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Predators Behind the Badge: Confronting Police Sexual Misconduct

Isidoro Rodriguez

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As more efforts to stem sexual abuse by powerful men come to light, there still remains a marginalized group that continues to suffer at the hands of the people who should be protecting them.

They are the victims of police sexual misconduct.

Interviews with police and other experts and a review of available data by *The Crime Report* indicated that police sexual misconduct (PSM) most affects young people and others who are the most vulnerable in society— amounting to a betrayal of trust of those who look to them the most for guidance, protection and safety.

“Police sexual misconduct is an issue that’s hidden in the shadows,” said Andrea Ritchie, author of “Invisible No More: Police Violence Against Black Women and Women of Color,” in an interview with *The Crime Report*.

“Police have so much power, and they use that power in the same way that other people with power, such as [Harvey] Weinstein, politicians, and priests do.”

The problem has long been recognized—but it’s only beginning to receive attention from police training academies and state legislatures.

A 2003 national study by the Police Professionalism Initiative written by Prof. Samuel Walker at the University of Nebraska at Omaha found that 40 percent of reported cases of police sexual misconduct involved teens, often young women involved in youth engagement and job-shadowing programs.

Seven years later, a 2010 study by the Cato Institute, a libertarian think-tank that tracks police wrongdoing, found that sexual misconduct by law enforcement generates more citizen complaints than any other factor except for excessive force.

A 2015 investigation by the Associated Press found that roughly 1,000 officers lost their badges in a six-year period for rape, sodomy and other sexual assault; sex crimes that included

possession of child pornography; or sexual misconduct such as propositioning citizens or having consensual but prohibited on-duty intercourse.

And a database compiled by *The Buffalo News* reports that from 2005-2015 a law enforcement official was caught in a case of sexual abuse or misconduct at least every five days.

Ritchie, a Researcher-in-Residence focusing on race, gender, sexuality, and criminalization at the Barnard Center for Research on Women, believes that these numbers represent just the tip of the iceberg.

She observes that victims of PSM have less motivation than most to report abuse, and thus often rarely come forward at all.

“The people we tell people to report sexual assaults to are the police,” said Ritchie.

“Survivors of sexual assault by police are the only survivors of sexual assault who have to report the assault to the people that committed it. That’s a huge reason they’re not reported.”

Moreover, Ritchie explains, police agencies are reluctant to take reports or complaints of this kind of conduct—often trying to dissuade people from making them, and even wrongly categorizing reports of abuse as discourtesy, improper search, or unprofessional conduct in an attempt to diminish their severity and impact.

If that fails, police departments and their officers have been known to actively pursue a victim’s silence through direct threats and intimidation, she added.

In 2010, *The Washington Post* reported that when teenager Tiawanda Moore attempted to report her sexual assault at the hands of a Chicago police officer she was allegedly “given the run around” by internal affairs officers, who intimidated and discouraged her from making the report, and instead instructed her to contact them if the incident happened again.

When she later used her phone to record the officer’s continued misconduct, using the recording as evidence for another report, she was charged with two counts of eavesdropping.

In 2017, according to an article by *The Huffington Post*, the mother of a teenage girl accusing two New York police officers of rape claimed that roughly 13 officers from two different precincts approached them while they were awaiting a forensic examination at a local hospital and attempted to dissuade them from reporting the crime, going so far as to try and push them to say that the perpetrators were not police officers at all.

And in Seattle, Wa., King County Sheriff John Urquhart was accused of directing investigators not to document rape allegations against him from 2016, of actively intimidating the victims supporters, and of attempting to discredit the victim by publicly releasing her medical records, according to a 2017 report by kiro7.com.

‘The blue wall of silence conceals this particular form of police violence’

“The culture of the blue wall of silence is what conceals this particular form of police violence, same as it does for others forms of police violence,” said Ritchie.

“A significant percentage of officers know it’s happening, but they’re looking the other way and not reporting it. It’s just considered part of the culture.”

And it is a culture that repeatedly discounts reports of rape and sexual assault in general.

