

# Racially Motivated Police Brutality Is a Community Public Health Issue in the United States

Darrell Norman Burrell, Marymount University, USA & The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, USA\*

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4675-9544>

Sharon L. Burton, Capitol Technology University, USA

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1653-9783>

Grace E. McGrath, Marymount University, USA

## ABSTRACT

Ongoing global protests against police violence and racism were heightened in 2020 after the deaths of Breana Taylor and George Floyd, whose deaths made headlines worldwide and raised awareness of the Black Lives Matter movement, which targets structural racism and violence against Black people in the USA and abroad. There are many documented links between policing and health-related outcomes, including but not limited to fatal injuries that increase population-specific mortality rates, adverse physiological responses that increase morbidity, psychological stress, arrests, incarcerations, and legal, medical, and funeral bills that cause socioeconomic deprivation, poor school performance, incomplete high-school education and not entering higher education, and the intersecting oppressive structures that result in systematic disempowerment and the destruction of civil liberties. This paper makes the case for classifying and exploring police brutality as a public health issue.

## KEYWORDS

Black Lives Matter, Community policing, police misconduct, police reform, public health, public safety, racial profiling, school resource officers

## INTRODUCTION

The occurrence and familiarity of violence inflicted by members of the police force are connected with mental and emotional suffering and distress dissimilar from trauma triggered by other types of ferocity, establishing a public health crisis for populations greatest disturbed (DeVylder et al., 2020).

According to DeVylder et al. (2022) and Ober (2020), Black, Indigenous, Latino, sexual minority populations, and other marginalized communities stand at greater risk of discrete mental health trials

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\*Corresponding Author

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and tribulations, along with the extreme risk of demise inflicted by members of the police community (DeVylder et al., 2020). Young-Drake et al. (n.d.) state that Black people are more susceptible to encountering chronic, tenacious mental health conditions for various reasons. Also, amongst African American youth and adults, mental health specialists have formerly started a causal connection amid racism and an upsurge in anxiety, depression, substance abuse, and suicide Young-Drake et al., (n.d.). Even though African Americans experience mental illness at the same decreased occurrence in America as White Americans, the historical pattern of the experience is very different. African Americans' experience endures to be described by trauma and violence more than White Americans; also, African Americans are influenced emotionally and mentally by youth and adults (Mental Health America, 2022).

The aftereffects of police violence and brutality in American society are a public health matter because police ferocity is not undergone proportionately. On the other hand, it has a lop-sided and unequal influence on the mental health of ethnic, racial, and sexual minorities. The data reveals that Psychologists agree that trauma stimulates biological or psychological vicissitudes that reveal as time advances as psychiatric indicators, mainly when the trauma is physical or sexually brutal (Ober, 2020). The demise of George Floyd in Minnesota (Smith & Rodriguez, 2020) and succeeding nationwide protests such as Ahmaud Arbery in Georgia (Strazewski, 2020) and Dante Wright in Minnesota (BBC News Services, 2022) are spotlighting, afresh, the link flanked by police criminal justice, cruelty, ruthlessness, and public health (Smith & Rodriguez, 2020; Strazewski, 2020). Also, after George Floyd's death, medical professionals began corroborating assertions from protestors and advocates concerning the injurious and hurtful influences of entrenched bigotry and intolerance. Physicians' associations denounced police inhumanity, highlighted bigotry and intolerance as a public health concern, and pushed for the universal transformation of police behaviors, training, and associated laws (Smith & Rodriguez, 2020). Medical professionals included but were not limited to the American College of Physicians, the American Medical Association, and the American Academy of Pediatrics (Howard, 2020). Messages were made public through tweets linked to policy statements, individual tweets, and joint association publicized statements (Howard, 2020).

Even in 2022, the perception of inequity continued to prevail. Meetings to discuss and examine the connection concerning police violence, systemic racism, and health equity during a pandemic persisted, as well as the message that police cruelty and ruthlessness are public health issues (Strazewski, 2020). Police violence and the application of undue force create health issues with victims (DeVylder et al., 2022). The public attention through Black Lives Matter protests and the killing of African American Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, spurred discussions about police brutality as a genuine threat to public health and a health equity issue (Lowery, 2017; Sandoiu, 2020).

