

Abstract

Police sexual violence is an under-researched topic that demands more scholarly attention. The existing research suggests that the scope of the problem is much larger than expected. Restrictions of scientific knowledge production are caused by the lack of available police data regarding police sexual violence, since police departments put a lot of effort into controlling the narrative around them. Additionally, police sexual violence cases are handled by the police themselves, thus most victims do not expect that they can successfully report their victimization. Sexual victimization varies by victim. Minors, sex workers, spouses and children, people of color, women and men, queer people, police officers and personnel are all victimized in different ways and contexts. The social relations that make this scope of police sexual violence possible are also various, ranging from hegemonic masculinity and cultural disregard for people suspected of violating the law to widespread substance abuse among police officers, all in the context of the capitalist mode of production of US society. As with most problems of policing, the solution is not reform but thorough societal change.

Introduction

When it comes to misconduct and crimes committed by police officers, most people, including politicians and journalists, tend to look the other way. If newspapers happen to report on an unlawful killing by a police officer, they use passive phrasing like “officer-involved shooting”. However, police killings are not the only topic ignored by policymakers, journalists, and the public. This paper analyses police sexual violence, an often-overlooked issue of police criminality. Police sexual violence ranges from inappropriate strip searches to officer involvement in sex trafficking, sexual violence, and rape. This paper will analyze and summarize previous research on police sexual misconduct, supporting academic findings with real-life examples from law enforcement officers in the United States.

Defining Police Sexual Violence

The term police sexual misconduct (PSM) refers to all sexual acts deemed inappropriate, committed by a police officer on or off duty. That includes watching porn on the phone, masturbating in the police car, having sex with another police officer, and inappropriate flirting with a victim, witness, or suspect. PSM also includes consensual sex between two or more on-duty police officers or sex that is initiated by “police groupies” who seek attention and sexual relationships with officers (Stinson et al., 2014; Stinson et al., 2015b). While not all PSM is harmful to the people involved, and not all PSM does even involve a second person, police sexual violence (PSV) includes all acts with sexual components based on coercion, threat, or use of force committed by a police officer. It includes a wide range of actions from verbal harassment of a person because of their sex, gender identity, or sexual orientation to unwanted touching, groping, assault, or rape (Purvis & Blanco, 2020).

A person in police custody generally cannot consent to sexual activity because they are already in a non-consensual situation in which they do not wield any power. Police officers cannot assess if the person is open to sexual behavior because they submit to police power or not. Nevertheless, police claim that some suspects try to get out of a situation involving law enforcement by engaging in sex with the officer; however, since this involves the threat of punishment, these sexual encounters cannot be seen as consensual, thus not merely as police sexual misconduct. As Purvis and Blanco (2020) state:

In some circumstances [...] a person might give expressed consent while subjectively feeling that they did not want to engage in sexual activity, but because of fear or threats or coercion felt that they had no choice but to allow sexual contact to proceed.

Therefore, within the context of a police officer wielding their power over a member of the public, consent is impossible.

Methods

The basis of this paper is relevant articles in the field of PSV research. Looking up papers on PSV on academic search engines like OneSearch or Google Scholar posed a problem: search engines look for articles that contain the given words, yet they do not look for the meaning these words may have together. Thus, looking up “police sex crimes” or “police as sexual perpetrators” does not result in a variety of PSV

research studies but in studies that, for example, analyze reporting patterns of sexual violence by strangers to police or books that offer a general overview of police work with victims of sexual violence. The solution to this problem was the use of large language models (LLM) ChatGPT and DeepSeek. LLMs have the advantage that they interpret the meaning of the words in combination; thus, they “know” that they were not looking for articles that contain the words “police”, “sexual violence” etc., but that the articles were supposed to deal with the phenomenon of police sexual violence.

The first wave of academic articles the LLMs found was skim-read to scan the articles for their utility for this project. The second wave of articles were taken from the reference section of the first wave of articles. The reference section of the second wave was then again searched for relevant articles that met the criteria and had not been found during the first two waves already. The following findings represent the summarized research of all relevant articles.

Critically Assessing the Available Data

Most police departments do not report violations by their officers, and those that do often do not report extensively. For example, by 2018, only 1,600 out of 18,000 law enforcement agencies, about 9%, in the US had agreed to submit data to an FBI database (Stinson, 2020). Criminologists who research police sexual misconduct and sexual violence face the same, if not higher, obstacles in regard to data collection. Thus, the data we are working with is abysmally underreported and only represents the tip of the iceberg of police sexual misconduct.