A 2016 investigation by *Buzzfeed News* found that the Scottsdale, Ariz., Police Department had one of the highest rates of unfounded rape cases in the country (46 percent between 2009 and 2014). *The Phoenix New Times* reports that FBI data from 2014 to 2017 shows that the department is still designating rapes as unfounded at a much higher rate than the national average, indicating a severe problem with the way officers there respond to rape victims and investigate rape cases.

In Baltimore, a 2016 investigation of the Baltimore Police Department by the Department of Justice found that the department seriously and systematically under-investigates reports of sexual assault, flagging failures such as victim blaming, ignoring reports from sex workers, letting reports languish as “open cases,” not testing rape kits, and not investigating suspects as standard practice.

Around the country, reports *The Appeal*, sexual assault victims have filed lawsuits against local governments and police departments for failing to investigate their cases, failing to submit rape kits, and disproportionately dismissing cases or refusing to prosecute when the victim is female.

In many instances, victims were instead met with judgmental questions about their clothing, the number of sexual partners, how much they had to drink, and why they were in a certain neighborhood when the assault occurred.

According to Philip Stinson, a professor of criminal justice at Bowling Green State University in Ohio, a police culture of silence, dissuasion, negligence and misogyny not only protects officers accused of PSM, but also enables them to better target their victims.

“The police subculture is a sexualized environment,” Stinson said in an interview with TCR.

“It’s a very masculine culture. It’s terrifying to go forward as a victim when your attacker is a police officer.”

Stinson, a former police officer for departments in Arlington, Va., and Dover, N.H., was exposed during his career to many officers getting away with crimes that others wouldn’t. In response, he developed a database tracking thousands of incidents in which officers were arrested since 2005.

Analyzing more than 500 officer arrests for sexual misconduct over a three-year period, the data he collected reveals a predatory pattern of on-duty misconduct, as well as off-duty misconduct that he notes is often facilitated by the power of the badge or the presence of an official service weapon, and that purposefully targets the most disenfranchised.

“PSM specifically targets victims whose calculated risk is based on their vulnerability, the likelihood that they wouldn’t be believed if they did come forward,” said Stinson.

“We have sex workers who are constantly harassed by a subgroup of officers who exploit them. Think nothing of a quid pro quo in lieu of getting a ticket or arrested. You also have the

driving- while-female scenarios, where an officer stops someone to flirt with them, gets their phone number, gets their name, all the way up to violence and rape.

“You have officers who exploit the teenagers who are in the law enforcement explorer’s programs and go on ride-alongs with officers. There are many dozens of cases where officers are arrested for those kinds of things.”

A 2016 investigation of the Baltimore Police Department by the Department of Justice found that officers habitually extorted sex from women by threatening prostitution charges if they did not cooperate.

The *Los Angeles Daily News* reported in 2019 that two LAPD narcotics officers received 25-year prison terms and were ordered to register as sex offenders for sexually assaulting four female informants facing drug charges.

In another case, former Oklahoma City police officer Daniel Holtzclaw is serving a 263-year sentence for sexually assaulting 13 black women and girls, repeatedly targeting young women, women who used drugs, and women he believed to be sex workers, according to a report by the Associated Press.

Such cases make clear that police are “picking people who are going to be discounted,” said Ritchie.

“That girl was ‘just trying to get attention’, she ‘brought it on herself’, she ‘trades sex for a living so what does she expect’” Ritchie said, quoting excuses she’s heard from officers.

“I’ve seen reports from police officers or investigations where they described people coming forward as the grumblings of prostitutes and junkies. And people tend to trust them and tend to believe them.”

In some cases, the abuse happens inside an agency.

In 2019, a Denver police officer was fired for making pervasive, graphic, and sexually oriented comments towards an intern during a ride-along: referring to her as a whore, suggesting she get hair removal procedures for her genitalia, and offering to teach her CPR by performing mouth to mouth on her.

Hiding Behind Authority

But often a predator in uniform can hide behind the cloak of authority.

“People let their guard down if they’re newly friends or in a relationship with a police officer, and let their guard down with their young teenagers and giving more access to them than they would otherwise,” said Stinson.

Domestic violence survivors are particularly vulnerable.

