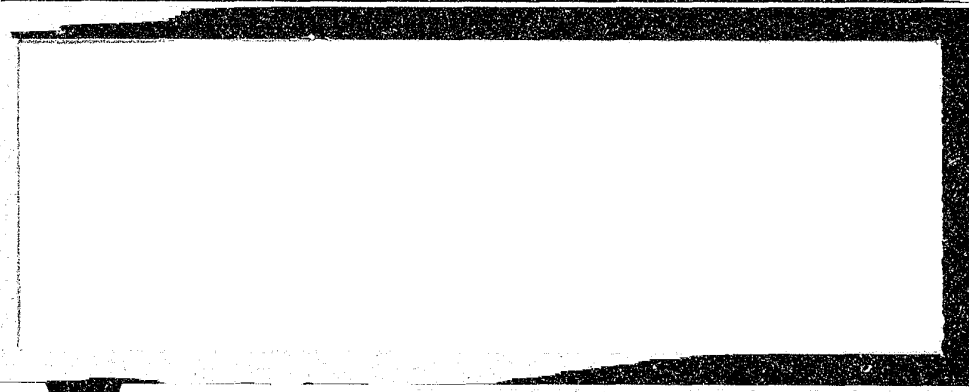


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Danger to the Police
From Domestic Disturbances:
A New Look at the Evidence

by

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ACQUISITIONS

Summary

The widespread belief that domestic disturbances are particularly dangerous to the police is found to be without a sound empirical basis. Police researchers, police managers and policymakers have estimated that domestic disturbances account for 18 to 22 percent of all officer deaths. A careful review of the empirical evidence demonstrates that these incidents account for less than 6% of all felonious deaths of police officers, less than one third that commonly cited in the previous research.

Using data on the frequency with which the police encounter domestic disturbances and four other police assignments, a comparison of the risks associated with domestic disturbances, other disturbances, traffic, burglary and robberies is generated. Domestic disturbances are found to be less likely to result in police officer deaths than any of the four other assignments for which data on deaths and police activity are available. Robberies are police assignment most likely to result in the felonious death of an American police officer.

We broaden the concept of danger to the police to include two other measures of harm--assaults on police officers and officer injuries. Robberies are consistently the most likely to generate assaults on police officers and police officer injuries, but the relative dangerousness of domestic disturbances, other disturbances, traffic assignments and burglaries varies depending upon the source of the information about officer harm and police activity.

Introduction

Between 1962 and 1984 a yearly average of 90 police officers were feloniously killed, and in 1984 alone over 60,000 assaults on police officers were reported to the FBI. This makes the homicide rates for police officer more than twice and the assault rate more than six times as high as the general population (FBI, 1961-1985a; FBI, 1972-1985b).¹

The special dangers police face play an important role in how police see themselves and their role in society (Manning, 1977). Police officers are keenly aware of their vulnerability and they are believed to behave differently when faced with potentially dangerous situations (Parnas, 1967; Buchanan and Perry, 1985; Walter, 1981). Although a few other occupations such as mining (Robin, 1963; Westley, 1970) are more dangerous in terms of on-the-job deaths, police officers live with the knowledge that they are subject to deliberate or unprovoked attack while carrying out the routine duties of the job.

Some types of police work, however, are believed to be more dangerous than others. Police intervention in disputes between family members is frequently cited by police researchers as a

¹ Over the past two decades, an additional 48 officers a year died in non-felonious "accidents" while on the job. In 1984, for the first time since 1962, more police deaths were attributed to accidents than to felonies.

routine task that is particularly dangerous to the police. For instance, the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) 1976 Training Key on "Investigation of Wife Beating" portrays the danger of such police work:

Intervening in wife assault cases is a formidable task. The police officer is exposed to the threat of personal injury every time he responds to a family disturbance call....Police officers must be aware of the danger involved in disturbance calls. Since 1966, 157 officers have lost their lives responding to disturbance calls.

Family violence researchers are even more emphatic in their assertions that domestic disturbances are dangerous to the police. Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz (1980) report:

(M)ore police officers die answering family disturbance calls (22 percent of all police fatalities) than die answering any other single type of call.

These views have not been ignored by policymakers. Enacted in 1984, Section 13519 of the California Penal Code mandates that police officers receive training in handling domestic violence calls. This legislation asserts:

(T)wenty-three percent of the deaths of law enforcement officers in the line of duty results from intervention by law enforcement officers in incidents of domestic violence.

Similar assertions appear in much of the police research² and the family violence research³ on domestic disturbances. Despite the widespread acceptance of this view, a careful review of the empirical evidence finds no evidence supporting this belief. To the contrary, all the available evidence demonstrates that domestic disturbances account for only a small proportion of all police deaths. This paper reviews that evidence and determines that a more accurate estimate of the proportion of police officer deaths occurring during domestic disturbances is less than one third of that commonly found in the previous research. In addition, we employ data on the frequency with which police officers encounter different types of incidents to compare the risks associated with police responses to domestic disturbances with other types of police assignments.

Police Deaths Reported to FBI

The most widely cited evidence to substantiate the dangerousness of domestic disturbances is the FBI's annual

² Auten, 1972; Bae, 1981; Bard, 1970; Bell, 1984; Black, 1980; Buchanon and Perry, 1985; Cory, 1978; Greenberg, 1983; Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, 1978; International Association of Chiefs of Police, 1976; Parnas, 1967; Police Foundation, 1977; Stephens, 1979; Walter, 1981; and Wilkerson, 1983.