Former police officer and now critical criminologist Phillip Stinson, specialized in police sexual misconduct, suggests that less than 10% of cases of PSV are reported (2015b). This is for a variety of reasons. Sexual assault is very intimate and personal by nature, and victims are generally unlikely to make a report. Often victims have trouble seeing themselves as victims of sexual assault, or they blame themselves for the attack. In cases where the perpetrator is a police officer, victims are even less likely to come forward and report the assault because they feel humiliated or are afraid of retaliation (Stinson et al. 2014). Many victims of PSV are sex workers, economically disenfranchised women, or people of color (POC). Victims already have a negative perception of the police, reducing the chance of reporting. Additionally, many reported cases of PSV are either ignored by the authorities or do not even make it into the system at all (Stinson, 2014). In fact, in many cases, police officers harass victims who made a report or who plan to make a report against another officer (Walker & Irlbeck, 2003).

Police officers are at least three times more likely to commit an act of sexual assault than the general population. (67.8/100,000 compared to only 28.7 /100,000) (Gonzales et al., 2016). About 25% of all women who participated in a drug court reported having been sexually assaulted by a police officer (ibid.). A six-year study using data from 2009 to 2014 found that 1.000 officers lost their jobs during that time for PSV (Purvis & Blanco, 2020). In total, the United States employs about 2.2 million public law enforcement officers in more than 18,000 state and federal agencies (Policy Circle, n.d.). About 0.64% of the US population are law enforcement officers (2.2 million /341.8 million), yet they are responsible for at least 2% of all sexual assault cases (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). Finally, police intern voices suggest that about 5% of all police officers will commit at least one sex crime, if not more, during their service. If true, this adds up to about 50,000 sworn law enforcement officers who committed or will commit an act of sexual violence (Maher, 2021).

Adding on, according to previous research, between 20% to 40% of police officers admitted in self-report studies to have engaged in domestic violence in the year previous to each study (Stinson & Liederbach, 2013). A study by Stinson & Liederbach on officer-involved domestic violence (OIDV) showed 16% of crimes related to PSV. As mentioned above, the total number of law enforcement officers in the US is about 2.2 million. This indicates that up to 880,000 police families are exposed to OIDV annually. Furthermore, 16% of these are up to 140,000 who are experiencing at least some kind of PSV. Furthermore, about 46.5% of PSV cases happen in the South as compared to circa 20% in the Northeast, 20% in the West, and only 14% in the Midwest (Stinson et al., 2014; Stinson et al., 2015b). Police officers who engage in PSV tend to be pattern-prone perpetrators who offend repeatedly (Stinson et al., 2014; Stinson et al., 2015b). More than half of the victims are under the age of 18 (Stinson et al, 2015b; Maher, 2021). Officers with less than ten years of service are most likely to engage in acts of PSV, followed by officers with 18 or

more years of service (Stinson et al., 2015b). Generally, police officers who graduated from large classes and who serve in municipal departments compared to rural departments are most likely to commit acts of PSV (Stinson et al, 2015b; Gonzalez et al., 2016).

Perpetrators of sexual violence often victimize several people over time if not caught, with an average of five victims per perpetrator (Purvis and Blanco, 2020). Considering the 50,000 police officers who commit at least one act of sexual violence during their career, the number of sex crimes committed by police officers in the US is over 250,000. The duration of average service years of a police officer is 15-20 years. This indicates that at least 12,500 to 16,500 people are sexually assaulted by police officers each year (250,000/15 – 250,000/20).

The Victims

Police usually do not victimize at random. Their victimization pattern deeply intersects with most victims being from vulnerable populations such as, POCs, women, queer people, sex workers, and people suspected or convicted of a crime. Police officers victimize these demographics most often since they're perceived as less credible, making it harder for the victims to come forward and less likely for the officer to be reprimanded. While the following categories all describe a distinct type of PSV victim, these categories overlap a lot in reality. Black, Hispanic, and Asian women are more likely to be victimized by police officers than White sex workers, queer people, women drivers are. One exception to this is victims of PSV in the context of OIDV. The majority of police officers in the US are straight, White men, and since about 93.4% of married White men are married to a White woman, most victims of officer-involved domestic violence are also White women (Statimetric, 2022; Data US, n.d.). Additionally, police officers are highly unlikely to victimize members of the higher class: nearly all their victims are members of the working class. This is not surprising, given the role of police as protectors of private property. The experiences of all victims of PSV differ, significantly shaped by the dominating social structures within the capitalist superstructure, like patriarchy, racial oppression, or heteronormativity.