An investigative report by the *Philadelphia Enquirer* found that officers use their perceived “savior status” to elicit sexual favors from women already traumatized by spousal abuse.

In 2014, according to an article by *The Charlotte Observer*, an Iredell County Sheriff's patrol officer was fired and the county forced to pay a \$475,000 settlement to two women, both victims of domestic abuse and seeking help, who accused the officer of continually propositioning and stalking them.

The officer claimed that dating domestic violence victims was "like shooting fish in a barrel."

"Police deliberately target victims of sexual violence or domestic abuse because they're vulnerable and they're people in need of help," said Ritchie.

"After 25 years of research on this, it's still shocking to me."

Lack of Training

And while police departments around the country are publicly revamping their training programs and promoting de-escalation, conflict resolution, and more empathetic policing tactics in order to stem the flow of violent encounters between officers and civilians, training and policy on PSM is almost nonexistent.

According to *The Washington Post*, a majority of U.S. police agencies have no official policies or training programs making it clear that on-duty sexual misconduct against civilians is prohibited.

Stan Mason, host of the radio program *Behind the Blue Curtain*, says that lack of training at the academy and official guidance from the departments can have dangerous consequences when considering the myriad of potentially traumatizing and corruptive environments that newly inducted male officers will encounter on a daily basis.

"The biggest part of policing, that the profession is not realizing, is that you have to be mentally prepared," said Mason in an interview with TCR.

A 25-year veteran of the Waco, Tx., police department, Mason was part of the training process in his agency for nearly 15 years. He insists that, despite recent changes and advancements in training, departments only teach recruits a rough overview of the job—one that focuses mostly on physical and tactical skills and fails to prepare them for what they're actually going to see once they're on patrol.

"Every police department has a physical agility test," said Mason.

"But where are new officers minds going to be at when they have that six year old who has been sexually molested or they're taking nude pictures of victims because they have to document evidence? Are they prepared to handle that?"

According to *DiscoverPolicing.org*, while most policing agencies require recruit to be 21 by academy graduation date, some take cadets as young as 18. A majority of these young officers have very little life experience to fall back on when they enter a world that deals with violent crime, sex trafficking, domestic violence, child abuse, and death on a daily basis.

The Roots of Misconduct

A profile of two newly graduated LAPD officers by the *Los Angeles Times* revealed that both officers felt their academy only prepared them for the job up to a point, and failed to tackle real-life issues such as how to handle the adrenaline resulting from dangerous situations, or how to cope with the trauma of witnessing the often bloody results of violent crime.

“Over time, in order to protect themselves and do the job, many officers have to detach themselves from that world,” said Mason.

“But some people don’t have that shut off valve.”

A 2015 study for the Walden University College of Social and Behavioral Sciences examining the effects of frequent exposure to violence and trauma on police officers found that the constant exposure to these elements can result in hyper-aggressive behavior, impulsivity, and overconfidence.

A 2018 report by the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services states that police officers work comes with a heightened risk of PTSD which, when left untreated, can impair their mental well-being and lead to behavioral dysfunction such as substance abuse and aggression.

For officers already walking the ethical and moral line, environmental effects such as these may only serve to push them even closer to the edge, especially when experienced with no official guidance, support, or restraint.

“Officers operate on the razor’s edge. You have to know about wrong to catch wrong people,” said Mason.

“So, when you walk that line, and your moral fabric and values aren’t solid, it’s easy to cross it.”

A 2017 survey of roughly 8,000 police officers conducted by the Pew Research Center found that more than half (56 percent) said the job of policing made them more callous. Meanwhile, seven in ten officers (72 percent) said that poorly performing officers are not held accountable.

And while many departments have tried to meet this problem from developing in recruits with a Field Training Officer (FTO) program, which assigns newly sworn in officers to a veteran who ideally steers them away from habits that violate the tenants of the profession, Mason warns that too often the veteran officers who are supposed to be their mentors can also turn out to be new officers’ enablers.

“When you come out of the academy, and you’re with training officers, you have two types,” said Mason.

“You have those that are really committed to training people to survive and prepare and you have those who want to be worshipped as gods.”

