

# Publicizing police killings of unarmed Black people causes emotional trauma

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A majority of college students of color show symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder after watching social media videos of unarmed Black men being killed by police, a Rutgers study finds.

The study, published in the *Journal of Black Studies*, surveyed 134 [college students](#) in the United States, between the ages of 18 and 24, 77

percent of whom were Black or Latinx.

Researchers examined the students' engagements with police brutality videos, their reactions to police killings of unarmed Black men and boys, their own encounters with police and their perceptions about police violence.

They found that 90 percent of the students observed several acts of police violence on various social media platforms, with many reporting finding the videos hard to watch, while others shared anger, frustration and fear over these videos.

Seventy-five percent of the students reported getting stopped by the police: 79 percent believed race was a factor and most felt high levels of anxiety during these encounters. Even the students who did not have direct interactions with the police were still fearful because they identified with victims they watched being killed by police and shared on social media.

The findings add to growing data by the U.S. Census Bureau that race or ethnicity is a factor in being stopped by police and other related police violence.

"In communities of color, we are already mistrustful of law enforcement, watching police kill individuals who look like us or members of our families is traumatic," said Felicia Campbell, the primary lead author, and Lecturer at the Yale School of Medicine.

The study found 65 percent of students surveyed reported [police violence](#) is an issue in their hometowns, and 63 percent admitted getting coached by family members on how to handle police encounters.

Previous studies have shown that Black people are three times more

likely to be killed by police than white people and five times more likely to be unarmed when killed. Studies also show that police are more likely to draw and shoot their guns after seeing a Black person than a white person. Stereotypes of Black people, especially men, as inherently criminal may contribute to police killing Black people at disproportionate rates, studies suggest.

"Higher education is no longer immune to Black Lives Matter's message and can't ignore police brutality that affects students of color," said Pamela Valera, an Assistant Professor at Rutgers School of Public Health. "It impacts the mental health of these students."

Researchers said police reform is needed to stop the killing of Black men, women and children by law enforcement. They added that technology, which has led to an increase of videos of deadly encounters between [police](#) and unarmed Black men, has helped to promote calls for reform.

**More information:** Felicia Campbell et al. "The Only Thing New is the Cameras": A Study of U.S. College Students' Perceptions of Police Violence on Social Media, *Journal of Black Studies* (2020). [DOI: 10.1177/0021934720935600](#)

Provided by Rutgers University

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