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## What Social Science Research Says about Police Violence against Racial and Ethnic Minorities: Understanding the Antecedents and Consequences—An Introduction

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*Police violence against racial and ethnic minorities by law enforcement is an international social justice issue that has elicited substantial societal attention, both historically and more recently since the death of Michael Brown in 2014 in the United States. This volume of the Journal of Social Issues integrates theoretical and empirical research to examine police violence (i.e., disproportionate physical and psychological injury and maltreatment) against racial and ethnic minorities and provides policy recommendations directed at reducing this violence from a multidisciplinary perspective. Organized across two substantive sections, one section is devoted to evidence of and factors contributing to police violence against racial and ethnic minorities, including racial stereotyping, implicit bias, and contextual factors. The other section focuses on societal-level, downstream consequences of exposure to this violence for both individual targets and their community, including attitudinal, physical, and mental health consequences. A concluding chapter integrates the special issue articles' findings and provides new perspectives on policing and race. This opening article to the special issue reviews existing literature and outlines the unique contributions of the included articles on this topic.*

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Although not a new phenomenon, disproportionate police violence toward racial and ethnic minorities has garnered international attention in recent years (e.g., Athwal & Bourne, 2015; Burch, 2011; Fryer, 2016; Goff, Lloyd, Geller, Raphael, & Glasser, 2016; Hyland, Langston, & Davis, 2015; Kahn & Martin, 2016). This violence is often perceived to be excessive by minority communities and, at least portions of, the larger public, regardless of whether it was a “justified” or “in policy” police shooting or action. High-profile police shootings, often of unarmed racial and ethnic minorities, have incited racial and ethnic tensions, led to wide-scale protests, and drawn intensive media coverage. This special issue takes an interdisciplinary look at police violence against racial and ethnic minorities by integrating theoretical perspectives, empirical research, and public policy recommendations.

We define police violence broadly to encompass fatalities due to physical injury or negligence as well as excessive nonfatal physical and psychological injury and maltreatment; racial and ethnic minorities are defined not only numerically, but also by social status and historical contexts to include individuals marginalized or stigmatized on the basis of self-identified or perceived race and/or ethnicity. The overall goals of this volume are to elucidate some of the myriad of antecedents and consequences of violence against people of color, broaden the discussion around the impact of this harm, and provide policy recommendations that promote equitable treatment of racial and ethnic minorities by police. In this introductory article, we briefly review past research on factors that contribute to these disparities as well as physiological and psychological consequences of this violence. Then, we provide an overview of contributions to this volume that extend this research.

### **Factors Contributing to Disparities in Police Violence against Racial and Ethnic Minorities**

Disproportionate use of force toward racial and ethnic minorities ranges on a continuum from low levels of nonlethal force to highest levels of lethal force (Kahn & Martin, 2016). In the United States, people of color are more likely to experience both threats of (Hyland et al., 2015), and actual use of, all levels of nonlethal force in interactions with police (Fryer, 2016; Goff et al., 2016). Similarly, in England and Wales, Blacks and other ethnic minorities, refugees, and migrants experience a disproportionate level of force compared to Whites (Athwal & Bourne, 2015). Regarding fatal encounters with the police, racial and ethnic minorities, especially young minority men in the United States (Burch, 2011) and internationally, are more likely to die in police custody or at the hands of police (Inquest, 2017). For instance, in 2015–2016, 405 unarmed individuals were killed by law enforcement in the United States; almost 30% of these individuals were Black (The Guardian, n.d.); a startling contrast to the roughly 12–15% of the U.S. population that Blacks comprise. Various assessments, like the ones mentioned

here, demonstrate a consistent pattern of disparities in police violence against racial and ethnic minorities across countries and contexts. These disparities are perceived to be excessive and unjustified by the groups targeted and many others in society. But why do these disparities exist? What are the causes?

Both contextual and dispositional factors have been examined as potential contributors to disparities in police violence against racial and ethnic minorities. From a contextual standpoint, researchers have focused on characteristics of the police-suspect encounter such as the victim's race or ethnicity, if the victim was armed, the victim's attire, and the location of the incident (e.g., urban setting). Take, for instance, empirical research on shooter bias (e.g., Correll, Hudson, Guillermo, & Ma, 2014). The police shooting of unarmed African immigrant Amadou Diallo in New York led to experimental investigations into the causal role that suspect race has on decisions to shoot. Building off of prior work on weapon misidentification (Payne, 2001), this research involves the use of a first-person shooter task, during which participants are presented with Black and White male targets holding weapons or neutral objects. Responses indicate a racially biased pattern of decisions to shoot, termed "shooter bias," such that people are more likely to make shooting mistakes consistent with Black racial stereotypes (e.g., mistakenly shooting unarmed Blacks more than unarmed Whites). This bias is attributed to cultural knowledge of racial stereotypes, in particular stereotypes of Black men as dangerous, aggressive, and criminal (Correll et al., 2014).