Those officers who want to be worshipped are the first ones to tell new officers to forget everything they learned at the academy and do the job their way, effectively creating more opportunities for misconduct and criminality.

In fact, an analysis of police corruption by the Federal Bureau of Investigation Law Enforcement Training Bulletin reports that, if left unchecked, the “this is the way we do it in this unit” mentality can lead to a feeling of being untouchable, especially when coupled with a lack of strong leadership.

The analysis added that the greater the length of time an officer is exposed to this socialization process, the greater its impact.

A study of the link between field training officers, their trainees, and allegations of misconduct found that FTOs seem to have a statistically significant effect on their trainees’ allegations of misconduct.

In Washington D.C., according to wusa9.com, a Metro Police Department Officer appealed his firing for aggressive searching practices that violated MPD rules and regulations on the grounds that the tactics used are common practice among officers on the street, and that veteran officers directly instructed him to perform them despite knowing they went against both academy training and department general orders.

“The profession is so ego-driven,” said Mason.

“They get with young officers and tell them they don’t have to do this, don’t have to do that, that’s too much extra stuff, don’t worry about it. They instill these things in them and then send them out with other young officers without bothering to check how they are feeling and whether or not their heads are together.”

As a result, misconduct only spreads further.

According to new research published in the journal *Nature Human Behavior*, for every 10 percent increase in the proportion of a police officer’s peers with a history of misconduct (for instance, adding one allegedly misbehaving member to a group of 10), that officer’s chances of engaging in misdeeds in the next three months rose by nearly 8 percent.

This is exemplified by cities such as Chicago and Baltimore, where both police departments have displayed a pension for violence and corruption that has spread like a disease from officer to officer with little successful efforts in place for containment or prevention.

Why Sexual Misconduct Remains Hidden

While public attention is drawn to the more popularized and visible police crimes of violence and corruption, police sexual misconduct remains hidden in the ambiguities of the job.

“The majority of police officer authority and discretion is unsupervised: they are working alone, late at night, away from the public eye,” said Tom Tremblay, founder and CEO of Tom Tremblay Consulting & Training.

“We need to be willing to have courageous conversations in our profession on how to address and prevent PSM from happening.”

A retired chief of police from Burlington, Vt., and the former Commissioner of the Vermont Department of Public Safety, Tremblay now works as a national and international advisor and trainer, specializing in prevention of sexual assault, domestic violence, and dating violence, for police, prosecutors, advocates, higher education, the military, and the private sector.

And while he agrees that the concepts of officer self-care, wellness and resilience are important to consider, especially in relation to the more corruptive aspects of the profession, Tremblay stresses that this is not enough to stop misconduct from occurring and could, in fact, distract attention from the real issue: an officer's choice.

"We have to recognize that while the conditions of the job can be concerning these are choices that offenders make," said Tremblay.

"Offenders choose to abuse or take advantage of someone they see as less powerful. We don't want to lose sight of that."

According to a report on violence and health by the World Health Organization, power, anger, dominance and control are the main motivating factors for rape.

An article for *Psychology Today* states that people with criminal personalities are attracted to "high voltage" occupations like policing because the job provides a cover for them to do as they choose and misuse their position of authority to suit their own ends.

"It's like a drug," said Mason.

"They need a challenge; they need something different, they have to go to the next level."

For Tremblay, one of the first steps to ending PSM is making sure these kinds of men don't make it into the academy at all.

"We need to create hiring practices that address this issue. Background checks, polygraph tests, psych exams are all a routine part of police hiring," said Tremblay.

"But ensuring that we directly ask applicants about their behavior and beliefs on gender, race, sexual assault, domestic violence, as well as speaking to current dating partners, spouses, and asking specifically about domestic violence and sexual assault, have to be a critical part of that testing also."

In fact, a 2011 executive guide from the International Association of Chiefs of Police on addressing sexual offences and misconduct by law enforcement states that to recruit and hire individuals with the highest standards of integrity departments must combine

- medical, psychiatric, psychological, polygraph and integrity testing;
- detailed personal interviews; and
- thorough background investigations that include a review of social networking websites.