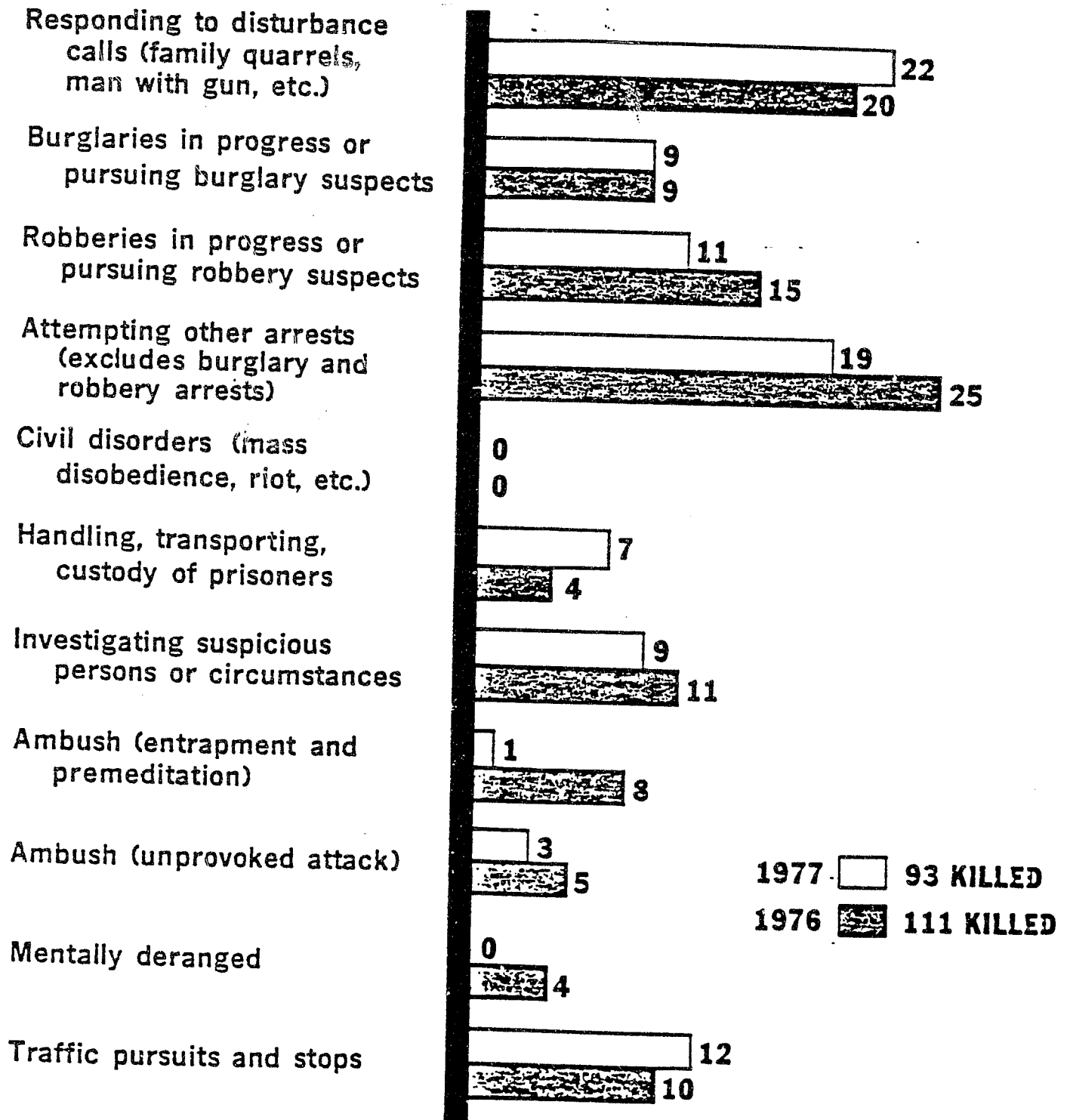
³ Fagen, et al. 1984; Fields, 1978; Fleming, 1979; Martin, 1976; Martin, 1978; Patterson, 1979; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980; Roberts, 1979; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1982.

FIGURE 1

LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS KILLED

Circumstances at Scene of Incident

1976 and 1977



statistics on the types of assignments in which law enforcement officers are feloniously killed.⁴ Because the way in which this information has been reported is important for understanding how the beliefs about the danger of domestic disturbances developed, we have reproduced the graph that the FBI uses to report officer deaths by activity type. The graph, Figure 1, conveys that "Responding to Disturbance Calls" was the single most frequent category of felonious deaths of police officers in 1977 and the second most frequent in 1976.

Figure 2 displays the number and Figure 3 the percent of deaths in the FBI "Disturbance" category for every year from 1962 to 1984. In six of these years, the "Disturbance" category was the single most frequent type of reported death. Between 1960 and 1984, 356 (16.7 percent) of the 2,129 felonious deaths reported to the FBI were in the "Disturbance" category⁵. During this period, the "Disturbance" category ranked third overall among the FBI categories of police officer deaths.

⁴ For 1961 to 1981, see FBI, Crime in the United States. Beginning in 1972, the FBI also published a separate document Law Enforcement Officers Killed; this publication was expanded in 1982 and renamed Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted.

⁵ Annual data on police deaths by category of incident is available beginning with the 1962 data. The FBI has published summary data going back to 1960. Thus annual statistics are given in Figures 2 and 3, beginning with 1962, but summary statistics can be calculated for the 25 year period beginning with 1960. The number of categories used by the FBI increased from 6 to 12 during this period, the major addition being the use of Traffic in 1971.

