



The Super Predators

When the Man Who Abuses You Is also a Cop

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In 1991, a researcher at Arizona State University testified to a congressional committee about a survey she'd conducted of more than 700 police officers. Forty percent admitted that they had “behaved violently against their spouse and children” in the past six months (although the study didn't define “violence.”) In a 1992 survey of 385 male officers, 28 percent admitted to acts of physical aggression against a spouse in the last year—including pushing, kicking, hitting, strangling and using a knife or gun. Both studies cautioned that the real numbers could be even higher; there has been startlingly little research since.

Even counting arrests of officers for domestic crimes is no simple undertaking, because there are no government statistics. Jonathan Blanks, a Cato Institute researcher who publishes a daily [rundup](#) of police misconduct, said that in the thousands of news reports he has compiled, domestic violence is “the most common violent crime for which police officers are arrested.” And yet most of the arrested officers appear to keep their jobs.

Philip Stinson, an associate professor of criminal justice at Bowling Green State University in Ohio, uses an elaborate set of Google news alerts to identify arrests of law enforcement personnel and then attempts to track the outcome through news reports and court records. Between 2005 and 2012, he found 1,143 cases in which an officer was arrested for a crime of domestic violence. While he emphasized that his data is incomplete, he discovered convictions in only 30 percent of the cases. In 38 percent, officers either resigned or were fired and in 17 percent, he found no evidence of adverse consequences at all. Stinson noted that it wasn't uncommon for police to be extended a “professional courtesy” in the form of a lesser charge that might help them avoid the Lautenberg Amendment. Officers could be booked for disorderly conduct instead of domestic assault. If they were charged with domestic violence, the prosecutor might allow them to plead to a different offense. Stinson has identified dozens of officers who are still working even after being convicted.

Through public records requests, we also obtained hundreds of internal domestic abuse complaints made about police officers between 2014 and 2016 in 8 of the 10 largest cities in the country. Officers can be penalized internally whether or not criminal charges are filed—although the penalties may be minor and many complaints are not substantiated. An [ABC 7](#)

investigation this February found that nine of every 10 domestic violence allegations made against Chicago police officers by spouses or children resulted in no disciplinary action.

What is striking in many of the internal complaints, as well as incidents we found in news reports, is the degree of alleged violence and how often it appears to coincide with the misuse of police authority. An officer in New Jersey was indicted in January after he allegedly used his identification to enter the hotel room of a woman he was dating, fired a gun in her direction, assaulted her to get her to recant a statement, and attacked an officer who was working with investigators. He pleaded not guilty. So did a veteran Cleveland officer who was arrested the same month for allegedly beating his girlfriend with his service gun, firing shots near her head, then sexually assaulting her at gunpoint. Last September, an officer in Indiana was arrested for assaulting his ex-girlfriend for years—after previously alleging that she had abused him. (The case has not yet gone to trial.) And in 2013, a San Antonio police officer allegedly hit his wife with a gun and pointed it at his children. He ultimately pleaded no-contest to “making an obscene gesture.” Because he was not convicted of a domestic violence offense, he kept his officer’s license.

Despite the scarcity of data, the IACP has acknowledged that domestic violence is likely “at least” as prevalent within in police families as in the general population. Which is significant: One third of women are estimated to experience sexual or physical violence or stalking by a partner during their lifetime. This is why, since the late 1990s, Wynn has focused on exposing the problem of abusive officers and persuading police departments to address it. As he sees it, the issue triggers every possible defensive instinct a cop might possess: romantic, protective, fraternal, tribal: “It’s the last frontier of policing.”