidence against her.

Discussion

Akin to previous findings, this research found there were different categories of sexual misconduct and considered the frequencies of these. The most common type of sexual misconduct committed by police officers was having sexual relationships with victims, witnesses, and vulnerable people. There were also some potential patterns between different groups of perpetrators, although the sample sizes were too small to make any firm conclusions. However, the majority of female officers involved in sexual misconduct were found to be having relationships with offenders. Special Constables were mainly involved in sexual misconduct with juveniles, and officers of higher rank were most frequently found to be engaging in inappropriate behaviour towards colleagues. Regional differences were also observed between types of misconduct and the outcomes of cases, ranging from no action to dismissal.

Categories of sexual misconduct

Sexual relationships with victims of crime accounted for just over a third of the total cases in the current research. However, it is likely this is under-reported, as it is known victims are reluctant to come forward fearing they will not be believed (Stinson *et al.*, 2015). The targeting of vulnerable victims is akin to what we know about the types of individuals' sex offenders target in general (Deslauriers-Varin and Beauregard 2010; Rebocho and Silva, 2014). Factors such as a criminal history, stressful life events, and mental illness appear to increase the risk of being targeted (Cottler *et al.*, 2014) and the findings of this research support this. It is of note many of the victims targeted in this sample were already highly vulnerable, coming into contact with police for reasons of domestic violence or sexual assault and then being re-victimized again by those in a position of trust. When considering victim selection in other areas involving abuse of position, it is thought teachers select pupils who are both easily controlled and likely to keep the secret (Knoll, 2010). The same has been found in prison-based

abuse of position (Beck, 2015). It is therefore possible that vulnerability may be a factor in victim selection for police officers. However, it should be considered that some victims may not consider themselves as vulnerable, particularly if they came into contact with the police as witnesses rather than victims. To fulfil the NPCC's definition of abuse of position, the victim does not have to be vulnerable—the imbalance of power between officer and victim is considered sufficient (NPCC, 2017).

Research into why police officers engage in corrupt behaviour, including having sex with victims of crimes, centres on the concept of the bad apple and the bad barrel. An officer who joins the police with intention of abusing their role is a bad apple, and officers who have no such intent may be gradually become 'bad' from the morally corrupt and unethical police environment—the bad barrel (Melig, 2012). In addition to this, policing provides many opportunities for lone working, management efficacy is variable, and colleagues may be reluctant to report wrongdoing (Cottler *et al.*, 2014; Lopez *et al.*, 2017). However, the bad apple/bad barrel theory oversimplifies the complex issue of sexual misconduct and suggests that all police officers either are or have the potential to become corrupt. More recent research finds that corrupt behaviour is likely to be combination of organizational and ecological factors, with less importance placed on individual factors (Lim and Sloan, 2016; Rosenbaum, 2016).

Regional differences in type of misconduct

For the majority of regions, the most common type of sexual misconduct was sex with vulnerable victims/witnesses of crime. However, the most frequently recorded type in Greater and Central London involved juveniles. Sexually inappropriate behaviour towards staff was the most frequently recorded type in the South East and East Anglia. It is unclear why there should be regional differences; however, similar regional disparity has been found

in the USA, with the majority of sexual misconduct occurring in Southern States (Stinson *et al.*, 2015). This is a matter of interest and will be fed back and further considered at pertinent levels of National Policing in order to develop potential hypotheses about why this may be the case—if vetting procedures are different in London; or if there are more male officers in senior ranks in South East and East Anglia, for example.

Perpetrators

Sex of perpetrator. The majority of research into abuse of position for sexual gain finds perpetrators are usually male. For example, Stinson *et al.*'s (2014) study of 548 police sexual misconduct cases found 99.1% involved male officers and Cole, Summers, Sweeting, and Hills (in preparation) recorded 98.7% of 89 UK cases involved male officers. Again, this is akin to what is known about sex offenders in general, the majority of whom are believed to be male (Sorrentino *et al.*, 2016; Turchik *et al.*, 2016; Manchak and Fisher, 2019).