FIGURE 2

NUMBER OF "DISTURBANCE" DEATHS: ANNUAL REPORTS TO FBI

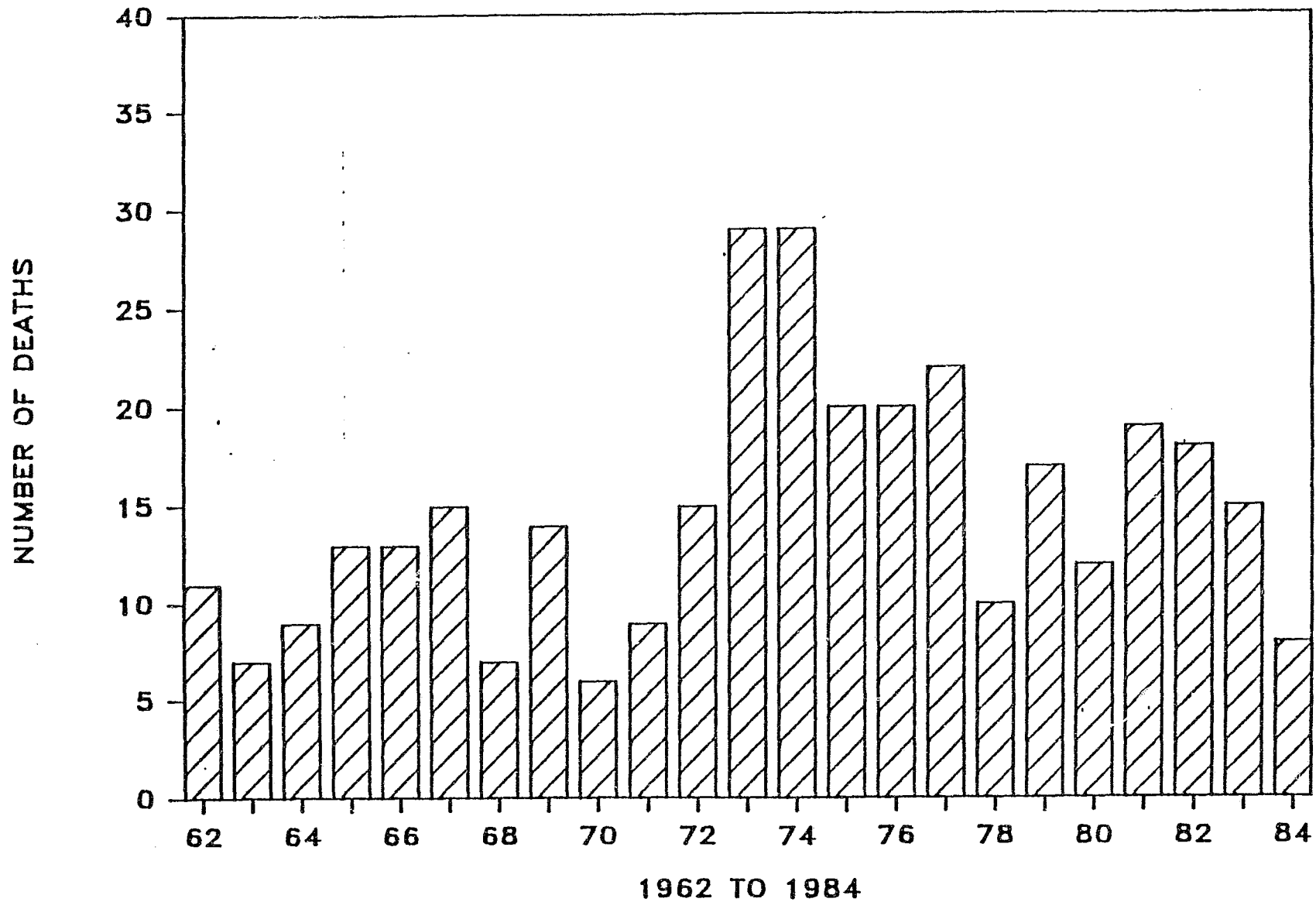
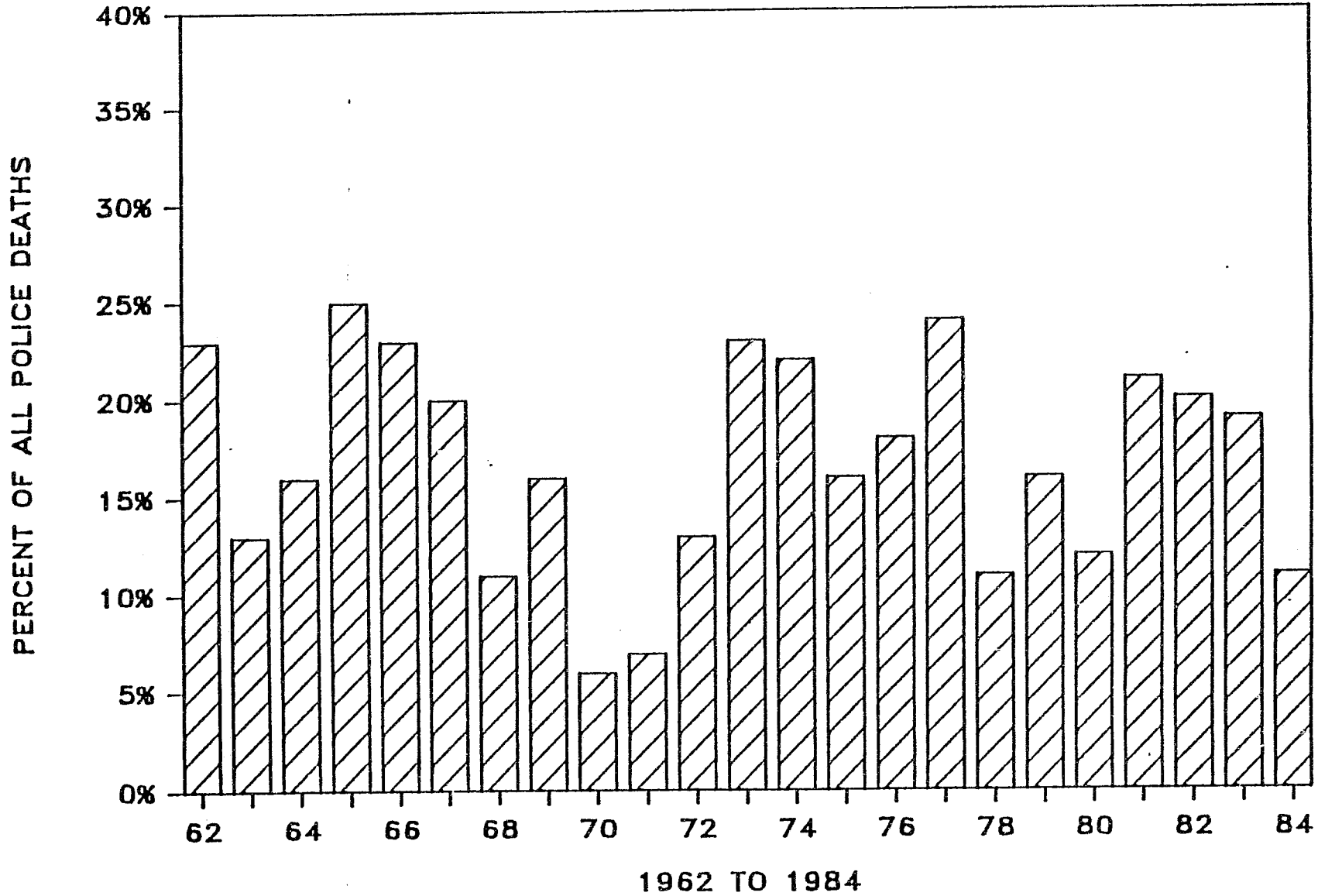


