

“Everything is Theory Versus Practice”:

Department Policy Changes in the Time of Black Lives Matter

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INTRODUCTION

- Nationwide, departmental policy changes intended to reform policing range from shifts in the way the law is enforced to bans on former police practices (Ferré-Sadurní & McKinley, 2020; Kaur & Mack, 2020).
- Police officers describe increased hesitation in initiating and responding to citizen contacts such as stops, arrests, and use of force incidents (Jones & Board, 2020).
- This hesitation can lead to a reduction in proactive policing strategies; some officers report a general tendency to avoid citizen contacts in fear of having to use force during an encounter and be subject to potential administrative sanctions and public backlash (Adams, 2019; Deuchar et al., 2019)

METHODS

- **15 current police officers** were recruited from departments in the southern & western U.S. using convenience & snowball sampling.
- **Semi-structured, in-depth interviews** on how policing & routine patrol activities have changed as a result of the modern racial justice movement.
- Interviews were transcribed and inductively coded in NVIVO 12 Pro using thematic analysis.

RESULTS

USE OF FORCE POLICY CHANGES:

- **Ban on Lateral Vascular Neck Restraints**

“... and now you're the bad guy, because you wouldn't have been violent if you hadn't gone in there. So even if we have a justified use-of-force at that point, it's not going to be justified. We're going to be seen as the aggressor. **And that's why we're removing ourselves from these situations.**” – Officer 26

“**[W]e have three seconds or two seconds or one second to act, and you have this window of opportunity to do something that's deemed reasonable.**” – Officer 20

“The policy before was that it was you could use it as a last, a means - it's considered lethal force. [I]f you're in the fight of your life and you're on the ground, you could either: a) put them in a chokehold or b) pull out your gun and do what you had to do to walk away.”

Researcher: “*Okay, so now it's never allowed no matter the situation so they basically remove that step, you have to escalate then to using your firearm?*”

“That's correct. It's escalated now to the firearm.”

🗨️ **Officer 14**



📱 **SCAN ME**



Take a picture to learn more about this study.

