

New study finds police-related fatalities may occur twice as often as reported

July 24 2018, by Stephen D'angelo



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According to a new study led by a Cornell University researchers, an average of nearly three men in the United States are killed by police use of deadly force every day. This accounts for 8 percent of all homicides

with adult male victims—twice as many as identified in official statistics.

These starkly contrasting numbers are part of the study, "Risk of Police-Involved Death by Race/Ethnicity and Place, United States, 2012-2018," led by Frank Edwards, postdoctoral associate with Cornell University's Bronfenbrenner Center for Translational Research, published in the *American Journal of Public Health*.

"Official statistics show that deaths attributable to legal intervention by police account for close to 4 percent of all homicides with adult male victims," Edwards said. "We estimated that over this period, police were responsible for about 8 percent of all U.S. homicides with adult male victims—or 2.8 per day on average."

Past work on police-involved mortality has been limited by the absence of systematic data, Edwards said. Such data, primarily collected through the Bureau of Justice Statistics' Arrest-Related Deaths program or the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Supplementary Homicide Report, are widely acknowledged as unreliable due to limited scope and voluntary data reporting.

In response to such shortcomings, journalists, activists and researchers have begun collecting data that count police-involved deaths through public records and media coverage, a method the Bureau of Justice Statistics says is actually more reliable than relying on police departments to report, Edwards said.

Through this method, the research found that the risk of being killed by police is 3.2 to 3.5 times higher for black men than for white men, and between 1.4 and 1.7 times higher for Latino men.

Edwards and his co-authors identified 6,295 adult male victims of police

homicide over a six-year period between Jan. 1, 2012, and Feb. 12, 2018—averaging about 1,028 deaths per year, or 2.8 deaths per day.

Of those 6,295 victims, 2,993 were white, 1,779 were black, 1,145 were Latino, 114 were Asian/Pacific Islander, and 94 were American Indian/Alaska Native. During this period, black men were killed by police at a rate of at least 2.1 per 100,000 population, Latino men at a rate of at least 1.0 per 100,000, and white men at least 0.6 per 100,000.

The research also showed that this risk varies dramatically by location. The data showed that although risk is high in large urban areas typically associated with police [homicide](#), the majority of police homicides occur in less-populated regions.

In the Mountain States, police were responsible for about 17 percent of all homicides, while in the Middle Atlantic states, police accounted for about 5 percent of all homicides. Police accounted for more than 10 percent of all homicides in predominantly rural areas and about 7 percent of all homicides in large central metropolitan areas.

Edwards says that though this research provides more accurate data on the use of deadly force by [police](#), it does not paint the whole picture.

"The new data that we're using is capturing a lot more cases than what the official data is showing us, but there is still an undercount," he said. "Everything that we've put forward within our research, we still think of that as being conservative."

More information: Frank Edwards et al, Risk of Police-Involved Death by Race/Ethnicity and Place, United States, 2012–2018, *American Journal of Public Health* (2018). [DOI: 10.2105/AJPH.2018.304559](https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2018.304559)

Provided by Cornell University

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