FIGURE 3

PERCENT OF "DISTURBANCE" DEATHS: ANNUAL REPORTS TO FBI



Does "Disturbance" Mean Domestic Disturbance?

At first glance, the FBI's systematically collected, national-level data appear to substantiate the notion that domestic disturbances are one of the most dangerous assignments given to police officers. This conclusion relies on the assumption that the FBI "Disturbance" category is entirely or in great part composed of domestic disturbance incidents. The complete FBI title for this category, "Disturbance Calls (family quarrels, man with a gun, etc.)", lends itself to this interpretation. This reading of the FBI data assumes that the elements within the parentheses are not distinct types of disturbances, but merely descriptive of the range of family quarrels, including those where a man had a gun.

This assumption is wrong. The "Disturbance" category is, in fact, an amalgamation of several different types of incidents, only one of which is properly identified as a "domestic disturbance". The kinds of incidents that FBI procedures catalogue as a "disturbance" include bar fights, gang calls, general disturbances (short of riots or civil disorders) and incidents where a citizen is brandishing a firearm, as well as disputes or assaults among family members. (FBI, 1984c).

FBI Reclassification of "Disturbance" Deaths

Beginning with its 1983 publication of the 1982 Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted, the FBI added a new table on officer deaths that distinguished between domestic disturbances and other types of disturbances. This special analysis created two categories, "Disturbance Calls (family quarrels)" and "Disturbance Calls (bar fights, man with gun)". The FBI analysis showed that of the 92 police officers reported to the FBI as feloniously killed in 1982, 7 (8 percent) died as a result of domestic disturbance calls, and 11 (12 percent) as a result of other types of disturbances. Five (6 percent) of the 80 officers killed in 1983 were responding to family disturbances. In 1984 only 2 (3 percent) of the 72 police killings stemmed from family quarrels.⁶

In addition, the FBI reviewed the narrative information on each police death provided by the local police departments and reclassified the police deaths reported for the ten year period 1973-1982. This reclassification established that domestic disturbance incidents accounted for 62 (5.7%) of the 1,085 police deaths in the preceding ten years (1973-1982). A similar

⁶ FBI, 1983b (Table 10, p. 17); FBI, 1984b (Table 12, p. 19); FBI, 1985b (Table 12, p. 19).

disaggregation of domestic and other disturbances was published by the FBI in 1984 for the years 1975 to 1984 and domestic disturbance incidents constituted 69 (5.6%) of the 1237 felonious deaths during the entire twelve year period. Had the disturbance deaths not been disaggregated in this way, the "Disturbance" category for 1973 to 1984 would have totaled 220 or 17.7% of all felonious deaths.⁷

The separate reporting of domestic and other disturbances by the FBI seriously undermines the empirical basis used to substantiate the widespread belief that domestic disturbance calls are particularly dangerous to the police. The FBI data originally used to establish such a point of view, when properly disaggregated, reveal a substantially lower frequency of officer deaths associated with domestic disturbance assignments.

Establishing New Measures of Danger

Before precipitously leaping to a new orthodoxy about how "safe" domestic disturbances are, a few caveats are in order. First, homicide is only one type of danger to police. Danger can include other harmful acts such as assaults or injuries. Before

⁷ None of the literature on the danger of domestic disturbances published since 1983 has incorporated the results of the FBI reclassification.

we the accept the absence of danger to the police from domestic disturbances, other forms of harm need to be considered.

Second, the low frequency of domestic disturbance deaths does not consider how much police activity is devoted to domestic disturbances. With an accurate measure of the proportion of police time that is spent handling domestic disturbances, we could establish a danger rate for domestic disturbances; that is, the number of deaths (or other harmful incidents) divided by the number of police responses to domestic disturbances. Emerson (1979) attempted to make just such a calculation but did not find a single officer injury or death based on officer reports of the 1,446 family disputes occurring over a two month period in Los Angeles.

Even if we calculated the danger rate for domestic disturbances using comparable data from police jurisdictions throughout the United States, we would still not be in a position to assert that domestic disturbances are or are not dangerous to the police. We would need to know the danger rate for other types of police activity in order to compare the domestic disturbance danger rate to the danger rate for other types of police work. By comparing these danger rates, we could describe the current level of danger that domestic disturbances pose for police officers.

The Need for Better Data

The kind of data needed to construct danger rates and make the appropriate comparisons do not currently exist. A variety of published studies report the number of police officer deaths, assaults or injuries by type of incident.⁸ Other research efforts provide rather extensive quantitative descriptions of the various types of police activities.⁹ We could find no publication that reports both the frequency of harmful incidents to the police by type of police work and the amount of police activity devoted to different types of police work.

The ideal situation would be an enumeration of all harmful events and all police activity using a common set of descriptive categories. The collection of such information would not be a simple task. First, as Emerson found in Los Angeles, a large number of observations are necessary to record even a small number of harmful events. If Los Angeles is any indication, the rate of any type of danger from domestic disturbances is going to be less than one in a thousand. To construct reliable estimates of danger rates, a substantial number of harmful events would be

⁸ Bannon, 1976; Chapman, et al., 1974; FBI, 1962a-1985a; Geller and Karales, 1981; Konstantin, 1982; Margarita, 1980a; Margarita, 1980b.