Minors

The available data suggests that a little more than half of the victims of police officers' sexual violence are minors, usually between 11 and 17 years old (Stinson et al, 2015b; Maher, 2021). A high number of these cases happen off duty. For example, many people trust police officers to babysit their children without a second thought because of the perceived trustworthiness that comes with the badge. One example is James Weems Jr., a retired Baltimore police officer, who worked for a daycare owned by his wife, a bus driver, sexually abused several of the children (Lockman, 2025). Since police officers are generally deemed trustworthy, when a child accuses an officer of improper behavior, parents/adults often do not believe the child (Stinson et al., 2014).

Another source of underage victims, about 40%, stems from ride-alongs in police cars in the context of law enforcement career exploration programs. Police officers take students on a ride-along, park the car at a spot they deem secure and coerce the student to engage in sexual activities with them. (Walker & Irlbeck, 2003; Stinson et al., 2015b). However, the incidences do not always happen during these ride-alongs; sometimes, those are only used to initiate contact with the victims. One example comes from Louisville officers Kenneth Betts and Brandon Wood who sexually abused a 17-year-old girl that took part in the Louisville Metro Police Department (LMPD) Explorer Program. Additionally, the LMPD has been accused of hiding more than 730,000 records related to sexual abuse of minors by police officers (Uyeda, 2020). A further threat is posed by School Resource Officers (SROs), or School Safety Agents (SSAs). Being the highest authority in school, and often alone on a shift, several SROs have sexually assaulted high school students (Vitale, 2024). If we consider the 10% reporting rate experts of PSV expect, we get to at least 2,000 cases in 17 years, from 2005 to 2022, that is about 118 SROs annually who engage in sexual violence against students. However, the number of victims needs to be assumed even higher than that since police officers who engage in PSV tend to have multiple victims. Additionally, with the rise of the internet, police officers increasingly victimize children virtually by using social media and messenger apps.

Sex Workers

About 38% of all sex workers have been exposed to police sexual violence (Murphy-Stanley, 2022). In many cases, police officers demand sex or sexual acts from sex workers to avoid arrest. Police officers often pose as buyers of sex in order to prove that the targeted person is offering full-service sex work. However, instead of arresting them when they have the necessary information, they still have sex with them before they let them know that they are police officers and arrest them (Maher, 2021; Murphy-Stanley, 2022). Additionally, in recent years, police officers have been charged with and convicted of coercing women to work as full-service sex workers for them and of leading sex trafficking rings (Vitale, 2017). Oftentimes, these cases are unreported since they involve a large number of officers, if not all officers of a police department. An exception to this was the 2018 indictment of seven NYPD officers in New York. For many years, the officers ran a ‘prostitution ring’ in Nassau County, Queens, and Brooklyn, and used their access to police information to protect the organization (New York City Police Department 2018, September).

Driving While Female

The term *driving while female* (DWF) was coined by the criminologists Samuel Walker and Dawn Irlbeck to describe sexual acts of police officers during traffic stops. About one in five cases of PSV includes a driving while female situation (Walker & Irlbeck, 2003). Police officers often stop girls or women they deem attractive, trying to get their contact information like a phone number or social media account. In some cases, officers go much further and sexually harass or even rape their victims. One example of such a case is Jarrod Gailen Webster from the Killen Police Department in Alabama. On November 12, 2023, Webster conducted a traffic stop during which he handcuffed and raped the driver. Officers who sexually abuse women during traffic stops purposefully do not inform their dispatcher about the stop to deny that it even happened if the victim files a complaint (Stinson, 2020). According to Phillip Stinson (2020), these acts are not isolated incidents but “...are crimes committed by serial sexual predators who happen to be employed as police officers.” Considering that most people in the US start driving by the age of 16, driving while female incidents partly explain why more than half the victims of sexual violence committed by police officers are under the age of 18.

