

APA Official Actions

Position Statement on Police Brutality and Black Males

Approved by the Board of Trustees, December 2018

Approved by the Assembly, November 2018

“Policy documents are approved by the APA Assembly and Board of Trustees. . . These are . . . position statements that define APA official policy on specific subjects. . .” – *APA Operations Manual*

Issue:

Repeated instances of police brutality against black males has led to widespread protests and generated national concern. Constant depictions of these incidences have had a profound impact on the emotional and psychological well-being of black families and communities, contributing to fear and uncertainty. Research shows that blacks are significantly more likely to experience police brutality than whites (Kahn, 2016). *The Counted* project—a database of documented killings by U.S. law enforcement—showed that black males, ranging from ages 15 to 34, were 9 times more likely than any other racial/ethnic group to be killed by police officers in 2015 (The Guardian, 2017). Data also showed that black males were killed at a rate 4 times that of their white counterparts within the same year. Mental health research has demonstrated a causal link between experienced racial discrimination and adverse mental health outcomes (Pascoe and Smart Richman, 2009). Perceived racism and discrimination—either overt or covert (microaggression) or in the forms of implicit or explicit bias—have been associated with depression, anxiety, increased substance use, feelings of hopelessness, and suicide ideation in black adults and youths (Gibbons, 2004; Nyborg, 2003; O’Keefe 2014). African-American males who are racially profiled to be criminals and perceived of wrong doing by law enforcement are at increased risk of subsequent symptoms of anxiety and posttraumatic stress disorder (APA, 2018; Aymer, 2016). Development of these mental health symptoms may in turn perpetuate a cycle of violence. It is reported that people with mental illness, especially those who are black, are disproportionately at risk of being victims of police killings than the general population (Saleh et. al, 2018). As leaders in mental health care, psychiatrists can play a vital role in promoting a positive relationship between law enforcement agencies and the black community while providing high-quality treatment to those impacted by police brutality.

Position:

APA condemns the brutal treatment of black males, the use of excessive force against black males, and the use of unwarranted and unnecessary deadly force against black males by law enforcement agencies and police departments.

1. **APA recognizes the profoundly negative impact that police brutality on black males has on their mental health, as well as the mental health of the black community.**
2. **APA encourages initiatives that foster direct collaboration between law enforcement and black communities in order to engender trust, cooperation, and understanding. Other**

necessary initiatives include, quality improvement programs on the part of law enforcement, community policing, and racial diversification of law enforcement officers and leadership.

3. APA encourages collaboration between law enforcement and mental health professionals for the purpose of developing programs that train law enforcement administrators and officers on the mental health impact of racial bias and its related trauma in the communities they serve.
4. APA encourages continued data collection and research into understanding the factors driving the disproportionate interfacing of black males with the juvenile or criminal justice system, as well as research that explores the mental health impact of police brutality and the use of excessive/deadly force on black males and black communities.
5. APA encourages the development of novel approaches and strategies to address the unique mental health needs of black males who have either directly, or indirectly experienced police brutality and/or the use of unwarranted excessive/deadly force by law enforcement, as well as the mental health needs of their family and community members.

This Position Statement was endorsed by the Caucus of Black Psychiatrists.

Authors:

Council on Minority Mental Health and Health Disparities

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