⁹ Kansas City Police Department, 1980; Ostrum, et al., 1978.

needed. With less than 100 felonious deaths a year for the entire nation, danger rate studies will need to cover multi-year periods or focus on other types of harm.

Second, it will require some effort to systematically count harmful events and police activity. Consistent measures of officer deaths will not be as difficult as determining what is and is not an assault or an injury. Establishing rules for handling incidents with multiple assaults or involving multiple officers or assailants will complicate such data collection.

Counting police activity has been tried with only limited success. Such efforts have been focused on patrol activity and rarely capture the substantial portion of police time spent not on patrol--preparing reports, in training, in court etc. Measures of police patrol activity include the number of calls for services¹⁰, the number of dispatches, the number of police citizen-encounters.

The greatest difficulty in generating the data needed is likely to be the construction of appropriate measures of police activity. The United States has expended considerable effort toward establishing uniform crime measures, but little progress has been made in establishing uniform activity measures for the

¹⁰ Since a large percentage of calls to police departments are information requests or referrals to other departments, calls for service are not an accurate measure of the extent to which the police are exposed to physical danger.

police or, for that matter, any other public agency (Whitaker, 1984). The FBI categories for officer deaths, for instance, have been revised and expanded several times since they were originally issued, but they still do not (and are not intended to) capture the full nature of police work in the United States.

Perhaps the least difficult aspect of collecting the ideal data would be the use of harm and activity data from the same or reasonably comparable jurisdictions from the same time period. We argue below that reasonably accurate estimates of the relative risk of different types of police work can be obtained when using data on harm and data on police activity from radically different jurisdictions and time periods.

Estimates of Danger Rates

While none of the existing studies have the ideal characteristics described above, we have been able to use data from several existing studies to derive estimates of the danger rate for domestic disturbances and four other incident types. These are rough estimates and we recommend that they be used cautiously. However, the issue of danger is so important to the police and the current level of knowledge so inaccurate that improved, if still imprecise, estimates warrant dissemination.

Because so much attention has been paid to domestic

disturbances, our first consideration for using a data set was that it permit separate measures of domestic and other disturbances. We found eight studies of harm and two of police patrol activity that allowed for this distinction. We then compared the description of the incident categories used in these studies and found three additional categories (burglary, robbery, and traffic) for which comparable data could be constructed. Six of the eight harm studies had all five categories; both of the activity studies were sufficiently detailed that activity measures for the five incident types could be reconstructed from the published reports or machine-readable data sets¹¹.

Table 1 reports the number of deaths, assaults and injuries by these categories reported in each of the studies on harm. Table 2 reports the number of activities reported for these categories in Kansas City and in the Police Services Study. We have collapsed those harmful events and police activities that do not fit into these categories into an "All Other" category. From these data we compute an estimate of the danger rate by dividing each category's measures of harm by its measures of activity. Table 3 reports the results of these calculations.

The measure used in Table 3, which we call the danger rank, differs from the preferred danger rate in two ways. First, the measures of harmful events or police activity are derived from

¹¹ A description of the harm and the activity studies is provided in Appendix A

Table 1: Reported Frequency of Harm

DEATHS

	FBI (1973-84)		Konstantin		Margarita	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Domestic Disturbance	69	(5.6)	15	(5.2)	4	(1.5)
Other Disturbances	151	(12.2)	17	(5.9)	35	(13.0)
Burglary	75	(6.1)	10	(3.4)	14	(5.2)
Robbery	210	(17.0)	31	(10.8)	60	(22.4)
Traffic	162	(13.1)	55	(19.2)	17	(6.3)
All Other	570	(46.1)	159	(55.4)	138	(51.5)
Total	<u>1237</u>	<u>(100.1)</u>	<u>287</u>	<u>(99.9)</u>	<u>268</u>	<u>(99.9)</u>

ASSAULTS

	Bannon		Chapman		Margarita	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Domestic Disturbance	37	(8.5)	168	(8.8)	26	(1.5)
Other Disturbance	68	(15.6)	217	(11.4)	400	(23.8)
Burglary	NA		NA		62	(3.7)
Robbery	NA		NA		390	(23.2)
Traffic	83	(19.0)	227	(12.0)	90	(5.4)
All Other	248	(57.0)	1285	(67.8)	714	(42.4)
Total	<u>436</u>	<u>(100.1)</u>	<u>1897</u>	<u>(100.0)</u>	<u>1682</u>	<u>(100.0)</u>

INJURIES

	IACP		Geller/Karales	
	#	%	#	%
Domestic Disturbances	60	(4.4)	4	(3.7)
Other Disturbances	168	(12.3)	34	(31.5)
Burglary	NA		2	(1.8)
Robbery	NA		19	(17.6)
Traffic	134	(9.8)	4	(3.7)
All Other	1001	(73.4)	45	(41.7)
Total	<u>1363</u>	<u>(99.9)</u>	<u>108</u>	<u>(100.0)</u>

Table 2: Measures of Police Activity

	Kansas City		Police Services	
	<u>Response Time</u>		<u>Study</u>	
	#	%	#	%
Domestic Disturbance	556	(7.8)	271	(4.8)
Other Disturbance	698	(9.8)	642	(11.3)
Burglary	352	(5.0)	29	(.5)
Robbery	127	(1.8)	21	(.3)
Traffic	1026	(14.4)	1649	(29.0)
All Other	4342	(61.1)	3076	(54.1)
	<hr/>		<hr/>	
Total	7101	(99.9)	5688	(100.0)

Table 3: Harm--Activity Ratios*

DEATHS

USING KANSAS CITY ACTIVITY MEASURES

	<u>FBI/KC</u>		<u>Konstantin/KC</u>		<u>Margarita/KC</u>	
	<u>Value</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>@Value</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Value</u>	<u>Rank</u>
Domestic Dist.	.124	6	.027	5	.007	6
Other Dist.	.216	2	.024	6	.050	2
Burglary	.213	3	.028	4	.040	3
Robbery	1.654	1	.244	1	.535	1
Traffic	.158	4	.054	2	.017	5
All Other	.131	5	.037	3	.023	4