Over the past decade and a half, studies have uncovered similar biased shooting patterns against Latinos (Sadler, Correll, Park, & Judd, 2012), Muslims wearing headgear such as a turban or hijab (Unkelbach, Goldenberg, Mueller, Sobbe, & Spannaus, 2009), and darker skinned, compared to lighter skinned, racial minorities (Kahn & Davies, 2011). Scholars have also focused on ways to mitigate shooter bias, finding some success in training programs that counter the Black stereotypic associations with violence (e.g., Plant, Peruche, & Butz, 2005; Sim, Correll, & Sadler, 2013).

Work on shooter bias highlights that racial and ethnic disparities in policing outcomes may reflect implicit or unconscious biases, in addition to any explicitly held prejudicial beliefs (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). Implicit biases that link racial and ethnic minorities with criminality and violence, held beneath an individual's conscious awareness, can produce discriminatory outcomes. Police may hold these implicit biases that are also pervasive in society, which can impact their behavior in police-suspect interactions (Kahn & Martin, 2016). While explicit racial animus held by police may play a role in producing some of this pattern of violence, implicit bias may also be a significant source.

And although not a primary focus of this volume, from a dispositional framework, some scholars suggest that there is a distinct "police personality"; yet the origin and exact composition is up for debate (Gatto, Dambrun, Kerbrat, & de Oliveira, 2009; Guimond, Dambrun, Michinov, & Duarte, 2003; Lefkowitz, 1975;

Sidanius, van Laar, Levin, & Sinclair, 2003, Twersky-Glasner, 2005; Whitley, 1999). A great deal of work in this area has centered on right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) and social dominance orientation (SDO)—two traits positively correlated with racial/ethnic prejudice and potentially related to police officers' use of force. RWA is a tendency to adhere to authority figures, engage in aggression toward out-group members when sanctioned by authority figures, and support traditional values endorsed by authority figures (Whitley, 1999). Relatedly, SDO is the degree to which a person desires to see their in-group as dominant over other out-groups, combined with a willingness to endorse beliefs that support the subjugation of out-groups (Sidanius et al., 2003). Evidence that police officers differ these traits is inconclusive (Gerber & Ward, 2011). Some research suggests that both newly recruited and established police officers' levels of RWA and SDO are higher than the general population, but that only established officers are higher in prejudice toward ethnic minority groups (Gatto et al., 2009). Oppositely, other studies show that law enforcement personnel are lower in authoritarianism than members of civilian groups, such as college students and teachers (Gerber & Ward, 2011). Still, one could argue that a police officer with these personality traits may be more prone to violence against racial and ethnic minorities.

Taken together, these contextual and dispositional factors provide some initial insight into factors that potentially contribute to the disparate amount of police force directed at racial and ethnic minorities, but it is essential to remember that this pressing problem is not just an issue of circumstance or police officers' individual level personality traits or explicit bias. Rather, law enforcement's history of mistreatment of racial and ethnic minorities is reinforced by societal-level systematic racism and ethnocentrism. Next, we turn to policies designed to address racially biased policing outcomes on a structural level.

### **Physiological and Psychological Consequences of Violence and Discrimination**

Previous research has also examined the impact of police violence against racial and ethnic minorities on other group members that are not the direct targets of this violence. It stands to reason that recurrent exposure to police violence against members of one's racial/ethnic group could be interpreted as a form of discrimination, and thus, has the potential to negatively impact physical and mental health.

Higher levels of perceived and experienced discrimination have been linked with poorer physical health, such as hypertension and increased risk of cardiovascular disease, as well risky health behaviors, such as smoking and alcohol use (Krieger & Sidney, 1996; Williams, Neighbors, & Jackson, 2003). Likewise, experiencing racial discrimination is associated with higher levels of psychological distress (Landrine & Klonoff, 1996; Williams & Williams-Morris, 2000), major

depression and other depressive symptoms (Kessler, Mickleson, & Williams, 1999; Thompson, 1996), and lower levels of happiness and life satisfaction (Utsey, Ponterotto, Reynolds, & Cancelli, 2000). Exposure to police violence against one's group, even vicariously, can carry with it these same outcomes.