Black, Indigenous, and People of Color

While about 67% of the US population identifies as White, only 18% of people who became victims of sexual violence are White, showing how sexual violence disproportionately targets communities of color. Black people generally face abuse by police at much higher rates than any other demographic, thus it is not surprising that the data suggests that impoverished Black women are the most likely to fall victim to sexual violence by police officers, closely followed by Hispanics, Indigenous people, Asians and immigrants. Some police officers use their access to the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) to find their victims: They often chose poor women of color with criminal records because they know this demographic is least likely to be believed if they come forward and speak about their victimization (Stinson, 2020; Maher, 2021). Black women and Latinas have also historically been stereotyped as being sexually promiscuous, making it more likely for prosecutors and the public to believe that the sex was consensual, and less likely for the officer to face repercussions (Purvis & Blanko, 2020). Because the victims also know that there is no chance that they will be treated fairly and get justice, most of them never come forward. As the case of Abner Louima shows men of color are also exposed to PSV. Louima, a Haitian man, had been arrested by two NYPD officers in 1998 and violently raped by the officers with a broom stick (Purvis & Blanko, 2020).

Queer People

Another demographic repeatedly victimized by police officers are queer people. Historically, gays and lesbians have been the most targeted queer demographic; however, in recent decades, transgender and gender non-conforming people have been more likely to become victims of police sexual violence. A study surveying queer people in the US by the Williams Institute from 2020 showed that 3% of respondents have experienced sexual harassment by the police. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health

Services Administration (2022), there are about 12 million queer people in the United States. A 3% rate of sexual harassment suggests that 360,000 queer people have experienced sexual harassment by the police. This shows that sexual harassment by police is not an uncommon experience for queer people. As always, this harassment is strongly intersectional: Black transgender women are most likely to be victimized by police officers (Williams Institute, 2020). One example of explicitly queerphobic sexual abuse of a queer person by a police officer is the unfortunate story of Charles Norwood who, in 2010, was repeatedly arrested for a minor violations and placed in a cell by Officer Steward who demanded sexual acts from Norwood. (The Chicago Reporter, n.d.).

Domestic Partners of Police Officers

The problem with OIDV in the United States has long been established (FBI Academy Behavioral Science Unit & Sheelan, 2000; Stinson & Liederbach, 2013). Yet, despite a substantial and still-growing body of research on the topic, its true extent can only be speculated upon. Johnson (1991) states that "...40 percent of the officers stated that in the last six months prior to the survey they had gotten out of control and behaved violently against their spouse and children." A study by Nedig et al. (1992) partly corroborates these findings and reports 24-40% rates of OIDV by police officers (Stinson & Liederbach, 2013). Both studies suggest that police officers are 4 times more likely to engage in acts of domestic violence, including sexual violence.

Others

There are many other demographics that are sexually victimized by the police. The types of victims mentioned in the paragraphs above are not an exhaustive list of victim types of PSV, but represent the most common demographic of victims. For instance, a survey of New York City youth (minors and young people 18 years or older) reported that two out of five (about 40%) of young women have been sexually harassed by a police officer at least once (Katovich & Park, 2018). This shows that minors are not the only young people repeatedly victimized by police. Another source of sexual misconduct is the rank system of law enforcement. Some officers of higher ranks abuse their power to coerce lower-ranked officers to engage in sexual activities, as the case of Jeffrey Maddrey shows. Maddrey, Chief of the NYPD, forced several subordinate female officers to have sex with him. He also helped another officer to retaliate against a female officer who filed a sexual harassment complaint against him (Meko et al., 2024).

Why are Police Officers committing Sexual Violence at such a high Rate?

There are several phenomena that favor PSV, such as police culture, capitalism, and lack of accountability.

Police Culture

General Disregard for People's Rights

A problem within the police is the disregard for human beings who are *accused* of having committed a crime. Many police officers who engage in illegal violence or sexual violence often deny their victim's humanity since they are seen as being on the wrong side of the thin blue line. As a result, police officers see their violence as deterrent, just retaliation or punishment (Stinson, 2020). Officers often see their acts of sexual violence against sex workers and previously convicted women not only as an act without a victim but also as moral an act of moral punishment. And police officers are trained, in the academies and with their partners on the beat, to not trust people who are not police officers themselves (Maher, 2021; Simon, 2024). This distrust of non-police together with disdain for suspects and people known to the police is a fertile ground for police misconduct including PSV.