The guide stresses further that the professionals conducting the examinations and interviews should be knowledgeable about and specifically screen for patterns of inappropriate behavior or attitude as well as prior sexual offenses.

Ideally, any candidate found through these processes to have a history of sexual misconduct or unacceptable sexual activities would be deemed ineligible for employment.

“We have to really work hard to not hire that individual who is going to use the power and authority of the police in an abusive way,” said Tremblay.

“The second thing we need to do is make sure our code of conduct and standards are very clear and that new hires know that any behavior of this nature is completely out of line with the ethics of this profession and will not be tolerated.”

Addressing the Problem

Some states are doing just that.

In 2018, Illinois passed House Bill 5597 stating that a police officer having sexual intercourse or conduct with anyone in their custody is committing sexual misconduct and, if convicted, will be required to immediately forfeit their employment.

In Maryland, House Bill 1292 declares that law enforcement officers are prohibited from engaging in sexual contact, intercourse, or any sexual act with a person in their custody and, on conviction, would be subject to 3 years imprisonment, a fine, or both.

In New York, legislation was passed that officially eliminated the option for a police officer charged with sexual misconduct to claim the defense of consent if the victim was in their custody at the time.

Tremblay admits that some police leaders may feel that a policy on sexual harassment or assault against civilians is unnecessary, and that officers can rely on the common sense and understanding that these acts are abhorrent and prohibited. But he considers this dangerously faulty logic that has already failed in the past.

“The policies and procedures and codes of conduct in law enforcement come from our failures,” said Tremblay.

“Why do we recognize that we have to have policies on issues like drinking on duty, operating a vehicle under the influence, or telling the truth, but we don’t see a need to have policies around sexual abuse and misconduct?”

Yet despite the small changes of some, as well as a push from the International Association of Chiefs of Police, the Obama administration’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing, the U.S. Department of Justice, and the New York City Commission to Combat Police Corruption, most police departments still fail to tackle this issue.

‘Police departments aren’t good at looking at things that make them look bad.’

“I don’t think police departments are very good at looking at things that make them look bad,” said Christopher Herrmann, assistant professor of law and police science at John Jay College of Criminal Justice.

“Of course they will tell you that they have addressed the issue, but they really think they’re untouchable to an extent, so, why are they going to do that?”

Meanwhile, those states that appear to be turning towards change may only be taking the smallest of conciliatory steps.

An article by *ThinkProgress.org* points out that the bills passed in Maryland, and New York are only applicable if the officer is charged with a crime. The Illinois bill mandating the removal of officers only applies if they are convicted, and legislation that changed criminal codes in states like Louisiana and Delaware only works if the victim is under arrest or in custody.

In states like Alabama and Wisconsin, similar bills attempting to establish a policy against police sexual misconduct failed to pass entirely.

And according to *Buzzfeed News*, there are still roughly 35 states where armed law enforcement officers can evade sexual assault charges by claiming that such an encounter — from groping to intercourse — was consensual.

“PSM is considered a low-volume crime [by states and police] that does not occur often and it makes the police look bad,” said Herrmann.

“Neither of those things makes this a likely issue to be addressed.”

Herrmann points to New York as an example, where a 2018 report on discipline in the NYPD shows that only one percent of officers pleaded guilty or were convicted of disciplinary charges in relation to sexual misconduct—a number he believes is far too small to merit the departments attention for reform, especially when compared with the significantly higher rates for things like rule violations, domestic violence, and use of force.

“If we teach cops to use their guns less and use non-lethal force more often than we have fewer innocent deaths and fewer lawsuits. Cops can wrap their heads around that,” said Herrmann.

“But in the case of sexual assault, I don’t see the perk for them.”

Police Unions Fight Back

In fact, instead of addressing the issue of PSM, some police organizations have seemingly gone out of their way to actually blunt efforts for greater change and accountability.

In Chicago, according to an article by *InTheseTimes.com*, The Fraternal Order of Police, one of the largest police unions in the country, used its political clout to adjust a bill stipulating that an independent agency must have jurisdiction over police involved sexual assault cases to, instead, exclude both Chicago and State Police Departments on the grounds that it negatively affected officer morale.