USING POLICE SERVICES ACTIVITY MEASURES

	<u>FBI/PSS</u>		<u>Konstantin/PSS</u>		<u>Margarita/PSS</u>	
	<u>Value</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Value</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Value</u>	<u>Rank</u>
Domestic Dist.	.255	3	.055	3	.015	5
Other Dist.	.235	4	.026	6	.055	3
Burglary	2.586	2	.345	2	.483	2
Robbery	10.000	1	1.476	1	3.238	1
Traffic	.098	6	.033	5	.010	6
All Other	.185	5	.052	4	.033	4

* cell entries are the ratio of the harm (Table 1) and activity (Table 2) frequencies.
 @ rank 1 represents the most dangerous; rank 6 the least dangerous.

Table 3: Harm Activity Ratios*
(Continued)

ASSAULTS

USING KANSAS CITY ACTIVITY MEASURES

	Bannon/KC		Chapman/KC		Margarita/KC	
	<u>Value</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Value</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Value</u>	<u>Rank</u>
Domestic Dist.	.067	3	.293	2	.047	6
Other Dist.	.097	1	.311	1	.578	2
Burglary	NA	NA	NA	NA	.176	3
Robbery	NA	NA	NA	NA	3.071	1
Traffic	.081	2	.221	3	.088	5
All Other					.164	4

USING POLICE SERVICES ACTIVITY MEASURES

	Bannon/PSS		Chapman/PSS		Margarita/PSS	
	<u>Value</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Value</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Value</u>	<u>Rank</u>
Domestic Dist.	.137	1	.601	1	.096	5
Other Dist.	.106	2	.338	2	.623	3
Burglary	NA		NA		2.138	2
Robbery	NA		NA		18.571	1
Traffic	.050	3	.138	3	.055	6
All Other					.232	4

* cell entries are the ratio of harm (Table 1) and activity (Table 2) frequencies.
@ rank 1 represents the most dangerous; rank 6 the least dangerous.

Table 3: Harm-Activity Ratios
(Continued)

INJURIES

USING KANSAS CITY ACTIVITY MEASURES

	<u>IACP/KC</u>		<u>Geller & Karales/KC</u>	
	<u>Value</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Value</u>	<u>Rank</u>
Domestic Dist.	.108	3	.007	4
Other Dist.	.241	1	.049	2
Burglary	NA		.006	5
Robbery	NA		.150	1
Traffic	.131	2	.004	6
All Other			.010	3

USING POLICE SERVICES STUDY ACTIVITY MEASURES

	<u>IACP/PSS</u>		<u>Geller & Karales/PSS</u>	
	<u>Value</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Value</u>	<u>Rank</u>
Domestic Dist.	.221	2	.015	4
Other Dist.	.261	1	.053	3
Burglary	NA		.069	2
Robbery	NA		.905	1
Traffic	.081	3	.002	6
All Other			.015	5

* cell entries are the ratio of harm (Table 1) and activity (Table 2) frequencies.
 @ rank 1 represents the most dangerous; rank 6 the least dangerous.

widely different jurisdictions and sampling methods. Second, the five categories used account for about one half of all harmful events and less than one half of all police activity. We would prefer to have comparable harm and activity data from enough categories to capture a much larger proportion (70 to 80 percent) of all harmful events

The second way in which this measure differs is that the data are not generated from even roughly comparable jurisdictions or time periods. For this reason the actual values of the rates computed in Table 3 are not meaningful. However, the assumption that the multiple jurisdictions for which we have data represent the range of values of these measures is more tenable. Of course, we would prefer to have a larger number of studies and jurisdictions, especially for the activity measures, but for the present we must rely on the data that is available.

To the extent that the assumption that the measures of harm and activity represent the range of values likely to be found in the U. S. is accurate, the true value of the danger rate is within the range of values we compute in Table 3. Out of necessity, we tentatively accept this assumption. We use the rank order of each category to assess the relative risk this type of assignment would represent to the police if both the measure of harm and the measure of police activity were from the same jurisdiction at the same point in time. Thus, the first column of rankings reported under deaths in Table 3 represents the relative risk of these five categories using the FBI ten year tabulation of deaths and the Kansas City activity measures.

Interpreting the Dangerousness Rank

Using the data from Kansas City, Table 3 reveals that for felonious homicides of the police domestic disturbances are consistently the least dangerous of police activities and that robbery incidents are consistently the most dangerous. When the activity data

from the Police Services Study are employed, robbery is still by far the most dangerous assignment, but the traffic category ranks as the least dangerous for two out of three measures. The domestic disturbance danger index using the police services data is consistently low and the category ranks as the least or next to least dangerous in all three studies of officer deaths.

The police services study has a very large proportion of police activity devoted to traffic and this explains the variability in the rankings between it and the Kansas City study. Similarly, Margarita's study of deaths in New York City has substantially fewer traffic deaths than the other studies, due in part to the dearth of automobiles during much of the study period. This variability suggests the importance of jurisdictional and study differences and the difficulty in comparing the values of the danger index for cross jurisdictional comparisons; however, the consistently low rankings for domestic disturbances and for the traffic category argue that these types of police work are less likely to result in officer deaths than robberies or burglaries.

The evidence for assaults and injuries is less clearcut. Wherever data are available, robbery continues to rank as the most dangerous type of police assignment. Domestic disturbances, burglaries, and the traffic category shift ranks depending on the data source and the type of harm. Since our danger rank is too rough an estimate to justify an average ranking, we interpret these findings as a suggestion that the underlying propensity of certain types of police assignments to generate assaults and injuries to police officers is, to some extent, different than the propensity to generate felonious homicides. These results reinforce our notion that assessments of danger should include measures other than deaths, but we acknowledge that they may reflect the imprecision of the studies on assaults and injuries.