### **Existing Policies to Decrease Police Violence against Racial and Ethnic Minorities**

Legislation to combat race and ethnicity-based discrimination among law enforcement agencies has also been enacted in some countries in order to promote more equitable outcomes. For instance, the United Kingdom passed the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, in part, to address racial discrimination among police officers (Bowling & Phillips, 2003). It “outlaws race discrimination in public authority functions not covered by the original Race Relations Act 1976” and “places a general duty on specified public authorities to promote race equality” (The Guardian, 2001). Similarly, The Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act of 2006 made discrimination on the basis of race, religion, and other characteristics illegal (The Police Accountability Project, 2011). Still, the effectiveness of such legislations has not been quantified (Bowling & Phillips, 2003). And importantly, this type of national-level legislation banning racial profiling in policing is absent in the United States (Goff & Kahn, 2012).

Other ways to reduce racial and ethnic disparities in policing outcomes focus on policy initiatives and police training. In response to recent protests regarding police use of force against racial minorities, police body-worn cameras (BWCs) have been championed as both a method of deterring the use of excessive force among officers and an objective means of documenting officer–civilian encounters (Kahn & Martin, 2016). Because it is a newer technology, the effect of BWCs on use of force is conflicting and inconclusive at best (Ariel et al., 2016). Further, police training programs to promote more equitable outcomes, such as cultural competency trainings, trainings to reduce racial profiling (e.g., perspectives on profiling training), and trainings on implicit bias (e.g., fair and impartial policing), are not universally adopted nor their long-term effectiveness rigorously evaluated (Kahn & Martin, 2016). The range of these issues suggests that any intervention to address this victimization must be multifaceted and far-reaching.

### **Overview of Current Issue**

Organized across two substantive sections, the first of these sections aims to quantify and describe the occurrence of police violence against racial and ethnic minorities and to elucidate factors contributing to this treatment. It begins with an article examining the magnitude of racial disparities in police use of force and testing competing hypotheses as the source of these disparate outcomes. Scott,

Ma, Sadler, and Correll (2017) analyze racial disparities in police shootings using data from the U.S. Department of Justice. They investigate two potential causes of the disparity: the *Racially Biased Policing* (RBP) hypothesis (i.e., racial bias leads officers to use more extreme force with Black suspects), and the *Differential Criminal Activity* (DCA) hypothesis (i.e., police respond to the behavior of the suspect, rather than race, but that behavior differs as a function of race). Supporting RBP, they find that police are more likely to shoot Blacks, regardless of any racial differences in crime activity. This suggests that officers are influenced by suspect race, and not differential suspect behavior, in these fatal encounters.

Having established the existence of disparities in police shooting fatalities, in the next article, Kahn and Davies (2017) explore contextual factors that moderate shooting decisions using an experimental paradigm. They find that participants were more likely to display “shooter bias” against Black, compared to White, suspects when primed with a stereotypically Black and threatening neighborhood and when they were dressed in stereotypically Black and threatening attire. Their results suggest that neighborhoods that are perceived to be dangerous, potentially because more Black individuals live there, and racialized clothing, such as Trayvon Martin’s hoodie, may be uniquely contributing and interacting with suspect race to increase the likelihood of police shooting racial minorities in police-suspect interactions. They argue that emphasis should be on police training to reduce the likelihood of potentially fatal shooting decisions based on race interacting with the social context.

The third article of the section shifts from police use of force against civilians to fatal use of force between police officers themselves, specifically examining shooting deaths of off-duty officers mistaken to be citizens. Mirroring disproportionate outcomes for racial minority citizens, racial disparities are strongly evident here as well. Analyzing data from the New York State Task Force on Police-on-Police Shootings and other administrative archives, Charbonneau, Spencer, and Glaser (2017) conclude the probability of being fatally shot by another officer while off-duty is 52 times higher for Black officers than White officers. They argue that the racial disparities in police-on-police shootings provide a stark, but informative, example of the complex role of implicit bias in policing decisions and suggest how it might be mitigated.

