

Link found between killings of unarmed black people by police and local babies born prematurely

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Joscha Legewie, a sociologist at Harvard University has found a link between the killing of unarmed black people and an increase in local

black babies being born prematurely. In his paper published in the journal *Science Advances*, he describes his study of birth records for black Americans living in the vicinity of killings by the police and what he found.

Over the past several years, several high-profile instances of police officers shooting and killing unarmed black people (mostly male) in the U.S. have made the news—mostly because the [black community](#) has reacted by staging highly publicized protests. Legewie notes that police in the U.S. shoot approximately 100,000 people each year and that approximately 1,000 of them die. He wondered what impact there might be, if any, on babies born to black women who live in the area in the months after a shooting. To find out, he obtained access to the birth records of all people living in California over the years 2007 to 2016. And he also obtained data on all police killings in California for the same time period. He then set to work analyzing the data, comparing shootings with changes in pregnancy duration for women who lived in the vicinity of the shootings.

Legewie reports that he found a clear link between the killings of unarmed [black people](#) by police and shorter pregnancies of [black women](#) in the local area. He further reports that he found no such link between the killings of unarmed people of any other race by police officers and pregnancy duration for women of any other race—or when the black shooting victim was armed.

He suggests the increase in shortened pregnancies (along with lower birth weights) was possibly due to stress experienced by women pregnant at the time of a shooting. Prior research has shown that stress can trigger cells in the placenta that respond by producing a hormone that is known to lead to premature birth and lower-than-average birth weight. He also notes that other studies have shown that [premature birth](#) can lead to [health problems](#), learning disabilities and in some cases, ADHD.

More information: Joscha Legewie. Police violence and the health of black infants, *Science Advances* (2019). [DOI: 10.1126/sciadv.aax7894](https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.aax7894)

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