

Why Cops Get Away With Rape

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2014 Cops Get Away with Rape



Police Swearing in

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Truthout revealed last week that there is no organization keeping good data on sexual violence perpetrated by police. Universities are being pressured by students, alumni and human rights groups for more transparency regarding sexual assault cases on campuses, but sexual misconduct committed by on-duty police officers goes vastly underreported. Truthout also says

that when police-perpetrated sexual violence is reported, shorter sentences or dismissed cases are more common.

Cases of police-perpetrated molestation, harassment sexual assault, rape and molestation have been all over the headlines recently. A former Washington, D.C., officer admitted that he forced teenagers to work as escorts out of his apartment, while a former Wisconsin police officer was arrested for murdering two women and stuffing them into suitcases. An officer in Texas was arrested on domestic violence charges and was recorded saying that his wife would benefit from being “cut by a razor, set on fire, beat half to death and left to die.” A former Georgia officer was sentenced to 35 years on child molestation charges after he forced himself on two girls and a woman while on duty.

Jennifer Marsh, vice president of victims services at the Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network, told Truthout that her organization receives multiple reports of police-perpetrated sexual crimes each month via its anonymous hotline. Marsh is unsure how many of these cases result in an arrest, and how many times charges are dismissed because the officer’s word is taken over the victim’s, partly because of the power dynamics in such situations and partly because of how the rapists select their targets.

“[Officers] tend to choose victims who would lack so-called credibility in the eyes of other law enforcement, whether it was somebody who was engaged in sex work or whether it is somebody who was intoxicated or who was using drugs, and then they use that justification for why that person cannot be believed,” Marsh said.

“Unfortunately, this is more the norm than the exception,” she continues. “It’s hard to do research

and find reliable statistics on a topic that nobody wants to speak about.” An unofficial study by the Cato Institute’s National Police Misconduct Reporting Project found that sexual misconduct is the second greatest of all civilian complaints nationwide against police officers, at 9.3 percent in 2010. The organization noted that 354 of the 618 officers under investigation for sexual offenses were accused of engaging in nonconsensual sexual acts, and just over half of the 354 cases involved minors.

Within the criminal justice system, sex offenders are difficult to prosecute, but officers accused of sexual crimes are even tougher to convict. According to a U.S. Department of Justice survey, 60 percent of sexual assaults go unreported, only 3 percent of rapists will serve time in prison, and the numbers for cops are nonexistent. The study notes that these cops are typically unsupervised and, if arrested, often have to recount the crime to, well, other cops. The truth is that little accountability exists for law enforcement officials.

Consider the case of Nicole Smith. In a report, she describes in graphic detail the horrible violence she endured when a police officer raped her over 20 years ago. “He just started beating the shit out of me, and he had a gun,” she said. “I remember him telling me, ‘You’re never going home’.... I could feel the gun on my face.” The officer was off duty when the rape happened (the two were briefly dating at the time). But a study conducted by Bowling Green State University finds that more than half of reported police-perpetrated rapes between 2005 and 2007 occurred when an officer was on duty.

Smith isn’t sure if she would have talked to the police at all had a friend not taken her to the hospital after the attack. “My paranoia was beyond belief when I was talking to the police,” she said. When Smith pressed charges, the officer was already standing trial on charges of raping and assaulting another woman. That case was dropped, and Smith’s case ended in a plea bargain for a life sentence. Smith’s rapist was deemed eligible for parole after an initial five years, then again every three years, although she said he has a good chance of getting out as early as September 2015 due to recent changes in the state’s parole board operations.

The Department of Justice’s Office on Violence Against Women funded an initiative by the International Association of Chiefs of Police to develop policies and training standards to prevent police-perpetrated sexual misconduct. *The American Prospect* reports, however, that the organization fails to track progress within its local departments. In 2000, the Department of Justice and the International Association of Directors of Law Enforcement Standards and Training unveiled the National Decertification Index, a database compiled to prevent decertified officers from becoming rehired due to misconduct. The most recent version of the index contains reports from only 37 states.