

New tool for measuring police and law enforcement interactions reflects police-based discrimination experiences

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Researchers have developed a new tool to catalog police and law enforcement interactions with black men, the Police and Law Enforcement (PLE) Scale, with the hope of documenting people's experiences and perceptions of police-based discrimination.

The study found that [police](#)-based discrimination is associated with depression symptoms such as sadness, hopelessness and loss of interest and ambition. Because of this, the authors believe that police-based discrimination should be considered a [public health threat](#).

"It's of the utmost importance for those of us who do research and work on black men's health to understand black men's [experiences](#) from their vantage point and how factors in the social environment shape mental and physical health," said Lisa Bowleg, professor of applied social psychology at the George Washington University and a co-author of the paper.

The Police and Law Enforcement Scale, a series of eight questions about individuals' experiences with [law enforcement](#), can help to document discrimination by police. It can be applied to the black community at large to demonstrate the bias these citizens often feel.

The researchers deployed the questionnaire through computer assisted, phone-based interviews with 1,264 black in Georgia. Those surveyed had

a wide variety of socioeconomic, regional and legal backgrounds. The results show that more than half of black men surveyed reported that they experienced some sort of police bias in the last five years. Further, the majority of men who experienced police bias said it happened several times per year.

The researchers note that most scientific literature on the subject typically includes the police's point of view of the experience and rarely that of the person who had the interaction with the police. The new Police and Law Enforcement Scale can help to balance out the record so that it includes the perspective of individuals who have interactions with police.

"There is a substantial gap between what you hear from black men regarding their experiences with [law enforcement officials](#) during their lives and what is in the [scientific literature](#)," said Devin English, a psychology Ph.D. student at the George Washington University and lead author of the study. "We see our study as helping to document what black men have been experiencing for centuries in the United States."

The researchers note that by focusing on black men's experiences with police discrimination and violence, the study provides greater insight about how institutionalized racism continues to shape the health of people in black communities across the country.

"Our study demonstrates that black men report having traumatic encounters with police often, which has a negative impact on their mental health," said David Malebranche, co-author of the study and associate professor of medicine at Morehouse School of Medicine. The survey was conducted at Emory University, Dr. Malebranche's previous institution. "We must consider this context when examining additional health variables such as diet, exercise, substance use, health care utilization, trust in medical institutions and adherence to medications.

Police racial profiling is a common experience for many [black men](#) in the United States, and health care institutions cannot afford to ignore its association to our individual and collective [health](#)."

The researchers hope that by applying the Police and Law Enforcement Scale to additional research and clinical practice, they can contribute to ongoing dialogues about police discrimination around the country. While this study focused on adults, the researchers plan to expand the survey to black adolescents and women. Since implementing the Police and Law Enforcement Scale in their study, the authors have been contacted by other researchers who would like to use the scale for other upcoming research projects.

The paper, "[Measuring Black Men's Police-Based Discrimination Experiences, Development and Validation of the Police and Law Enforcement \(PLE\) Scale](#)," is available online and published in the April print edition of Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, a publication of the American Psychological Association.

Provided by George Washington University

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