

## Excessive police violence evident in emergency care cases, say US doctors

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Excessive police violence is evident in the types of injury and trauma emergency care doctors are treating in the US, indicates research published in *Emergency Medicine Journal*.

The findings are based on 315 responses to a representative survey of 393 academic emergency care doctors across the USA.

There are around 800,000 police (law enforcement) officers in the USA, and figures for 2002 show that just short of the 45 million people who had a face to face encounter with one, did so at the behest of the officer.

Almost all (99.8%) of respondents believed that the police use excessive force to arrest and detain suspects.

And a similar number (98%) confirmed that they had treated patients who they suspected had sustained injuries/bruising inflicted by police officers.

Around two thirds of respondents said they had treated two or more such cases a year.

Doctors working in public facilities were more than four times as likely to report treating patients who had been the victims of excessive police force than doctors working at university or community teaching emergency care departments.

The most frequently cited type of injury was blunt trauma inflicted by fists or feet. Around three out of four cited overly tight handcuffs.

Seven out of 10 (71%) doctors said they had not reported these incidents and over 95% said they had no departmental policies on reporting their suspicions.

A high proportion of respondents (94%) said they had not been given any training on how to handle such cases.

But around 70% felt they should be reporting incidents of this kind, while just under half felt it should be a statutory requirement to do so, as it is for child abuse, domestic violence, and elder abuse.

The authors point out that the police do sometimes have to use coercive force, ranging across a spectrum from voice commands through physical restraint and use of chemical sprays, batons, and dogs, to lethal firearms.

Most police departments do not keep records of how often coercive force is used in confrontational situations, say the authors, but estimates suggest that this applies in around 8% of encounters.

How often it escalates to excessive force is not known, they add. But the World Health Organization classifies Injury and death caused by excessive force at the hands of police officers a breach of human rights.

Source: British Medical Journal

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