The available evidence strongly suggests that police researchers and police managers should abandon the notion that domestic disturbance calls result in a large number of police deaths. Not only are the numbers of domestic disturbance deaths

considerably less than had been previously reported but these incidents are proportionately less likely to result in an officer death, given the frequency with which American police encounter family disturbances. The available data are not entirely consistent about the least dangerous type of police work, but robberies are clearly the most dangerous in terms of deaths, assaults and injuries.

Implications for Policy

The evidence from the reclassified FBI reports on police deaths and the several independent studies of police deaths, assaults and injuries warrants attention by police trainers. Training materials on domestic disturbances should be revised to portray more accurately the low level of danger currently associated with this type of police work. However, we emphasize that the available information describes events which happen in a specific environment and that environment currently includes a widely held belief that domestic calls are dangerous. We do not know the extent to which the current risk of death in domestic disturbances stems from precautionary measures taken by police when responding to domestic disturbances.

Although this research does not contribute directly to the debate concerning the effectiveness of alternative police responses to domestic disturbances (Sherman and Berk, 1984; Hart, 1984), it does remove one of the factors that may have inhibited police managers from exploring innovative strategies in dealing with this police assignment. When danger to the police is high, safety measures are naturally given more prominence in setting policy. Since we now have good reason to believe that domestic disturbances do not generate exceptional danger to the police, managers can focus officer attention on improving the effectiveness of the police response to victim needs.

Implications for Research

Researchers, like trainers, must first repair the damage caused by decades of inaccurate reporting. Future research ought to go out of its way to emphasize the lack of apparent danger to the police in domestic disturbances. A second task is improvement upon the Danger Rank. We have already noted the inadequacies of the available data on felonious deaths, injuries, and assaults. One additional point is worth emphasizing. If our concern is for on-the-job deaths, the current distinction between felonious and accidental death may warrant reconsideration. For instance, between 1973 and 1984, 56 officers were feloniously killed in domestic disturbances. During the same period, 65 officers died accidentally as a result of their own action or the actions of other police officers. In 1984, for the first time, the number of accidental deaths reported to the FBI exceeded the number of felonious deaths.

Whatever measures are ultimately deemed useful, researchers will need to produce meaningful categories of police activity which can be used to describe both harmful incidents as well as the routine frequencies of police work. Although the FBI's data collection procedures for officers killed and assaulted were not explicitly included in the recently proposed redesign of the Uniform Crime Reporting system (Poggio, et al., 1985), individual level data on deaths, assaults and injuries (with appropriate descriptors of the incidents) should be collected for many of the same reasons and with as much priority as the individual level data on criminal behavior.

The available data on the frequency with which police performs different assignments is amazingly sparse. The pioneering work by Reiss (1971) and by Ostrom, et al. (1978) have not been followed by additional research consciously designed to systematically describe police behavior. What we know about police--citizen encounters in the U. S. must rely on these decades old studies or on less comprehensive, selectively chosen samples such as those from Minneapolis (Sherman and Berk, 1984). There are, of

course, other reasons to obtain more accurate and up-to-date measures of police activity, but improved measures of the risks different assignments pose to the police should increase the priority of this research task.

Appendix A

Independent Data on Officer Deaths and Assaults

The FBI ten year reclassification remains the most comprehensive source of information on officer deaths¹². Information on police officer deaths, assaults and injuries has been independently collected and published in a variety of research projects completed between 1976 and 1984. These studies are considerably less comprehensive in geographic scope than the FBI reports, and they each employ a unique set of categories to describe the nature of the incident leading to the death, assault or injury. These studies give us a quite different picture of the danger to police from domestic calls.

Deaths

In a review of every police homicide in New York City from 1851 through 1978 Margarita (1980) concluded that only four (2%) of the 239 homicides resulted from a domestic disturbance. In contrast, public disturbances accounted for 12 deaths (5%) and man-with-gun incidents accounted for 23 deaths (10%). Margarita employs 21 different categories and assigns incidents to those categories on the basis of New York City archival records and her own personal judgement.

Konstantin (1984) used the narrative descriptions of police deaths printed in the

¹² Schmidt (1985) classified 59 (11 percent) of 535 police officer gun deaths reported to the Public Safety Officer Benefits Program from September 1976 to April 1983 as a "disturbance". However, this automated data set did not permit her to distinguish domestic from other disturbances.

FBI's Law Enforcement Officers Killed to review and recode the FBI data on felonious killings for the years 1978, 1979, and 1980. He then reclassified the incidents into eighteen categories and subcategories, with three subcategories for disturbances: domestic, man-with-gun/gunshots, general. His classification resulted in domestic disturbances accounting for 15 (5%) of the 287 police homicides during those three years. Man-with-gun/gunshots accounted for 12 deaths (4%), and general disturbances for another five deaths (2%). Both Konstantine and Margarita rely on their own categories and their own judgement to classify the type of incidents during which officers were feloniously killed. To an unknown degree, the findings they report may stem from the area and time period they included and from the personal judgements they made in classifying incidents.

Assaults

Several researchers have studied police assaults. Bannon (1976) analyzed police reports for all assaults against police that resulted in arrest in Detroit from July 1, 1973 to June 30, 1974. Using a code scheme developed by Bannon, the officer making the arrest described both the incident leading up to the assault and the parties involved in the incident. Bannon found that social conflicts of all types (involving family, friends, relatives, neighbors, or strangers) accounted for 103 (23.6%) of 436 such assaults. Seventeen (4%) assault incidents were labelled "domestic" (presumably meaning spouses), 5 assaults (1%) involved parent-child conflicts, 15 assaults (3%) were boyfriend-girlfriend, 17 assaults (4%) involved other relatives, and the rest, 49 assaults (11%) involved neighbors, acquaintances, or strangers. Combining the domestic (spousal),

parent-child, and boyfriend-girlfriend, a total of 37 assaults (8%) were attributed to what is typically included in the descriptions of domestic disturbances.