In New York, the city's largest police union, the Patrolmen's Benevolent Association (PBA), issued a legal challenge to a resolution granting the city's Civilian Complaint Review Board (CCRB) jurisdiction over civilian complaints of police sexual misconduct and insisting that allegations of sexual abuse by NYPD officers remain under the authority of the NYPD and out of the public eye, arguing that police sexual misconduct is not an abuse of authority and, therefore, not under the CCRB mandate.

Efforts like these not only serve to further damage the trust between police agencies and the communities they are supposed to serve, but also guarantee that fewer and fewer victims of PSM will ever come forward.

"It's incumbent upon law enforcement agencies to do outreach and create a policy that recognizes this as a problem of the profession for decades," said Tremblay.

"But if they don't have a policy, if they never engage in this conversation, reports are likely to never occur."

Can More Female Officers Make a Difference?

For Penny Harrington, former Chief of the Portland Police Bureau, that conversation can't begin, and effective policies and practices can't be created, until more women are among the ranks and involved in the decisions of police departments around the country.

"The culture changes when you get a higher percentage of women in it," said Harrington.

"Because women don't do this kind of stuff."

Co-founder of the National Center for Women in Policing (NCWP), Harrington was the first woman to ever head a major U.S. city police department and spent over twenty years fighting to change the male dominated culture therein. She insists that, while women today aren't tolerating as much as they used to, among the ranks of policing they still have a long way to go before they can make a difference.

"There's a field of study called the critical mass theory, that you have to get a certain percentage of any minority group into a majority group before they can make changes," said Harrington.

"You had to have roughly 20 percent of women in politics and on legislatures until they really started having power and were able to pass meaningful legislation. And because law enforcement is such a militaristic organization, that percentage is more like 30%."

By reaching that ratio, Harrington believes departments can achieve better results overall.

A 2019 report by the National Institute of Justice states that women officers have been found to have proportionately fewer use-of-force and citizen complaints, potentially saving departments from costly lawsuits, while also proving to be more capable in their interactions with diverse communities.

A nationwide survey by the Pew Research Center found that female officers are much less likely than male officers to report that they have ever fired their weapon while on duty (11 percent vs.

30 percent), are less likely to use aggressive tactics over civil tactics (48 percent vs. 58 percent), and are less likely than men to say they have physically struggled with a suspect who was resisting arrest in the past month (22 percent vs. 35 percent).

And research on the retaining and hiring of more women in law enforcement conducted by the the National Center for Women in Policing found that female victims of domestic violence are more likely to report the crime to a female officer, who are also more likely to take such reports seriously, follow up on them to prevent repeated acts of violence, and respond more effectively to any calls concerning violence against women.

Yet despite the proven need and benefit of having more female officers, Harrington explains that most police departments don't hire women unless they are forced to. And once the pressure wears off, whatever numbers they've managed to build quickly disappear.

"When I was running the NCWP the percentage of women in policing was up to 14 and then, after 9/11, the numbers went down real fast," said Harrington.

"I had one chief of police who I called to talk to about hiring more women say we don't need to do that shit anymore. That is the response."

An example of this is Pittsburgh, where, according to wesa.fm, a federal consent decree in 1975 required that for every white male hired the police department also had to hire a black female, a white female, and a black male. Though their minority numbers grew as a result, the decree was deemed unconstitutional in 1991, and their recruitment has lagged ever since. The force is currently only 15 percent female.

As of 2018, according to statista.com, the ratio of full time female law enforcement officers in the United States is only 12.6 percent.

"There is a built in animosity towards women in policing that is adopted all the way up to the top ranks," said Harrington.

"That's what we're up against."

That animosity often begins on the academy floor.

A report published in *The Crime Report* last year found that after New Jersey instituted a new fitness test requiring aspiring officers to prove they can meet fitness requirements within an abbreviated period of time the rate of women failing female police academy tests almost tripled.

In Massachusetts, according to USA Today, the state requires women to complete the same arduous obstacle course as men, resulting in a fail rate for women of 20 percent compared to 2 percent for men.

Despite promising to revise the test in 2015, reforms have yet to be announced.