The second of the two substantive sections focuses on the long-lasting and far-reaching societal-level consequences of perceived excessive police violence against racial and ethnic minorities. It begins by drawing attention to the immediate societal reactions to these acts, and then details the indirect impact of this brutality on the mental and physical health of communities of color. First, Reinka and Leach (2017) review recent polls, as well as their own work, on the racial divide in attitudes and reactions to, and protest against, police violence toward racial and ethnic minorities. In their research, Black and White individuals had divergent reactions to images of police brutality and protests against police force.

White individuals found these images more novel, suggesting unfamiliarity with them, while Black individuals were more affected by these images. A linguistic analysis of participants' written reactions to the images revealed that Blacks used more positive, justice- and affiliation-related language. These findings suggest that Blacks, compared to Whites, may have a greater connection with, and appreciation of, protest against police violence toward racial and ethnic minorities. This work has implications for how protests against police violence, such as Black Lives Matters, are viewed, understood, and ultimately supported—or not.

Turning to the portrayal of victims, the next article focuses on the type of media coverage racial and ethnic minority victims of police violence receive. Following the deaths of Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown, media outlets were criticized for their focus on negative, racially stereotypical background information they presented about both teenagers. Dukes and Gaither (2017) examine how such portrayals affect attributions of blame, sympathy, and empathy with the victim and killer, and by extension, undermine motivation to prosecute perpetrators. Results demonstrate that having a negative, racial stereotype-filled message about a victim, similar to information frequently released about racial and ethnic minority victims of police violence, can significantly sway not only how the victim is perceived, but also how the shooter is perceived and the sentencing the shooter should receive. The authors provide policy recommendations for media outlets that encourage portrayals of victims that are, balanced.

What effect do perceived biased interactions with police have on racial and ethnic minorities' perceptions of law enforcement? In the fourth article of this section, Nadal, Davidoff, Allicook, Serpe, and Erazo (2017) use a mixed method approach to investigate the impact of perceived racial bias in policing on communities of color, including Blacks, Latinx, Asians, and Whites. Specifically, the authors examine both perceptions of law enforcement and the qualitative experiences of being stopped by police without a justifiable reason as a function of race. Their findings suggest that Blacks hold more negative attitudes toward the police than other racial and ethnic groups, and that in general, when people perceive they are unjustifiably stopped, that they experience a spectrum of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral reactions. The authors discuss the implications of these findings for the mental health of individuals that feel unfairly targeted by police, as well as its impact on community relations and the need to improve the relationship between law enforcement and the communities they serve.

As described earlier, the pattern of unequal treatment of racial and ethnic minorities by police is international in scope. Kauff, Wölfer, and Hewstone (2017) offer an international perspective on adolescent immigrant minorities' perceptions of discrimination, including by police and private security guards, and how it affects their health and well-being in three European countries—Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden. Kauff et al. (2017) find that perceived ethnic victimization by police and private security guards was the most reported type of

discrimination, as well as the most impactful, on their overall health (e.g., psychosomatic problems). These health consequences can have long-lasting impacts on both individuals and communities, a point that continues in the final article.

Continuing on this theme, Bryant-Davis, Adams, Alejandre, and Gray (2017) provide a critical review of literature on police brutality and disparate treatment (e.g., stop-and-frisk searches, identification checks) of racial and ethnic minorities in the United States and beyond through multiple trauma frameworks, namely, complex trauma and intergenerational trauma. Complex trauma is characterized as a subset of dangerous or harmful events in which the person suffers traumatic shock, and also severe disruption in the development of core self-regulatory competences (Ford, 2005). Intergenerational trauma posits that racial and ethnic minorities have been subjected to acute traumas and/or persistent acts of criminalization spanning multiple generations (e.g., war, genocide, colonization, and segregation/institutionalized racism) and are at risk for mental, physical, and environmental health risks long after the actual trauma/criminalization has occurred. Police brutality can be understood through this trauma framework and cross-generational effects can be noted in these targeted racial minority communities. Bryant-Davis et al. (2017) conclude by outlining novel ways in which these frameworks can inform medical, judicial, and clinical policies and procedures.

Finally, in a concluding chapter to the special issue, Jones (2017) provides an additional perspective and integration on the findings from the included articles and what they mean for our understanding of race, policing, and violence. The article brings in historical insights, an analysis of causes, and thoughts on reducing the occurrence of future police violence against racial and ethnic minorities.

In summary, the special issue seeks to better understand the range of factors that create and maintain police violence against racial and ethnic minorities and assess the aftermath of this harm. Taken together, these contributions provide new perspectives on these troubling and devastating incidents, and also new recommendations, small and large, toward alleviating this international social justice issue.

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