

Op-Ed: Police Misconduct Harms Everyone, Part 2

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In [Part 1](#) of this series I offered several possible definitions for police misconduct and discussed several of the more general aspects of the topic.

In this part of the series I list a few specific examples of prior incidents of misconduct at the Long Beach Police Department (LBPd) as well as some attempts to quantify and analyze police misconduct throughout the nation.

Examples of past misconduct

Throughout LBPd's history there have unfortunately been a number of examples of severe misconduct by its (now former) officers.

In 2013 a former detective was [arrested and prosecuted](#) for using her position to help a criminal street gang.

In 2013 a former officer [pleaded guilty](#) to several counts of sexual misconduct.

In 2012 a former officer charged with [assaulting his wife](#) was sentenced to 12 years and four months in state prison.

In 2010 a former officer [pleaded guilty](#) to stealing firearms.

This was not intended to be a complete or comprehensive list by any means. There are many other regrettable incidents of proven misconduct by former LBPd officers and, in most every case, the misconduct occurred while the officers were on duty.

Perspective

Habitual critics of the department often seem to take great pleasure in posting more comprehensive lists of this type but seem strangely reluctant to acknowledge that in each case of police misconduct there exist department policies that prohibit all of it.

Similarly, these critics often lack a certain measure of perspective. Instances of any degree of proven misconduct arguably represent less than 1% of the total activity in which LBPD officers engage throughout any given year. While all misconduct is wrong and should be condemned, proven misconduct at LBPD is neither an “epidemic” nor even “common.” Misconduct is the notable *exception* to the vast rule of professional police activity in Long Beach.

As a moderately productive patrol officer at LBPD, I typically engaged in about 60-70 policing activities per shift (parking and traffic enforcement, subject contacts, arrests, calls for service, investigations, reports, etc.) At the time there were about 850 sworn officers in the department. For the sake of argument, let’s say the average activity level for each officer was 50 per shift, times 850 equals 42,500 police activities per shift department-wide, times about 180 work days per year equals 7.7 million police activities department-wide per year, times 20 years equals 154 million police activities over 20 years department-wide.

I challenge anyone to develop a comprehensive list of proven LBPD misconduct incidents over 20 years, total them up, compare them with 154 million, and try to convince any reasonable person that proven misconduct at LBPD is an “epidemic” or even “common.”

Attempts to quantify and analyze police misconduct

There have been several rather ad-hoc attempts to quantify and analyze police misconduct over the years in both the public and the private sectors. In my opinion, none of them have had much long-term or truly probative value.

Public Sector

The U.S. Department of Justice, [Bureau of Justice Statistics](#) (BJS) has conducted a number of surveys and published reports broadly related to the topic but, to my knowledge, does not oversee any continuous program to collect and analyze data related to police misconduct throughout the United States. I believe it should do so. I do not think the BJS has the constitutional authority to *mandate* that state and local agencies share their misconduct complaint data but I do think those agencies should agree to do so *voluntarily*.

The State of California licenses all state and local police officers in the state and also sets standards for peace officer training through its [Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training](#) (POST). For this reason and others I think all such agencies should be required to share their misconduct complaint data with the State Department of Justice (DoJ). To my knowledge this does not occur and beyond sometimes investigating crimes committed by police or accepting [misconduct complaints](#) under very limited circumstances, the State DoJ does not appear to collect any comprehensive data on police misconduct.

The Los Angeles County District Attorney’s Office has a [Justice System Integrity Division](#) which is responsible for investigating and prosecuting any allegation of criminal misconduct committed by a peace officer within the county, whether on or off duty. Investigators and Deputy D.A.’s from this Division also respond on all officer-involved hit shootings in the county and investigate them concurrently with, but independently from, the involved agency and, in the case

of fatalities, with the County Coroner's Office. Again, though, the District Attorney does not appear to collect or analyze data of officer misconduct within the county.

Private Sector

The most common result of a standard Boolean search related to Officer Misconduct reporting and tracking appears to be a project the CATO Institute currently produces called the [National Police Misconduct Reporting Project](#) (NPMRP.) NPMRP began in 2009 as a private project but the owner transferred the rights to CATO in 2012. NPMRP offers a number of valuable resources and provides a "Daily Feed" of misconduct reports from around the nation. Although part of the original intent of NPMRP was to document police misconduct on an ongoing and comprehensive basis, the project has produced only two such reports, in [2009](#) and [2010](#), and no reports at all since CATO assumed control of the effort in 2012.

Unfortunately, as a serious study of police misconduct NPMRP has limited value because its reports only document *alleged* misconduct and from only a small percentage of the total agencies throughout the nation. There is no data on the *results* of any subsequent administrative or criminal investigations, and only sparse data on the arrests, convictions, and incarceration rates of former police officers. Sadly, these reports are far from the comprehensive or objective sort that might provide serious public policy researchers with much in the way of valuable information.

In Part 3 of this article I will suggest some ways to improve police-community relations, generally and propose some ways police oversight in Long Beach may be improved.