Of the eight female officers in this sample, five had engaged in relationships with offenders. Without knowing more about the specific circumstances, power differentials are difficult to determine. A male offender may view a relationship with a female officer as a source of protection or might exploit this for tip-offs or police intelligence. Female perpetrators may commence relationships as a means of steering the offender away from crime (Cockcroft, 2015) or in order to evade their partner's arrest (Lamy, 2019). Interestingly, both mainstream and local media reporting in both of the latter cases minimized the seriousness of misconduct by reporting the officer's behaviour as protective and loving, emphasizing their good careers.

Rank of perpetrator. The second largest category of cases was sexually inappropriate behaviour towards colleagues including words, gestures,

and physical contact. This category also contained the largest concentration of officers who work in a supervisory role. It is possible such differences may reflect difference in opportunity between lower police ranks who are likely to have more contact with members of the public and victims of crime, whereas supervisors may have more opportunity to commit offences against staff, and less opportunity for unsupervised interaction with members of the public. This is akin to opportunistic theories of crime stating the availability of suitable victims is through everyday activities—in this case, the working environment (Cockbain and Wortley, 2015).

The majority of such cases involved a higher-ranking officer's behaviour towards a lower ranking female. Given the power imbalance created by rank, this behaviour fits into the accepted definitions of workplace bullying—negative verbal and physical behaviour—and the sexual element means it is equally appropriate to term this behaviour as sexual harassment (Johnson *et al.*, 2018).

Research into sexual misconduct between police officers in North America finds—in contrast to this research—that the typical perpetrator will be a colleague of the same rank rather than a higher-ranking officer (Lonsway *et al.*, 2013). In Japan, higher-ranking officers more likely to target those of lower ranks (Kobayashi, 2018). Kobayashi theorized this may be due to the lack of higher-ranking female officers in Japan as compared to the USA. However, the proportion of higher-ranking females from the UK and USA is proportionally comparable which suggests there are other reasons for higher-ranking officers targeting lower ranks (NPA, 2013, Allen and Zayed, 2019).

In support of the current findings, research into sexual misconduct in other UK public services shows a tendency for higher ranks to target lower ones, from the National Health Service to politics and Universities (Bull and Rye, 2018; Fitzgerald and Cortina, 2018; Linqvist and McKay, 2018). Research into the National Health Service has found that doctors are more likely to target

vulnerable patients but when the behaviour is directed towards colleagues, the target is commonly junior-ranking females (Searle *et al.*, 2017). Reaching the higher ranks of organizations such as the police indicates increased job security and potentially, the ability to more successfully deal with allegations of inappropriate behaviour (Rabe-Hemp and Braithwaite, 2013).

There was also an interesting finding in that of the special constables committing sexual misconduct, the most frequent category was for this towards juveniles and children (40%). In addition, this was the most frequently recorded type in Greater and Central London, the area with the largest number of police officers in England. Again, whilst sample sizes are small, this finding is worthy of further consideration. It is possible that a small minority of officers may join the police in order to access vulnerable children, as has been found in research into other types of 'professional perpetrators' such as teachers and the clergy (Sullivan and Beech, 2002; Christensen and Jansen, 2019). One example is PC Naude who was found guilty of the rape of a 13-year-old girl and an additional 31 grooming offences. Naude admitted he joined the police in part so that he could access vulnerable children (Everett, 2018). However, this is only one case study, and child sexual abuse committed by a person in a position of trust appears to be relatively rare in the UK at just 6% of total offences for both rape and other types of sexual assault (Kelly and Karsna, 2018). Yet, there are no data available for child sexual abuse committed by police officers, but what is known is that child sexual abuse victims usually know or are related to the offender, as such, these individuals are in a position of trust (Jackson *et al.*, 2015; Reitsemma and Grietens, 2016). In addition, whereas this accounted for 13% of our sample, American research has found that 73% of victims of police sexual misconduct were under the age of 18 (Stinson *et al.*, 2014). Police officers who offend against children were also found to be statistically more likely to reoffend (Rabe-Hemp and

Braithwaite, 2013) usually involving multiple offences and victims (Britton, 2017; Weinfass, 2017; Taylor, 2018). As such, further research, giving specific consideration to recruitment and supervision practices for all volunteers and police staff/officers may be worthwhile in the light of these findings (Sweeting and Cole, manuscript under preparation).

