

Experts on violence release report giving recommendations for reducing inappropriate use of force by police

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A new report from the Police Violence Commission of the International Society for Research on Aggression (ISRA) outlines policy and

procedural recommendations for reducing use of inappropriate police force from behavioral and social science experts.

The panel of experts, chaired by Paul Boxer, a Professor of Psychology at Rutgers University-Newark whose expertise lies in the development and management of aggressive behavior, especially in [high-risk environments](#), includes leading scholars from across the United States and Germany. SASN Department of Psychology's Luis Rivera, an associate professor with expertise in implicit bias, and Kaylise Algrim, a doctoral candidate in Boxer's lab, are among the group.

The report looks at the inappropriate use of force by [police](#) from the perspective of behavioral and social science inquiry related to aggression, violence, and intergroup relations. Researchers examined use of force in the context of research on modern policing as well as critical race theory and offered five recommendations suggested by contemporary theory and research. The panel's recommendations are aimed at policymakers, law enforcement administrators, and scholars.

"There is a crisis in the United States and beyond right now with respect to relations between police and the communities they serve," states Boxer. "Large scale efforts thus far to improve these relations have failed and it is time for a new set of strategies based on behavioral and social science and taking into account the broader environment of systemic bias against minoritized populations, including the de-militarization of the police."

The five recommendations made by the group include:

- Implement public policies that can reduce inappropriate use of force directly and through the reduction of broader burdens on the routine activities of police officers.
- For officers frequently engaged in use-of-force incidents, ensure

that best-practice, evidence-based treatments are available and required.

- Improve and increase the quality and delivery of noncoercive conflict resolution training for all officers, along with police administrative policies and supervision that support alternatives to the use of force, both while scaling back the militarization of [police departments](#).
- Continue the development and evaluation of multi-component interventions for police departments, but ensure they incorporate evidence-based, field-tested components.
- Expand research in the behavioral and social sciences aimed at understanding and managing use-of-force by police and reducing its disproportionate impact on minoritized communities and expand funding for these lines of inquiry.

Included in the policy recommendations is more accountability for officers that are found to use excessive force, including ending "qualified immunity" for police as a legal shield against litigation. "The challenge is that any policy can be put on paper," says Boxer, "but what matters is the accountability—are the policies enforced? Is the enforcement monitored? Is the monitoring evaluated? Are officers who violate policies held accountable?"

Boxer is hopeful that the recent guilty verdict reached in the case of Derek Chauvin, the former Minneapolis police officer who killed George Floyd, will have a positive effect on reducing future use of inappropriate force among police units. "Testimony against Derek Chauvin was provided by the Minneapolis chief of police—this was a big deal as this sort of testimony coming from a high-ranking officer is highly unusual. The chief said that Chauvin violated department policy on protecting the 'sanctity of life.'" This sets a clear bar in Minneapolis. I think the message is pretty clear here, and an easy one for chiefs of police everywhere to understand and convey to their own officers."

The panel recognizes that a true culture shift will take time, even once policies are implemented, and that inappropriate use of force by police might continue to happen. Boxer suggests that some ways to help lessen the trauma on communities from these incidents is an immediate and clear response from leadership. "Police chiefs and other high-ranking officials could aid in the lessening of trauma for families and communities by taking these stances and clearly communicating these positions very openly and very publicly in the wake of any killing of unarmed civilians by police, and by implementing serious disciplinary action when warranted."

He adds, "Conversely, officers who successfully de-escalate high-intensity situations could be rewarded for doing so. These sorts of steps could produce immediate impacts on the culture of a department, particularly for departments in higher-crime areas where officers are more frequently exposed to such situations."

"I hope the Chauvin verdict represents a watershed moment for the police," said Boxer. "I think there are many communities that enjoy constructive relations with their local police departments. It is clear there are many situations where the police are helpful and valued. But I also think in some cases we probably expect the police to take on too much—and this is where the idea of 'defund the police' originates. There have not been high profile calls to eliminate the police altogether, but rather redefine and reorient their work to a more limited scope. Many communities are lacking in enough social and human services, medical and psychiatric services, youth development services that all could work to prevent the sorts of problems that eventually become problems for police. Police should not be asked to take lead roles in handling psychiatric emergencies, for example, and nor should they have to function as ad-hoc case managers for youth having challenges in school or at home."

"At the same time I hope the Chauvin verdict yields a broader and more effective conversation about system racism in American society and beyond, where the killing of George Floyd (and many other Black men and women) is just one example of many demonstrating the unjust treatment that Black people have received."

ISRA is a professional society of scholars and researchers engaged in the scientific study of aggression and violence. The report is [available at ISRA's website](#) and will soon be published in the society's journal, *Aggressive Behavior*.

More information: Report of the Presidential Commission on Police Aggression and Its Disproportionate Impact on Minority Populations. www.israsociety.com/resources/for-the-public

Provided by Rutgers University

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