

Increased reports of officer misconduct associated with larger police departments

July 21 2015, by Evelyn Perez



The size of a community's police force is a greater predictor for police misconduct than its ethnic diversity, according to researchers from Florida International University and Montana State University.

In a study of nearly 500 city [police departments](#) across the United States, researchers found police departments with a large number of full-time employees are more likely to experience reported incidents of police misconduct, including [excessive force](#), sexual misconduct, financial misconduct and driving under the influence. This contradicts previous claims by other studies that a large police organization can potentially reduce misconduct.

FIU criminal justice researcher Stewart D'Alessio said large organizations tend to experience difficulty in monitoring a large number of employees.

The study, published in *Police Quarterly*, reports a city's violent crime rate—including the number of murders, forcible rapes, robberies and aggravated assaults—is the only external factor that influences police misconduct. Other environmental factors—including population diversity, unemployment rate, percentage of households receiving public assistance, percentage of families below poverty level, or percentage of female-headed households with children—do not appear to be relevant in explaining why one police department experiences more instances of police misconduct than another.

Few studies have examined the role of internal factors in predicting the most common forms of police misconduct, including bribery, theft and drug use.

"There are more than 11 million arrests made annually in the United States," D'Alessio said. "Cases of police-use of excessive force are often highlighted in mass media and social media, but these are just a few incidents that occur out of 11 million arrests."

According to the researchers, because internal rather than external factors are better predictors of police misconduct, police departments

have the ability to implement policies that can help reduce the occurrence of police misconduct.

"Deliberate but thoughtful efforts to reduce police misconduct are desirable because misconduct has a negative effect on the public's view of the [police](#) and their legitimacy," D'Alessio said.

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