Unlike previous studies we have reviewed, Bannon's data were recorded at the time of the incident and by officers involved in the assault. This approach still requires judgments on the part of the arresting officers and introduces the possibility of inconsistencies in the classifications. Requiring that the assault result in an arrest may also bias the sample toward more serious assaults.

Chapman, Swanson, and Meyer (1974) studied assault on police during 1973 in 37 rather disparate municipalities in Oklahoma, New Mexico, Arkansas, Louisiana and Texas. Their analysis is based on 1,897 classifications of assault incidents into 14 categories. These 1,897 classifications are based on 1,143 assault incidents, some of which received multiple classifications. The analysis showed that 380 (20%) of the reported assaults were attributable to investigating or enforcing disturbance incidents. Of those 380 incidents only 163 (8.6% of 1,143) were family disturbances, and the other 217 (11.4%) were public disturbances. Again, this study involves a restricted geographic area and time period and a series of judgments and categories which may influence the reported distribution.

Margarita's (1980) review of violence against the police in New York City included assault as well as homicide data. The assault information was limited to the years 1973 through 1978. During that time there were a total of 1,131 incidents involving 1,719 assaults, some incidents involving assaults on more than one officer. Adequate data existed to allow classification of 1,682 assaults. Margarita classified 426, or 25.3 percent of the incidents as disturbances (domestic disturbance, public disturbances and man-with-gun). Only 26 (1.5%) were classified as domestic. Public disturbances accounted for 79 (4.7%) of the assaults and man-with-gun incidents accounted for 321

(19.1%) assaults.

These three independent studies of assaults on police officers do generate rather consistent findings. Figure 6 compares a ten year average of the FBI "Disturbance" assaults with the disturbance and domestic disturbance assaults reported by Margarita, Bannon, and Chapman et al. Where a distinction can be made, domestic disturbance assaults are less than half of all disturbance assaults in each study and less than a third in two out of the three. Again, the evidence indicates that domestic disturbances constitute a substantially smaller danger to police than previously believed.

Injuries

The Police Weapons Center of the International Association of Chiefs of Police attempted a national study of police injury and deaths by reviewing 1,800 newspapers monthly from July, 1970 to April, 1971. Using the newspaper accounts the Center's researchers categorized the circumstances leading up to the injury or death. During that ten month period the Center collected information on 1,563 police injuries and 94 police deaths. Of the injuries 60 (3.8%) were determined to be from "domestic disturbance" calls, and an additional 168 (10.8%) were from other "disturbing the peace" assignments. Of the 94 deaths, 2 (2.1%) were from domestic calls, and another 2 (2.1%) from disturbing the peace assignments.

The short time period, ten months, and the fact that it is spread across two calendar years thus precluding comparison with FBI data, limits the usefulness of the study. There is also no indication of the geographic range of the newspapers. Finally, data that rely on press clippings reflect countless editorial decisions, and are not necessarily an reflection of the incidence of police injuries. Police deaths, being more

newsworthy, are more likely to be reported than are injuries¹³.

Geller and Karales (1981) analyzed data from 1974 through 1978 on all incidents (108) when shots were fired by civilians at Chicago policemen and injury or death to a police officer resulted. The findings of this study showed that all disturbances totalled 36% of these incidents, but domestic disturbances were but a small fraction of that. Of the 108 officers shot at, a total of four (4%) were as a result of a domestic disturbance. A person-with-a-gun accounted for 24 (23%) of the incidents and non-domestic disturbances for ten (9%). Because it is limited to injuries from gun shots, this study is in some ways even more restricted than the other research on deaths and assaults. Of course, Geller and Karales used their own set of categories and their own judgment about how to classify incidents. Because the incidents studied by Geller and Karales all involved firearms, it is likely that they may be more serious than those studied by Bannon.

Injuries, like deaths and assaults, do not appear in domestic disturbance incidences with the frequency that one would expect given the conventional wisdom about how dangerous domestic disturbances are to police officers. These independent studies vary in many aspects yet the findings consistently indicate that the previous literature has overstated the danger in domestic violence calls.

Police Activity Studies¹⁴

¹³ Chapman, Swanson and Meyer (1974) report that there were injuries in 47% of assaults of all types, 47% of family disturbances and 46.5% of public disturbance incidents. Since they did not report the injury rate for all categories, it was not possible to reconstruct a percentage of all injuries that were classified as domestic disturbances.

The Kansas City Response Time Analysis (1978) measured the time elapsed between discovery of a crime or situation involving police assistance, and the time it took police to arrive at the scene. The data were collected over a ten-month period in 1975 in 56 of the 207 beat-watches in Kansas City, selected because of their high rates of robberies and aggravated assaults. Civilian observers rode with the police, measuring the response time, and also corroborating the call classification given by the dispatcher.

During the ten-month period a total of 7,101 calls were dispatched. Of these 556 were domestic disturbance calls, including disturbances involving families, friends/lovers, and estranged/divorced couples. Disturbance calls were included in the "noncrime call analysis" and were divided into two sub-categories, confrontation disturbances, and nuisance disturbances. There were a total of 1176 confrontation disturbance calls, but 620 of them involved neighbors, juveniles, public, or other non-family calls. There were also 516 nuisance disturbance calls involving noise, juvenile gatherings, etc.

The Police Services Study included a detailed observation of 5,688 "police-citizen encounters" in sixty neighborhoods in Rochester, NY, St. Louis, Missouri, and Tampa-St. Petersburg, Florida during the summer of 1977. The neighborhoods were chosen to represent the income and ethnicity of the area at large and observers rode with the police and coded the type of problem encountered. Incidents were coded at the time of the dispatch, at the time the officer first encountered the incident, and after the incident was disposed. In addition, multiple codes are possible for each incident. We chose to use only the first code listed at the time the officer first encountered the incident.

Analysis of that coding showed that 271 of the encounters were domestic (including

14 See Wycoff (1982) for a thorough review of the available data on police activity measures.

"family trouble", "domestic argument", "domestic fight", "domestic assault", and "domestic aggravated assault").

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