The Blue Wall of Silence

The so-called *blue wall of silence* is a second contributing factor to the proliferation of police misconduct like PSV. Police officers generally do not report other police officers' misconduct and criminality, nor do they tell the truth if they are questioned or interrogated regarding police misconduct (Hoberman, 2017; Maher, 2021). However, the blue wall of silence is not always only socially enforced but

sometimes also with violence like the cases of Frank Serpico and Adrian Schoolcraft show. Serpico was a whistleblower who informed the public about the wide spread corruption within the NYPD and was not supported by his NYPD colleagues present at the scene after he got shot in the head and nearly died. Additionally, Schoolcraft, another whistleblower, who recorded orders by superiors to fulfill illegal arrest quotas, was forced into a psych ward while the NYPD leadership tried to get him labeled as psychotic, in order to discredit him and his information (Rayman, 2013).

Masculinity

The culture of police is deeply influenced by hegemonic masculinity, which describes the dominant vision of how to be a man. According to Purvis and Blanco (2020), “[b]ecause masculinity is [...] intersectional, hegemonic masculinity [...] describes the upper middle class White male professional who represents the ideal version of masculinity because of the important relationship between masculinity and breadwinning”. This obviously leaves out the majority of men who have to find ways to prove their masculinity and that is usually done by physical, hypermasculine acts (Purvis & Blanco, 2020).

Due to their position within the criminal legal system, police officers can engage in violent behavior with little scrutiny or rejection since society accepts violent behavior to be part of the police profession. Thus, police officers’ hypermasculine behavior is morally sanctioned. Additionally, policing is seen as a blue-collar job; police officers are likely to feel the need to prove their masculinity by hypermasculine behavior in order to assert their status as a man (Purvis & Blanco, 2020). This hypermasculine culture within police departments comes with problematic attitudes, including the view of women, queer people and sex workers as being lesser. As the research by Samantha Simons (2024) shows, the presence of women within the structure of modern-day police is often used to degrade male officers. When female officers outperform male officers, higher-ups usually use this to insult the men. Generally, female cadets and the spectre of femininity serves as the background against which police cadets are evaluated. (ibid.). The message purveyed is clear: women are weaker, thus lesser than men.

Social values based on exclusion and competition like masculinities are an expression of what Karl Marx called *Entfremdung*, or *alienation*. The German term refers to the act of becoming estranged. In the Marxian sense, we become estranged from our environment, other humans, and ourselves. In order to substitute for this alienation, we create other types of bonds, based on identities like nationality, political opinion or, like in this case, gender (Tucker, Marx, & Engels, 1978). While policing is necessary to protect capitalist property relations, it also mirrors its philosophy: the strongest people have the power to determine what happens in each situation. While capitalists’ power is derived from their relationship to the means of production, the power of masculinity is derived from the use of force.

Substance Abuse

Another problem is substance abuse by officers. Experts estimate that about 10% of police officers are abusing steroids, with large departments, like the NYPD, having rates of steroid abusing officers estimated to be as high as 25% (Hoberman, 2017). High levels of alcohol abuse among police officers are not a rare occasion either. A study by the Butler Center for Research found that 37.6% of urban police officers in the United States engage in problematic drinking behavior (Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation, 2015). The widespread abuse of steroids and alcohol among law enforcement officers is an important cause of the high rates of police sexual misconduct and abuse.

Lack of Accountability

Police officers rarely face repercussions for any acts of assault, sexual or non-sexual, and are widely regarded among criminologists and other experts to be exempt from law enforcement, since police officers usually do not arrest other police officers. (Stinson et al, 2015b). Contrary to popular believe body cams, harsher punishment for police misconduct and education on civil and criminal liability do not prevent police officers from engaging in sexual assault, or violent behavior in general (Gonzales et al., 2016). One reason for this is that even ‘harsher’ punishment usually only translates to the reduction of vacation days or short-term administrative leave by full payment. Additionally, many police officers accused of sex crimes

escape the loss of their badge by simply moving to another law enforcement agency (Ibid.). About 20% of police officers convicted of a violent crime simply get rehired at another police department (Stinson, 2020).