Detective constables were found to be more likely to engage in sexual relationships with offenders rather than victims of crime. This novel finding may be explained by two possible factors. Firstly, officers working in Offender Management Units for serious offenders are usually required to have trained as detectives, although less serious offenders may be managed by PCs and civilians. Secondly, working with offenders is very different from 'regular' police work as officers are expected to build a professional working relationship with criminals and to 'befriend' them (Nash, 2016). This environment may afford greater opportunities for officers to abuse their positions; however, there were only a total of 10 such cases in this sample and further research is recommended.

Outcomes of cases

Overall, the data from this research suggest the police service is taking allegations of officer-to-officer sexual misconduct seriously, with the majority of cases resulting in some form of formal discipline. However, an unexpected finding was differences in dismissal rates across England. For officers involved in sexual relationships with vulnerable victims, the percentage dismissed appeared to gradually fall from the South to the North of the country—94% to 66.7%. Other categories with notable differences were attempting to establish relationships with members of the public where 70% of officers were dismissed in the South compared with only 40% in the North. Sex on duty also had varying dismissal rates but with a reversed effect with only 20% of officers in the South, 100%

in the Midlands, and 50% in the North losing their jobs due to such activity.

Guidance on what discipline outcome to apply to any officer found guilty of misconduct, including sexual misconduct, is provided to all police forces in England and Wales by the College of Policing (2017). This advises the seriousness of misconduct must be assessed through the officer's culpability and harm caused plus aggravating and mitigating factors. Where there has been 'a desire to establish a sexual or inappropriate emotional relationship with a colleague or a member of the public' and/or where the victim is vulnerable, the misconduct should be treated very seriously (College of Policing, 2017b, p. 18). Despite this clear guidance, there are differences in dismissal outcomes with the lowest recorded outcome level for this behaviour found in this research as a written warning, and fewer officers being dismissed in the North of England than in the South. The reasons for this are unclear but highlight potential differences in management practice.

Also, of interest, it may be that sexually inappropriate behaviour is assessed with greater seriousness when the officer is of rank. In relation to sexual misconduct directed towards colleagues, 50% of officers in this sample who were above the rank of Sergeant were dismissed compared with 41% of constables. In contrast, in the NHS, nurses were more likely to be struck off for the same behaviour than Doctors who were retained in post (Searle *et al.*, 2017).

It is important to note that there was a 100% dismissal rate for officers who had sexual relationships with offenders but not for those who had relationships with victims and witnesses. This may give the impression of a difference in perceived seriousness by the police yet both behaviours are abuse of position for a sexual purpose and, arguably, should have the same outcome. Another explanation to account for this is the known differences in how female officers are treated within policing generally: they are subjected to greater levels of sexual harassment and are less likely to

reach higher-ranking positions than male officers (de Haas *et al.*, 2009; Morabito and Shelley, 2018). Given the higher proportion of female officers in the sex with offender category, differences in outcome may be another example of gender bias within the police.

Limitations

A limitation of this research was that not all police forces share the outcomes of their misconduct hearings online, and for those who do, there were variations on the amount of information provided. A minority of forces posted comprehensive summaries of the misconduct and even gave the full name of the officer. Others posted minimal information, merely stating the area of police regulations breached. Subsequent research currently obtains more detailed case information, directly from police forces.

Conclusion

This research used publicly available data found on Welsh and English police force websites to understand the current picture of police sexual misconduct. Eight categories of sexual misconduct were identified, and the most frequently occurring type involved officers having sexual relationships with vulnerable victims of crime. However, for this type of misconduct, dismissal rates were lower in the North than in the South of the country. Sexual misconduct directed towards colleagues was also prevalent and almost always involved a male officer of rank as perpetrator, and a female of a lower rank as the victim. Instances of police sexual misconduct involving juveniles appear much lower in the UK than in the USA. However, the number of volunteer police officers (Specials) was high in this category, and this should raise concern as they are subject to less training and supervision than regular police officers. This research has implications for standardization of police practice, and consideration of which victims may be most at risk, from which officers.

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