
Something is rotten in the state of Ireland: the Irish Police (An Garda Síochána) and their official statistics

Frank Houghton

“My fear – and my real fear - is that this falsification is not confined to traffic data”

Former Garda Commissioner Nóirín O’Sullivan (O’Connor, 2017)

Revelations concerning the extensive falsification of breathalyser testing statistics by the Irish Police (O’Sullivan, 2017), An Garda Síochána, have recently escalated into a damning expose of a series of more incriminating practices. What started out as an investigation into inflated activity figures by some Irish Police officers (Garda) has subsequently revealed financial misconduct, wholesale errors and incompetence, and extensive data falsification and a nefarious cover-up at the highest levels.

Previous estimates of the number of falsified breathalyzer tests reported by the Garda put the figure at 937,212 (Houghton, 2017). This is obviously a significant figure in its own right, but particularly in the context of the relatively small population of the Republic of Ireland (approximately 4.8 million). However, as the investigations into malpractice continued, the reported figure increased from almost one million to two million false reports (The Journal, 2017a).

These revelations were part of a wider critique of Garda activities and helped open the floodgates on reports of police malpractice in Ireland. Evidence subsequently emerged around a number of issues, including significant financial misconduct. This included, for example, the misappropriation of European Union funds for police training. It was noted that 5% of money received from CEPOL, the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training, was diverted to a secret bank

account funding entertainment for the Garda (Lally, 2017a; O'Keefe, 2017a; McMahon & O'Connor 2017).

Other examples of financial misconduct include the Garda leasing out land owned by the State to farmers, with the money raised (125,000 Euros) being used to support the bar in the Garda Club. Further Investigations of financial irregularities at the Garda Training College identified 50 separate suspect bank accounts with funds totaling 5 million Euros (The Irish Independent, 2017a). Further controversy ensued when the then Garda Commissioner unexpectedly took six weeks holiday immediately after submitting a report on this issue and other instances of Garda misconduct to the Public Accounts Committee (O'Keefe, 2017b). The Commissioner subsequently resigned from the top policing position in the country, giving just six hours notice of her intended departure (The Irish Independent, 2017b).

Further disclosures revealed widespread illegal recording of phone calls by the Garda (Policing Authority, 2017a; Lally, 2017b), the wrongful issuing of 14,500 traffic fines (The Irish Independent, 2017b; Miller, 2017), and inflated self-reported rates of solving crime by the Garda (The Irish Independent, 2017c). The most damning revelations about Garda malpractice to date relate to the suspect quashing of significant numbers of speeding tickets (The Journal, 2014), and the subsequent cover-up that ensued (Clifford, 2017). This cover-up included a smear campaign at the very highest levels of the Garda and included wrongful allegations of sexual assault made against one of the whistleblowers who had initially highlighted the penalty point issue (The Irish Independent, 2017c; Keena, 2017).

However, Garda malpractice and attempts at a cover-up in relation to official crime statistics do not end there. Concerns were initially raised by the Garda Inspectorate concerning the under-reporting of crime statistics by the Garda some years ago. This report estimated an under-reporting rate of 38% (Duncan, 2015). The Central Statistics Office (CSO, 2015) subsequently noted an under-recording rate in 12 of 14 categories of crime statistics of 18% on average (Duncan, 2015). A review of the data was initiated based on the period from 2013-2015, however this was subsequently extended back to 2003 (RTÉ, 2017). The CSO then subsequently repeatedly delayed the publication of Irish crime statistics as it sought to improve data quality in its reports (RTÉ, 2017).

This dismal and unfortunate saga in Irish history has continued. Significant issues have recently been noted in relation to homicide statistics in a Ireland being underreported (MacEnroe, 2018). The implications of such mis-categorization are hugely important as it impacts both the resources available for a subsequent investigation, as well as potentially leaving women at risk as a result of inadequate follow-up in domestic violence deaths (RTE, 2018a).

It is alarming that when two civilian crime analysts reported this issue to senior Garda they came under severe pressure to withdraw their concerns, and were consequently ignored and ill-treated (RTE, 2018b). However, to compound matters, it is clear that the Policing Authority failed to support them. This is extremely unfortunate as the Policing Authority was specifically established as an:

'independent body to oversee the performance of the Garda Síochána in relation to policing services in Ireland. Its key objective is to promote trust and confidence in policing and to help shape policing services for Ireland in the future' (Policing Authority, n.d.).

Such inaction was somewhat surprising given the previous robust statements made by the Policing Authority in relation to Garda misconduct. One notable example includes the statement:

'The Garda response in the form of the O'Sullivan report does not give comfort to the Authority that the organisation has yet grasped their importance, has taken ownership of them or is focused on addressing them. While lack of adequate training is cited in the Report, and it is certainly a factor in the context of complex legislation, the Authority feel strongly that training is not necessary for people to be honest.' (Policing Authority, 2017b).

However, in this instance it is clear that the *'Policing Authority had "closed the door" ' on the two civilian analysts reporting this issue and 'Instead of hearing the women... had gone to their bosses.'* (RTE, 2018a). These issues were raised in a protected disclosure made to the Oireachtas (Irish Parliament) Committee on Justice in early 2018 (Lally, 2018).

Concerns over falsified breathalyser tests statistics by the Garda in Ireland have morphed into widespread doubts over the integrity of the Irish police in general. Repeated attempts by Garda management at cover-ups, evasions, and subterfuge have left public confidence in An

Garda Síochána in disarray. The most shocking elements of this debacle include a smear campaign at the highest levels of Garda management against one whistleblower which portrayed him as a sexual predator. Current concerns over underreported homicides in Ireland indicates that women have been left at risk in situations of domestic violence resulting in homicide. It seems unlikely that the reputation of the Garda and confidence in the integrity of their statistics will ever recover.

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