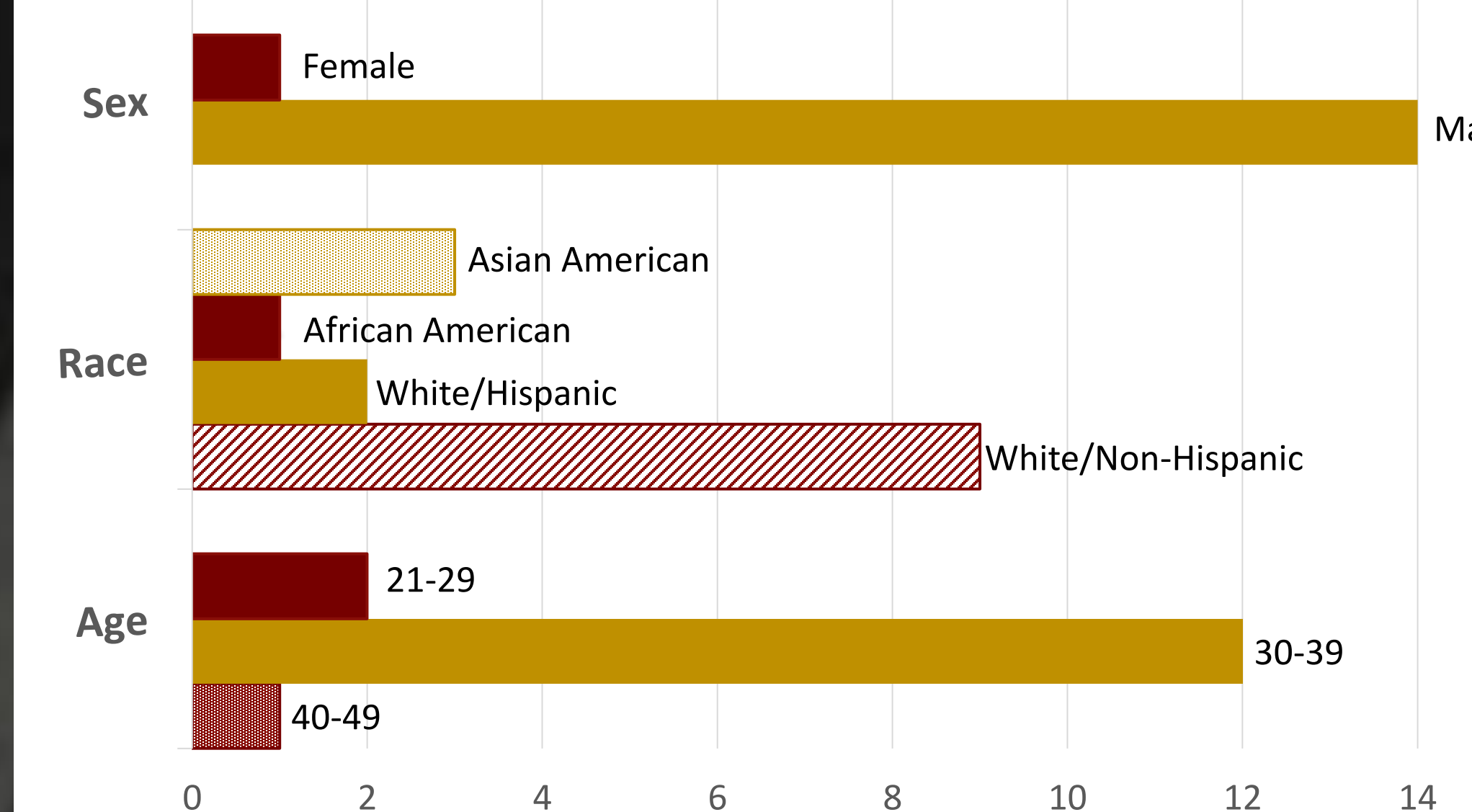


Figure 1: Sample Demographics

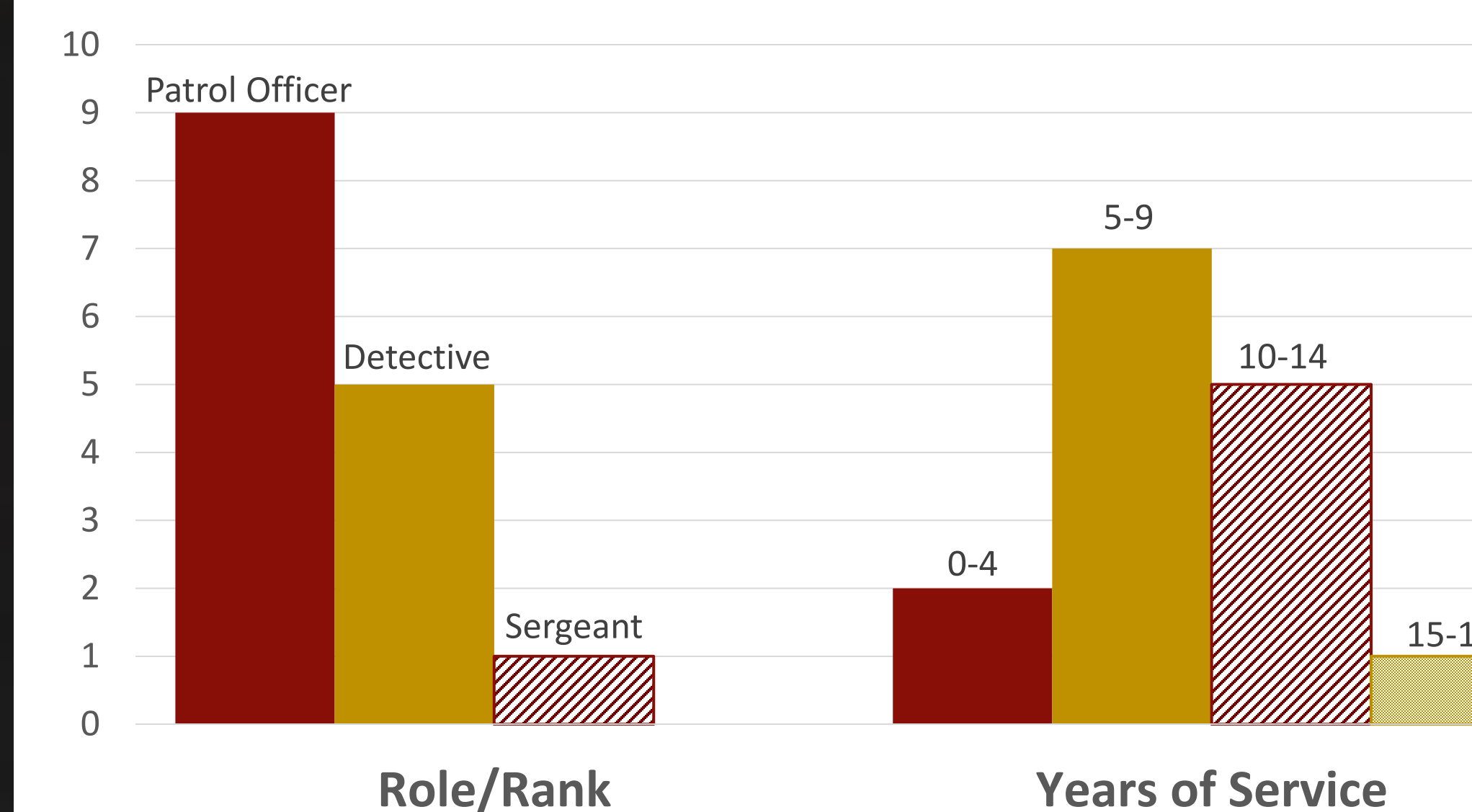


Figure 2: Policing Background Descriptives

RESULTS (continued)

- **Redefining “Use of Force”**

“And for us, it was just making more stress because... you pull out your firearm, you're having to write reports with it. **It's adding more work to things that we didn't have to do before.**” – Officer 12

“... if anybody wants to use that data, it's going to come back **'Well, look how many uses of force this department has, and look how many uses of force against Black males they have,' even though technically no force was used.**” – Officer 9

DISCUSSION

- Departmental policy changes are “removing tools from the toolbox” for police officers.
- Overall themes based on officers’ descriptions:
 - A strong sense of removal from situations due to use of force policy changes.
 - Additional work and time spent on reports for each service call.
 - A questionable aspect of how recorded data will be utilized in the future.
- Providing officers with the opportunity to voice their experiences will foster collective community inclusion and help facilitate the conversation on the future direction of policing.

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