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## Former Deputy Gets 30 Years in Sex Case

*Gabriel Gonzalez was convicted of sexually assaulting three women while on patrol. Two of his victims cite lingering psychological effects.*

August 04, 2006 | Stephen Clark | Times Staff Writer

After the deeply emotional testimony of two victims, a former Los Angeles County sheriff's deputy was sentenced Thursday to 30 years in federal prison for sexually assaulting three women while on early-morning patrol in Compton and surrounding cities.

Gabriel Gonzalez, 38, faced up to life in prison after being convicted in February by a federal jury. The sentence is one of the longest ever for a law enforcement officer convicted of sexual assault, said a spokesman for the U.S. Justice Department.

Gonzalez's attorneys plan to appeal the conviction and the sentence.

Gonzalez, a Chino Hills resident who worked in the Compton area in 2002 and 2003, stopped the three women and accused them of traffic or jaywalking offenses before raping or assaulting them in isolated areas, prosecutors said.

Several other women testified of being victimized by Gonzalez, but no charges were filed in their cases.

Gonzalez has been in custody since his conviction.

At the sentencing, a bespectacled Gonzalez, sporting a buzz haircut, remained expressionless as he listened to testimony and arguments from lawyers on how long he should serve.

Prosecutors had pushed for a sentence of 34 years under the federal sentencing guidelines, saying his pattern of sexual assaults -- which included ordering his victims to undress and shining a flashlight on their private parts -- abuse of power and the possibility of repeat behavior made him a danger to the public.

Defense attorneys argued for a sentence of 27 years, highlighting Gonzalez's upstanding record before the convictions. They also mentioned the devastating effect his time behind bars would have on his 4-year-old daughter, who is suffering from a serious medical problem and will soon have her spleen removed.

"It's a tragedy for the victims, a tragedy for the defendant's family," Judge Christina A. Snyder said before sentencing Gonzalez, "and a tragedy of its own making for the defendant."

Gonzalez's crimes and fall from grace are all the more remarkable when considering his background. The Long Beach State graduate comes from a "stable, loving, supportive family" and maintains close ties to his parents and siblings, according to the prosecution's pre-sentence memorandum.

He was raised in a safe neighborhood and told a probation officer that he had a "good" childhood. He participated in the sheriff's Explorer program, worked with disadvantaged and mentally challenged youths, and helped his family and friends, defense attorneys said.

He has no history of psychological or psychiatric problems, alcohol or drug abuse.

Gonzalez joined the Sheriff's Department in 1996 and was assigned to the Compton station in 2000.

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"What happened or why it happened, I don't have an explanation for the court at this time," said Vicki Podberesky, Gonzalez's attorney.

Gonzalez's father, Frank Gonzalez, asked the judge for leniency. "My family has been devastated by this entire ordeal," he said, struggling to find the words. They are worried about his welfare behind bars, he said.

Gonzalez did not speak at the sentencing. But two of his victims did.

One, a Spanish-speaking beauty parlor owner and single mother of two teenage boys, said through an interpreter that she initially didn't report Gonzalez because she feared no one would believe her. Now she suffers psychological problems, she said, and has lost interest in her business and the strength to take care of her sons.

In a March interview with The Times, she said Gonzalez stopped her early one morning in the summer of 2002 on a nearly empty street near her South Gate home. Despite passing sobriety tests, the lawman accused her of being drunk and then ordered her into his vehicle.

After driving around that city for an hour and asking her where she worked and lived, he took her to an isolated industrial yard near Tweedy Boulevard and Atlantic Avenue, where he ordered her to take off her clothes and raped her, she said.

"This sexual predator will never be able to imagine how hard it's been for me to resume a normal life," she said at the sentencing, her voice trembling. "A part of my body and life has been stolen from me.

"However, I want him to know my spirit is stronger than his," she said, adding that she is no longer afraid because he will be locked up.

The second victim, who was then a prostitute and the first to report Gonzalez, told how her life is still in shambles. Since the trial ended, she said, she has lost 40 pounds, failed her classes and is taking antidepressants.

"I can't even come up with the words to describe what you've done to me or my family," she said.

But she added that she had forgiven Gonzalez, saying: "You don't hold me prisoner anymore."

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