And in Colorado Springs, a 2018 story by *The Gazette* reported that the city approved a settlement of \$2.5 million for 12 female police officers who said their careers were harmed by a physical aptitude test that discriminated against women.

“Women want to help,” said Harrington.

“And, yes, they have to be physically fit, but they don’t have to be iron man.”

By making it harder for women to become police officers for reasons like this, departments continue to confine female officers to a voiceless minority population among the ranks and perpetuate a stereotype of inferiority and vulnerability that can actually put them in the crosshairs of the same empowered and protected predators who choose to sexually assault female civilians every day.

A 2019 special report by the *Philadelphia Enquirer* revealed that multiple high ranking veteran male officers in the Philadelphia Police Department had assaulted and harassed their fellow female officers for more than a decade without consequence.

In New York, the *Daily News* reports that a former NYPD domestic violence officer, a 14- year veteran, spent four years in an environment where she was repeatedly raped and sexually abused by her partner and another officer, purposefully strung out on drugs, and blackmailed, all while her superiors turned a blind eye.

In New Jersey, a 17-year female veteran officer of the Branchburg Police Department filed a lawsuit against her department, the township, and several fellow officers, saying she was groped, kissed against her will and propositioned repeatedly throughout her career. Though the assaults were reported to her fellow officers, nothing was done.

Without the numbers, female officers working in departments like these don’t have the support and protection they need to fight back against not only their attackers but also the outdated and prejudicial police culture that protects and allows those attackers to stay in uniform and continue to prey upon both officers and civilians alike.

“We have to be a culture that is accepting, that respects and views women as equal,” said Tremblay.

“Because when you look at that dynamic of sexual assault, it’s an offender who looks at women as not equal and vulnerable.”

Setting an Example

Some departments are setting the example.

In Wisconsin, the Madison Police Department (MPD) more than doubles the national average of women in policing (28 percent). In a story by Channel3000.com, female officers report full support from their fellow male officers and take pride in being able to provide different communication skills for different situations.

In Louisiana, a state with one of the highest rates of female officers in the country (22 percent), Captain Treone Larvadain, a 14-year veteran, was recently promoted to lead the Louisiana State Police’s (LSP) Protective Services unit, the first African-American female captain in the department’s history.

Danielle Outlaw, Portland's first African-American female police chief, recently became Philadelphia's first female Commissioner, according to CNN.com.

By employing more women among the ranks, departments like these provide a safer and more secure environment for female officers, one that allows them to affect change on a larger scale, better supports victims of PSM, and forces male officers to either get in line or get out.

"You have to have enough women to have a critical mass and feel that when they speak out they're going to be heard and paid attention to," said Harrington.

"I asked one of the top women from the Madison Police Department, with this high a percentage of women what do you do about sexual harassment? She looked at me and laughed and said there isn't any, men wouldn't dare, because they had women all the way up the ranks and they were a large enough group that they could see what was going on all over."

However, while integrating more female officers in police departments is a large step towards tackling police sexual misconduct, it is far from a cure.

Despite being examples of greater female representation, in the last year alone departments in Madison, Louisiana, and Philadelphia have still all faced accusations of officer sexual misconduct.

"Women have great value in our profession," said Tremblay. "But I don't think hiring more women necessarily solves our problem."

Instead, hiring more female officers, increasing awareness and engagement with officer wellness, revamping hiring and training practices, and establishing concrete policies on sexual misconduct and harassment must all be part of a concerted and cohesive effort by states and departments to defeat this issue and better protect and defend its victims.

But this kind of change can only really occur when people are paying attention.

And while the recent conviction of men like Harvey Weinstein has garnered international praise, and represents a victory against sexual assault for some, the issue of police sexual misconduct has failed to generate the same kinds of responses and actions that helped bring him down, leaving victims to fight an uphill battle alone.

"Under international law, being sexually assaulted by a state actor is viewed as torture," said Andrea Ritchie.

"We need to think about how we're going to make space for and support the people experiencing this, because right now they are shut out of every conversation, every solution, every #MeToo debate, and every opportunity we're thinking about when it comes to tackling sexual violence."