Furthermore, Patrolmen's Benevolence Associations (PBA) try everything to keep cases of police sexual misconduct out of public awareness. According to the ACLU the PBA "... seeks to keep such allegations of sexual abuse [...] out of the public eye, in part by arguing that police sexual misconduct is not an "abuse of authority"" (Katovich & Park, 2018).

Capitalism

The police are part of the executive arm of the state which is itself an agent of class war, always benefiting the dominant class and its interests. In a capitalist society that is the capitalist class (Karl Marx, 1867/1976). This material relationship is conditional for the operation of the police, the focus it lays and the decision its leaders are making. Historically, the state emerged in human society at the intersection of those who own property and those who do not. It was constructed to prevent those who lack property from rising up and overthrowing the ruling class of society. Thus, the police are foremost there to prevent revolution, not to fight crime (Neocleous, 2025). Furthermore, capitalism is a system that needs the working class to be divided and also to veil the class nature of its economic mode of exploitation. This is achieved through racism, misogyny, queerphobia and xenophobia. How and in what way those are expressed differs strongly between society, time and country. The workers fight over issues of culture, immigration, gender, ethnicity etc. consequently, they do not realize that the source of their suffering is not a difference of skin tone, gender, religion or country of origin but the exploitation through the capitalist class. Thus, capitalism needs both, a police force it can trust and misogynist (and other) narratives dividing the people in order to preserve class relations to secure exploitation. Implementing measures to prevent police sexual violence would be interpreted as an attack by the ruling class on police officers and as a sign of distrust, thus alienate police officers from the ruling class. The ruling class need to know the police are on their side, and they need to keep the working class divided to prevent revolution, that is, actual change. In conclusion, capitalist class exploitation keeps politicians from taking meaningful action against police sexual violence.

Police Do Not Prevent or Investigate Sexual Violence

Contrary to popular opinion, police do extraordinarily little to prevent acts of sexual violence. Only one third of sexual assaults are reported, with some estimates stating that only 20% are reported. But even if they are reported to the police they are often not investigated (Maher, 2021). Police claim a nationwide clearance rate of sexual assault cases of 32% which is already disturbingly low if we consider that 80-90% of all victims know their perpetrator (Awad and Saunders, 1991; Maher, 2021). The use of the term clearance rate is also misleading, as that means an *arrest* has been made, not that they arrested the right person nor that the person also got convicted. The actual clearance rate, meaning someone got convicted, is deemed by experts to be only about 16% (Maher, 2021). This 16% is as small as 5.3-3.2% if we consider that most sexual assaults are never even reported. Given that this is an estimated average, we must also consider that some municipalities have even lower rates. Considering the high number of acts of sexual violence committed by the police, of which we only have underreported data, we can at least assume that the police and the criminal legal system only do little to prevent sexual violence or to bring justice to the victims. Generally, policing has been shown to not be an effective means in reducing crime (Pratt & Cullen, 2005).

Reform or Revolution?

Each time problems with law enforcement are publicly discussed, some advocates demand reforming the institution of police and policy makers are often willing to give us watered down reforms. However, those are either small in their impact, had no impact at all or made things even worse. The now infamous chokehold which an officer applied when he killed Eric Garner on Staten Island in 2014 was itself the result of a reform to reduce the high rates of police shootings. The police officer who killed George Floyd was not only taking part in his department's bias training, but he was the instructor. Police bodycams were another call to reform to prevent police misconduct. Created by the company Axon (formerly Taser), and instilled by them into reform movements, body cams are now used to support the position of police

officers. The problem with body cams is that their footage is only accessible by Axon and the police, not by the public or prosecutors. It is often edited and otherwise altered in order to strengthen the position of the police narrative when confronted with accusations of police misconduct. In many cases the footage is simply not made available at all.

Police departments promise to implement zero tolerance policies, more accountability and more severe punishment every time police abuse or misconduct makes the headlines, yet officers are still rarely disciplined. For example, the problem with officers' abuse of steroids has been known at least since the '80s but no department in the US is testing its officers for steroids (Hoberman, 2017). Furthermore, more funding for better training is rarely used for its intended purpose but is usually spent on supplies, higher wages, new gear and vehicles for the departments. Despite all these reforms, the rate of people killed by police has increased by about 35% since 2020: from about 1,000 per year to more than 1,350 people killed in 2024. Violent crime did not significantly increase during that time, neither did non-violent crime (Campaign Zero, 2025).

