



**FLORIDA PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION STATEMENT ON
POLICE BRUTALITY**
February 2023

Police responses to unarmed civilians remain in the public awareness as seven unarmed individuals have died including Tyre Nichols in Memphis, TN. The Washington Post *Fatal Force* (2023) police shootings database indicates 8,166 fatal police shootings since 2015, which does not track police fatalities incurred by methods other than firearms. While every life unnecessarily lost is a tragedy, individuals of color are three times more likely to be killed by police than White people and 1.3 times more likely to be unarmed during fatal police contact than White people, regardless of the police officer's race (Washington Post, 2023).

As citizens rely on law enforcement for protection, a large portion of the U.S. population experiences genuine concern about how they may be treated by police because of their race regardless of the race of the responding officer. A comparison study of a national sample of 918 participants who identified as either Black, Hispanic, or White U.S. residents examined the extent of worry experienced by individuals during police contact (Graham et al., 2020). Only 6.6% of White respondents indicated significant worry about police brutality and 75.5% of White respondents "do not worry at all" (Graham et al., 2020, p. 557). Black respondents were five times more likely (Odds Ratio [OR] = 5.372) and Hispanic respondents were four times more likely (OR = 4.013) than White respondents to indicate worry about police brutality (Graham et al., 2020, p. 560). The impact of increased rates of police brutality negatively influence the mental well-being of individuals of color and concerned communities. A study of 623 Black adults in the U.S. indicated heightened vigilance accounted for 11% of the total effect of police brutality on depressed mood and 21% on generalized anxiety among Black individuals (Alang et al., 2022). Overall, Bor and colleagues (2018, p. 302) identified 0.14 additional poor mental health days reported by Black American respondents in reaction to police killings of unarmed black Americans, which the researchers extrapolated to estimate as many as 55 million poor mental health days each year among Black adults in the U.S., similar to the effect of diabetes (p. 308).

We at the Florida Psychological Association condemn any and all kinds of unwanted police brutality on unarmed civilians as it not only impacts their grieving families but also creates an atmosphere of tension and fear that impacts every American at large. These acts have to stop and we as a genuinely concerned group of psychologists worry about the national state of mental health due to these unnecessary acts. Although any feasible and sustainable solution will take time to implement, we strongly encourage decision-makers to prioritize the mental health needs of those most affected and help stop these preventable dire outcomes if no additional safety training or surveillance of convicted (as well as current) police officers takes place. Our current generation is going through a very preventable gun violence epidemic and we solemnly stand in active solidarity with all those affected. .

References

- Alang, S., VanHook, C., Judson, J., Ikiroma, A., & Adkins-Jackson, P. B. (2022). Police brutality, heightened vigilance, and the mental health of black adults. *Psychology of Violence, 12*(4), 211-220. <https://doi.org/10.1037/vio0000418>
- Bor, J., Venkataramani, A. S., Williams, D. R., & Tsai, A. C. (2018). Police killings and their spillover effects on the mental health of black Americans: a population-based, quasi-experimental study. *Lancet, 2018 Jul 28;392*(10144):302-310. doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(18)31130-9.
- Graham, A., Haner, M., Sloan, M. M., Cullen, F. T., Kulig, T. C., & Jonson, C. L. (2020). Race and worrying about police brutality: The hidden injuries of minority status in America. *Victims and Offenders, 15*(5), 549-573. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15564886.2020.176252>
- Washington Post (2023). Fatal Force. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/investigations/police-shootings-database/>