

Society and Police

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The use of force is a sensitive issue to discuss on account of society having strong opinions about the police. Some individuals demand the police to be held accountable for their actions, others oppose that notion by stating that the officers' actions were justified given the circumstances. Regardless of which party is right or wrong both officers' and civilians' lives are at risk during violent confrontations. When a situation escalates to the use of lethal force it is important to understand what factors conceive such action. This essay will discuss the characteristics of the officers, the traits of the suspects and the situational components. By acquiring this knowledge the public will be able to comprehend the complexity of police use of force.

Statistics

Police and the use of force have always been a controversial issue as a result, there have been many studies devoted to this controversy. In his study James P. McElvain and Augustine E. Kposowa find a big difference regarding officers characteristics. White officers made 37.4% in shootings involvement, contrasting Hispanics at 7.9% and African American at 1.4%. It is interesting to see the large disparity between the shooting percentages and the officer's race. McElvain also found a difference between gender in the police department. Male officers form 47.4 % of the shootings marking a contrast with only 1.1% of female officers. (James P. McElvain, Augustine E. Kposowa, 2008, pg. 513). It is important to note the correlations between shooting percentages, race and gender of police officers. Another factor that can play a role in the use of excessive force is the traits of the offender. In a study done by Andrew P.

Wheeler, Scott W. Phillips, John L. Worrall and Stephen A. Bishop 207 officer-involved incidents are analyzed in the Dallas Police Department. In this study, the demographics of the offenders are highlighted. When analyzing race, 100 of the 207 shootings were of African Americans (48%) Latinos made 34% and Whites made only 16%. African Americans may be overrepresented together with Latino and White underrepresented. According to the 2010 Census in the city of Dallas, the African American population makes up 25% of the residents, (48% of shootings but only 25% of the population). In the census, Latinos make up 42% and Whites 29% of the population. 34% are Latino-related shootings compared to 42% of the Latino population (Andrew P. Wheeler et al. 2018, pg. 59) It is captivating to see the results of this study and how race does play a role in shootings especially how some races are under or over-represented in the officer-involved shootings. Places and situations are another important aspect in the use of excessive force. In another study done in St. Louis, Missouri by David KLinger, Richard Rosenfeld, Daniel Isom and Michael Deckard the data indicates that areas with higher minority population, elevated measure of violent crime in addition to regions with economic disadvantage increase the use of police deadly force. (David Klinger, et al, 2015 pg. 205) Crime is not divided evenly throughout the city; it has hotspots and they are concentrated in high crime areas where deadly force is more prompt to be used. This problem is a difficult concept to change due to the economic disadvantage individuals find it challenging to get out of the hotspots in spite of that, families eventually do move out to better neighborhoods. I have talked about statistics on characteristics of police officers, characteristics of suspects and situational components you have a concrete foundation of knowledge.

Officer Characteristics

The public has mixed opinions about the police when it comes to the use of force either good, bad or neutral. Many individuals do not put themselves in an officer's shoes, before judging them. Most of the time the use of deadly force is justified and sometimes it was unnecessary. This is why there has been an increase in the use of technology that can help see and understand how the situation developed escalated and ended. Police departments are using more Body-worn cameras which are of massive help when a call officers are responding to escalates to the use of deadly force. When this type of situation happens people may wonder if the characteristics of the officers played a role in using deadly force. In his New York police department study Greg Ridgeway found that the higher the rank, the lower the possibility to shoot. His research shows 65.3% of shooting officers in contrast with only 16.0% of that of a detective or a sergeant. He also found that an officer who has a higher education is less likely to shoot than an officer who does not. His study shows that officers with a High School diploma made up 20.7% of Shooting officers contrasting that officers with College and some graduate degrees comprise 1.3% of shooting officers. (Greg Ridgeway, 2016, pg. 3) It is quite shocking to see the difference in the shooting percentage between officers who have a High School diploma and officers who have a higher education. Another issue that comes into question is racism. People assume that police officers are racist and that's why they use excessive force to clarify these assumptions. I conducted an interview with Detective Gomez and I asked about this issue. Back in the 50's and the following years it was a bad time when it came to policing, there was a lot of racism in the police community "what is happening now is America hasn't accepted the fact that police departments now have a large majority of African American and Hispanic police officers and that racism has been pretty much watered out, racism is not tolerated within the police department"

(Oscar Gomez, personal communication May 3, 2019) As new police recruits come in with fresh ideologies the old ones with a racist mindset are being retired. Which makes people think if the suspect is at fault for their actions.

The traits of the suspect

Society argues that police are using unnecessary force on civilians and people want officers to be held accountable for their actions. Sometimes people are right and police should be held accountable but other times the suspect is the cause of the level of force used on him or her. As we know many factors can play a part in the outcome of the situation, some of them are race, sex, education and other variables. In her study Lorie A. Fridell discussed a few mixed findings. In New York City African Americans and Hispanics are both more prone to be affected by police force, although African Americans are more susceptible to a higher degree of force.

Contradicting this finding she states that nationally, Whites and Blacks find themselves with the same risk of being injured during an encounter with the police (Lori A. Fridell, 2016, pg. 505) it is important to note that we may see these different results because the first one is a study in a city and the second one is a study in the nation. There are big disparities and races may be over or underrepresented. Sadly There has been many unjustified use of deadly force cases and the community is having trust issues with the police. When people read or watch in the news about cases like “Trayvon Martin” they start questioning the police officers. But we have to keep in mind that the use of deadly force is extremely rare. James P. Mcelvain et al mention in their study about frequency of force. “Although police officers are entrusted with the authority to use coercive force... Such necessity is rather rare. Officers handle thousands of calls for service each day, and despite public perception, use of force incidents remains uncommon” (James P.

McElvain, et al, 2008, pg. 506) Now that I have discussed in more detail characteristics of suspects I want to talk about the situations when police officers respond to a call.

Situational Components

Many things can play a part when an officer decides to use deadly force and situational components is one of them. An officer has to be prepared for any type of situation, once they respond to a call they have to be ready for the worst because they really do not know what to expect. There may be a suspect that is doing what the officer tells them to do, there might be someone that needs force in order to comply or there may be someone attacking the officers when they arrive. This is why they have to be prepared for the worst and this includes the use of deadly force. In my interview with Detective Gomez I asked a few questions about his views on the use of excessive force “It varies from being a normal citizen and a police officer, we go off of force continuum, if you are going to punch us we are using tasers or pepper spray. If somebody punches me i’m not gonna pull up a rainbow, it gets ugly but it is done to gain compliance” (Oscar Gomez, Personal Communication, May 3, 2019) This means that the many times the suspects are not complying with the police and they have to do their job.

Conclusion

As we know police use of force is a very sensitive issue to discuss and people have strong opinions about it. That is the reason why this essay covered the factors that may influence the use of force and backed them up with data from peer-reviewed studies. Characteristics of the officers, the traits of the suspects and the situational components are all factors that play a part in the use of force. There are officers who should be held accountable for their actions but there are others who are using their best judgment in a highly dangerous job protecting people's lives.