

Study indicates that as racial diversity and income rise, civilian injuries by police fall

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An analysis of civilian injuries resulting from interactions with police in Illinois found that residents of all races and ethnicities are more likely to sustain injuries if they live in economically under-resourced areas. The

risk of injury decreases as communities become more racially diverse, the researchers found.

The study from the University of Illinois Chicago analyzed information on nearly 5,000 injuries caused by police that were treated in Illinois hospitals between 2016 and 2022. The researchers then compared that information with socioeconomic data from the U.S. Census on each injured person's home ZIP code.

The study is [published](#) in the *Journal of Urban Health* and was conducted as part of the School of Public Health's Law Enforcement Epidemiology Project.

Most previous research on police-civilian interactions focuses on fatalities, the researchers explained.

"The problem is, for every fatal injury, there are more than 100 nonfatal injuries," said author Lee Friedman, a research professor at UIC and co-lead of the Law Enforcement Epidemiology Project.

The analysis of nonfatal injuries revealed a more granular picture of what is happening across the state, allowing the researchers to evaluate how community-level characteristics are associated with injuries during police-civilian interactions. These injuries can not only harm people's mental and [physical health](#), they can also erode community trust in police, they said.

Without clear data on injuries, "there's no information to support people in specific communities when they want to understand, "Is this normal?" said Alfreda Holloway-Beth, research assistant professor at UIC and co-lead on the Law Enforcement Epidemiology Project.

The study divided the state's ZIP codes into three categories: Chicago,

suburban Cook County and the rest of the state. In all three areas, non-Hispanic Black residents had the highest rates of injuries, ranging from 5.5 to 10.5 times higher than the injury rate for non-Hispanic white residents. Hispanic residents had higher rates of injury compared with white residents in Chicago and suburban Cook County, but lower rates in rural areas.

Statewide, as the percentage of non-Hispanic Black residents or Hispanic residents in a ZIP code increased, injury rates among all three racial and [ethnic groups](#) decreased, though there was variability across regions of the state, and certain ZIP codes had very high rates of injury.

Across all three regions of Illinois and all three racial groups, the rate of injury increased in economically under-resourced areas.

"It was very consistent that the more economically disadvantaged a community is, the higher the rates of injury are going to be," Friedman said.

This result makes clear why it is very important to study factors beyond race when examining injuries, Holloway-Beth said.

"If we just rely on data on race, we don't get at the issue of being poor in America and how much that affects these numbers," she said.

Holloway-Beth, who is also director of epidemiology at the Cook County Department of Public Health, is part of a national pilot project among state and local public health departments to start tracking this sort of injury data. The researchers hope academics in other states begin these types of analyses, too.

"I think the narrative has been a bit constrained as being solely about race and ethnicity. And it's been focused on [fatal injuries](#)," Friedman

said. "That has meant we've lost some of the complexity of the issue."

The other authors of the paper are Chibuzor Abasilim, a post-doctoral scholar, and Brett Shannon, a doctoral student, both at UIC's School of Public Health.

More information: Chibuzor Abasilim et al, Relationship between Civilian Injuries Caused during Contact with Law Enforcement and Community-Level Sociodemographic Characteristics, *Journal of Urban Health* (2024). [DOI: 10.1007/s11524-024-00865-9](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11524-024-00865-9)

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