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Police: Authorities say the suspect forced two prostitutes to have sex with him by implying they would be arrested if they refused.

May 09, 2002 | MATT LAIT and SCOTT GLOVER | TIMES STAFF WRITERS

A Los Angeles police officer has been arrested for allegedly sexually assaulting two women while he was on duty, authorities said Wednesday.

Officer Joseph Evan Robinson, a three-year LAPD member assigned to the 77th Division, was booked on suspicion of "rape by force or fear" and is being held on \$1-million bail.

According to LAPD sources familiar with the case, two admitted prostitutes independently claimed that Robinson forced them to have sex with him by implying that they would be arrested if they didn't do so.

The sources, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said the alleged assaults took place in inconspicuous areas near the Harbor Freeway.

The LAPD opened an internal affairs investigation Jan. 30, the day the first victim alleged that she was assaulted by an on-duty LAPD officer.

By April 16, the department had developed "sufficient credible information to suspect" that Robinson committed the assault, according to an LAPD statement outlining the arrest.

That information, said Police Cmdr. Tom Lorenzen, came from an undercover operation conducted by internal affairs detectives who tested Robinson's behavior with female suspects.

"We caught him in behavior that we believe is predatory," said Lorenzen, who declined to elaborate.

Robinson was ordered to relinquish his gun and badge and was relieved of duty with pay pending the outcome of the investigation, police said.

Days later, on April 21, police interviewed a second woman who alleged that she also had been sexually assaulted by a police officer. Investigators say Robinson was that officer.

After Robinson was relieved of duty, investigators secretly followed him when he left his home. On May 7, police allegedly caught Robinson engaging in consensual sex with another prostitute in the same area where the previous assaults took place, officials said.

Robinson was arrested, police said. He was carrying a loaded handgun at the time, they said.

Los Angeles Police Commission President Rick Caruso praised the department's swift response to allegations that one of its own was committing crimes on the job.

"This shows that the LAPD can indeed police its own," he said.

Lorenzen, head of the department's internal affairs division, said the investigation of Robinson continues.

"Our fear is that there are other victims," Lorenzen said. "We are out there looking for other victims. We hope they come forward."

Though no other LAPD officers have been implicated in the assaults, Robinson was working with a partner on both nights that the alleged assaults took place.

Lorenzen said those two partners are the subject of an administrative investigation aimed at determining whether they were aware of Robinson's alleged activities. On Wednesday, detectives served a search warrant on Robinson's locker at the 77th Street station. Police declined to comment on what, if anything, was found.

A case against Robinson will be presented to the district attorney's office today for the filing of criminal charges.

Robinson, 26, is the second Southern California police officer in recent weeks to be arrested for allegedly sexually assaulting women while on duty.

On March 28, a San Bernardino patrol officer was arrested on suspicion of sexually assaulting 11 women he encountered on the streets.

Los Angeles police said that anyone with information regarding the Robinson case can contact LAPD internal affairs at (213) 485-4152.

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