Police Violence Severely Harms Black Americans' Mental Health

September 10, 2020 By Alicia Green

Police violence against Black people, including the killing of unarmed citizens, is negatively affecting African Americans' mental health, reports ABC News.

According to data from the U.S. Census Bureau, anxiety among Black Americans increased by 26%, and depression increased by 22% in the weeks after George Floyd's death at the hands of police. (In late May, a police officer pinned an unarmed Floyd under his knee, leading to his death.)

Caught on video, Floyd's death sparked a worldwide outcry regarding police brutality and the injustices experienced by Black Americans. But these issues are not new, and health experts confirm that the continued violence by police and the current coronavirus crisis in America have taken their toll on Black people.

Black Americans are already 20% more likely to experience serious mental health woes than the general population, said Thomas A. Vance, PhD, a postdoctoral and research fellow at Columbia University. Furthermore, young Black people exposed to violence are 25% more likely to experience posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). (Click here to read Chicago Rapper G Herbo's story about how growing up surrounded by drug addiction, violence and other negative factors contributed to his PTSD.)

Researchers have previously observed that police killings have overloaded Black Americans with a mental health burden nearly as large as the mental health burden associated with diabetes. What's more, police killings generated 55 million poor mental health days among Black Americans yearly.

African Americans are also assaulted by instant images of Black men and women being aggressively mistreated physically and emotionally as well as being shot. According to Colette A. Poole-Boykin, MD, of Yale University, these images can trigger secondary trauma, as indirect exposure to a traumatic event is known.

"Seeing constant videos of Black death is next-level exhausting," activist Isabella Dominique told ABC News. "It's a constant reminder that we are not safe anywhere in this country, no matter what we do. We shouldn't have to grow strong and be able to process violence against our people."

Experts advise Black Americans to seek mental health resources, such as talk therapy, to help

them assess their trauma. But as ABC News points out, one in five Black Americans live in poverty, which sometimes makes it almost impossible to access the mental health help they may desperately need.

For related coverage, “Black Americans Report Worse Effects of Bias From COVID-19,” “Medical Groups Call Racism a Public Health Issue,” “Police Killings Negatively Affect Health of Black Infants.”

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.realhealthmag.com/article/police-violence-severely-harms-black-americans-mental-health