The best way to reduce police sexual violence is to reduce police officers' interactions with the public. This can be done by reducing the tasks assigned to police. There are a variety of approaches to the tasks police officers are assigned that strongly correlate with PSV, such as school safety and the apprehension of sex workers. These abolitionist approaches are not only effective but also noncorrosive, nonviolent, and respect the people and help to build stronger communities.

A great example of how to reduce the occurrence rate of police sexual violence is the decriminalization of sex work. If sex work is not prosecuted police officers have less power to abuse sex workers. As mentioned above, PSV is a common problem for sex workers, but the decriminalization of sex work would have additional benefits. Due to a legal mishap, Rhode Island legalized indoor prostitution from 2003 to 2009¹. A study analyzing data from that time period suggests a decline of sexual violence in general by 30% and a decline of STDs by 40% (Cunningham & Shah, 2014). The data also shows that other crimes did not decrease during that time; the rates of robbery, murder, assault etc. stayed the same. This happened despite the police having more resources available to deal with these types of crime, since they didn't police sex workers anymore (ibid.). Thus, this study shows that increased police resources are not equivalent to a reduction in crime.

Another source of PSV is police involvement in schools, either as SROs or in the above-mentioned ride-alongs. The idea of school policing imagines that police officers prevent school shootings and crimes on school grounds. Both narratives have been disproved repeatedly. For example, Tom Mowen, a researcher with focus on school resource officers said: "For someone to suggest that SROs prevent school shootings is absolutely unfounded in [sic] terms of science. There's no support for that statement at all" (Schlemer, 2019). However, what school policing does is to criminalize children and teenagers for age-typical behavior and minor transgressions. From a pedagogical perspective, conflicts on school grounds offer a valuable opportunity to teach students how to manage intense emotions, insults, status claims, and related dynamics. The police do not offer such an emotional-growth-based approach to conflict. They offer a criminal record and future difficulties to secure a job; thus, police intervention in high schools is itself often criminogenic. School policing brings the devastating, racialized effects of modern policing from the streets into the schools. It is highly racialized and targets students of color much more than other demographics. For example, in Milwaukee, Leaders Igniting for Transformation compiled a report that found that "the 50% of Black students made up 84 percent of all police referrals" (Vitale, 2024). School policing has become one of the most damaging experiments in US educational history. Removing SRO programs will not only reduce PSV rates but also reduce the harassment of students, especially students of color, by the criminal legal system.

In the end, no approach that seeks to reduce police misconduct and policing itself, no matter how radical or abolitionist it may be, can truly end police violence. Police are the executive force of the state, a construct that historically emerged to protect the interests of property-owning classes from those who do not own property. The dialectical relationship between the capitalists and the workers requires the capitalist

¹ Prostitution was actually legalized by a law from 1980. However, nobody knew that until the 2003 court case.

state to employ a police force whose purpose is ultimately to protect the capitalists' property and to prevent revolution. Only when we overcome this class society, that is, when we abolish capitalism, can we work on a way of dealing with people's harmful behavior that is truly meaningful and effective. This makes a socialist system, meaning a system in which the means of production are mutually owned by the people, not a small sect of property-owning capitalists, necessary to put an end to sexual abuse by law enforcement. Nevertheless, a socialist restructuring of society alone will not be sufficient. Projects, movements, and organizations driven and led by the people targeting racism, queerphobia, the patriarchy etc., will be most important too.

Conclusion

Police sexual violence is an overlooked problem within policing in the United States. Police officers victimize tens of thousands, mostly young, women every year. This is because law enforcement agencies, prosecutors, judges, and politicians are not interested in preventing, reducing, or prosecuting police misconduct. Additionally, since the media presents most cases of police misconduct, no matter if sexual or non-sexual, as an exception, despite them being systemic problems, the general public is not aware about its scale. Since predatory officers know that poor women of color, formerly convicted women, trans people, and sex workers are not seen as credible in our society, they mostly victimize these populations. The problem of PSV will not disappear as long as the system remains the same. As the experience of the last decades clearly shows, there is no reform, no zero-tolerance approach, that will significantly reduce the problem. It is but a byproduct of a misogynist society that throws law enforcement and punishment on every problem that arises. The problem of PSV cannot be dealt with by simple police reforms but by significantly restructuring society and by implementing alternative approaches to crime, including the reduction of the use of police.

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