

# Police violence the sixth leading cause of death for young men in the US

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20 August 2019

The killing of young men by police in America is a health emergency. Much attention has been given to the rise in recent years of “deaths of despair”—due to drug overdose, alcohol abuse and suicide. However, a recent study ranks police killings of young men as the sixth leading cause of death for young men in the US, regardless of race.

The study was published August 5 in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (PNAS) by Rutgers University Newark, University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, and Washington University in St. Louis. It concludes: “Risk of being killed by police peaks between the ages of 20 years and 35 years for men and women and for all racial and ethnic groups.”

The study’s authors, Frank Edwards, Hedwig Lee and Michael Esposito, note that no agency of the government tracks or compiles an official count of peoples’ deaths at the hands of law enforcement. The findings on police “use-of-force” deaths in the study are gleaned by journalists from public records and news accounts and tabulated at the Fatal Encounters web site.

According to the Mapping Police Violence web site, 1,164 people were killed by police in 2018. According to the *Washington Post*’s Fatal Force tally, there were only 22 days in all of last year in which police didn’t kill someone.

The study’s authors also point to a commonly recognized phenomenon: “Police in the United States kill far more people than do police in other advanced industrial democracies.” Deaths due to police violence have increased a staggering 50 percent since 2008.

The study estimated an overall annual mortality rate from police violence of 1.8 per 100,000 for all men ages 25 to 29, in sixth place among all causes of death.

Number one was a catch-all category of accidental causes (such as drug overdose, motor vehicular

accidents, and other fatal accidents), standing at 76.6 per 100,000.

Suicides account for 26.7 deaths per 100,000, homicides 22.0 per 100,000, heart disease 7.0 per 100,000, and cancer 6.3 per 100,000. It is a grim fact of life in America that the top three causes of death for young men involve so-called “deaths of despair” (drug overdoses and suicide) and homicides.

The mortality rate for women from police violence stands at 0.08 per 100,000 annually and does not rank in the 15 leading causes of death in young women.

Deaths caused by law enforcement actions were compiled for the study using data from 2013 to 2018. The authors found that about 52 of every 100,000 men and boys in the United States will be killed by police use of force over their lifetime. This compares to about 3 of every 100,000 women and girls that will meet the same fate. Latino men and boys have about a 53 per 100,000 risk of death by police, similar to the overall risk for men and boys.

The study confirms that black men have about 2.5 times the life risk of being killed by police than white men. Native American men have a lifetime risk of death by law enforcement between 1.2 to 1.7 times that of white men, and Native American women have a lifetime risk of a police-caused death 1.1 to 2.1 times that of white women.

The authors make the false claim that “Policing plays a key role in maintaining structural inequalities between people of color and white people in the United States.” While the police killings of African Americans, Latinos and Native Americans are disproportionate in relation to their percentage in the population, the greatest number of people killed in police shootings are white. Moreover, while this issue is not addressed in the study, other studies have shown

that black police are just as likely to kill, and just as likely to kill black men, as white police.

The “structural inequalities” enforced by the police violence are those between the ruling class and the working class and are not of a racial character. All of the racial- and gender-sensitivity training in police departments in cities and towns across America will not lead to a reduction in police violence against the population as a whole.

The study notes: “Austerity in social welfare and public health problems has led to police and prisons becoming catch-all responses to social problems.” In other words, the armed men of the state have become the “first responders” to mental health, poverty and other expressions of the social crisis—with fatal effect.

Of the 570 people counted in the *Washington Post*’s death-by-police tally for 2018, approximately 20 percent were described as mentally ill. Police often shoot and kill individuals whose loved ones have called for help to deal with a mental health crisis for which they have been unable to obtain help, only to see them gunned down.

Reporting on the *PNAS* study, *Newsweek* notes that “Between 2013 to 2017, 11,456 fatal encounters with police and members of the public were reported.” Over the course of a man’s life in the US, he has a 1 in 2,000 chance of dying by police violence—be it by Taser, “restraint” as in a chokehold, “rough” rides in law enforcement vehicles, beatings, chemical agent, or gunshot. For black men, the lifetime risk of a police-caused death is 1 in 1,000.

The crowdsourced Mass Shooting Project counts mass shootings as any incident in which four or more people are killed. By this criteria, 387 people were killed in all of 2018 in mass shootings. Police killings accounted for 2.5 times as many deaths.

The police, as the armed representatives of the super-wealthy ruling elite, are in the front line of defense of the system of stark structural economic inequality in which working and poor people of all races, genders and ages are alienated from and robbed of the wealth that they produce.

The violence meted out by police on a daily basis on streets across America is a significant cause of early deaths of young men in particular. As the sixth leading cause of deaths for this group of the population, it is a significant contributor to the falling life expectancy of

the US population in the last two years for the first time in half a century.

In the five years since 18-year-old Michael Brown was shot at least six times by police officer Darren Wilson in Ferguson, Missouri, and left for four-and-a-half hours to die in the street, police have killed an estimated 5,000 Americans. According to the Police Integrity Research Group, since 2005 only 35 officers have been convicted of a crime related to an on-duty fatal shooting.



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