

# Increased anxiety among young Black adults from exposure to police violence

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Anxiety disorders are among the most prevalent disorders for Black emerging adults 18 to 29 years of age in America. Frequent exposure to police violence among Black emerging adults puts this population at risk

for increased rates of anxiety disorders, according to a new study from researchers at Washington University in St. Louis and presented at the American Psychiatric Association's Annual Meeting, held online.

The study, led by Robert Motley, Ph.D., Race and Opportunity Lab Manager at Washington University in Saint Louis, assessed the prevalence and correlates of anxiety related to [police](#) contact among Black emerging adults. Researchers examined the association between sociodemographic factors, community violence exposure, experiences of being a victim, witnessing and seeing a video of police use of [force](#), and levels of anxiety that Black emerging adults reported experiencing during or in anticipation of police contact. Computer assisted surveys were used to collect data from 300 Black students (age 18-29) enrolled at a [community college](#) or university in St. Louis, Missouri.

On average, the participants had been a victim of police use of force nearly two times; had witnessed in person police use force against someone more than seven times; and had seen video in the media of police use of force more than 34 times. Participants were also asked about having witnessed community violence—on average participants had witnessed more than 10 incidents of community violence in their lifetimes.

Three 4-point Likert police contact anxiety scales, ranging from 0 = not at all, to 3 = severely, were used to assess the severity of anxiety symptoms a participant experienced in the past 30 days during or in anticipation of police contact as a result of 1) being a victim, 2) witnessing, or 3) seeing a video of police use of force in the media. Examples of survey items include:

- As a result of being a victim of police use of force, "Worry about police contact (e.g., being alone during police contact, experiencing police contact at night, experiencing police contact

in a secluded area)"

- As a result of witnessing in person police use force on another individual, "Fearful of police contact (e.g., losing my life, being assaulted, or falsely accused of a crime during police contact), and
- As a result of seeing a video of a real-life incident of police use of force in the media (e.g., television, or internet/social media), "Urge to avoid police contact (e.g., dressing differently, not calling police when I or others are in need of help)."

Police contact anxiety as a result of being a victim of police use of force (Mean = 13.68, SD = 4.94), witnessing in person police use of force (Mean = 13.35, SD = 5.10), and seeing a video in the media of police use of force (Mean = 13.01, SD = 4.41) was moderately high (range of 6-24) for study participants.

Being male, unemployed, and having witnessed more community violence were significantly associated with greater police contact anxiety. Participants who were unemployed were more likely to have increased police contact anxiety as a result of seeing a video in the media of police use of force compared to those who were employed. Participants who reported more [past experiences](#) of witnessing community violence were more likely to have increased police contact anxiety as a result of being a victim of police use of force than those who had witnessed it less often.

The authors suggest their findings of black emerging adults experiencing moderately high rates of police contact [anxiety](#) can help inform clinical practice with ethnic minorities experiencing various forms of police use of force exposure.

Provided by American Psychiatric Association

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