Let us review some statistics. According to Edwards et al. (2019), police brutality is the foremost reason for the demise of young men in America. Throughout life, African American men are killed by police, approximately 1 in each 1,000. When reviewing the mean lifespan odds of African Americans being killed by police, the results are 1 in 2,000 for men and about 1 in 33,000 for women (Edwards et al., 2019). African American men are 2.5 times surlier to be killed by police. Also, unlike white women, African American women are 1.4 times likelier to be murdered by police (Edwards et al., 2019). According to SAMHSA (2018) National Survey on Drug Use and Health: African Americans, of the African Americans reported to have a mental illness, the number was 16% (4.8 million). Of the 4.8 million, 22.4% (1.1 million) conveyed a grave mental illness over the previous year (SAMHSA, 2018).

## **History of Policing in America**

African Americans and other minorities being harassed by the police is nothing new. An article by Ortiz-Lytle (2020) notes Representative Ayanna Pressley, D-Mass., speaking as a replacement of Democratic presidential candidate Senator Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., during a campaign occasion held in Ames, Iowa, on Friday, January 31, 2020. The specific message is "The roots of policing are

inextricably linked to the antebellum slave patrols of the South that led to the establishment of all-white police departments, and since the Fugitive Slave Act, criminal law enforcement has meant the subjugation and dehumanization of black lives.” So, just what is the Fugitive Slave Act?

Two historical narratives exist about the origins of American law enforcement (Hassett-Walker, (2020). First needed is a review of the Compromise of 1850. This compromise entails five laws passed on September 9, 1850, that focused on slavery and territorial growth and development (Hodgson, 2002). Prior to 1850, on Thursday, December 20, 1849, California asked for consent to become a part of the Union as a free state; because of California’s status as a free state, this admittance had the likelihood to distress the equilibrium connecting the free and slave states in the U.S. Senate (Library of Congress, n.d.). Also, on January 29, 1850, Senator Henry Clay presented a series of resolutions to pursue negotiation and deter calamity between North and South. The Fugitive Slave Act, which safeguarded the comeback of the original owners of all runaway slaves (Baumgartner, 2022), was amended as a part of the Compromise of 1850; California was admitted to the Union as a free state (Library of Congress, n.d.). The significant results of the Fugitive Slave Law are two-fold. First, this law permitted the U.S. government to deputize people and compel these deputized individuals to partake in possession or other assemblages, sometimes against their will, to capture fugitive slaves. Second, the Fugitive Slave Law prohibited local courts from adjudicating if an individual was or was not a slave (Foner, 2022). The law was repealed in 1864.

President Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation, issued on January 1, 1863, offered a limited four-pronged form of freedom (National Archives, 2022). First, the promise was that every individual possessed as an enslaved person within what was called rebellious states (states that had separated from the United States) were free. Second, the Emancipation Proclamation did not apply to states that were faithful to slavery and bordering states (Delaware, Maryland, Kentucky) that failed to connect with the Confederacy and had enslaved people. Also, this Emancipation proclamation relieved portions of the Confederacy (secessionist states of the south) having previously wrapped under the control of the North. Last, according to the National Archives (2022), Lincoln’s presidential order (not a passed Congressional law) was contingent on the Union portion of the United States winning a military victory.

The second historical narrative regarding the origins of American law enforcement is Jim Crow Law (1877 – 1954). What is Jim Crow Law? Jim Crow law arose practically right after the obliteration of Southern slavery during the twilight of the nineteenth and immediate twentieth century (Oakes, 2022). Urofsky (2022) posited Jim Crow law as all laws applying racial segregation in the United States’ southern states, with a period flanked by the 1877 Reconstruction period and the 1954 start of the civil rights movement. Signed into law in the State of North Carolina (Lundoff, 2021), Jim Crow law was felt physically, experienced mentally, and remained visible through signage noted in Figure 1. Such relics have remained as ghosts continuing to spread negative dealings of social and economic factors that are the origins of distrust and a history of racist and brutal police engagement towards minority groups.

According to Young-Drake et al. (n.d.), socioeconomic disparities have been straightforwardly connected to mental health outcomes since the historical difficulty that African American people have undergone, from slavery to segregation to police brutality. Prolonged atrocities and outrage regarding racial profiling and the murder of African Americans by members of the police force and other renegades over the years supported the fueling of the Black Lives Matter movement (Hassett-Walker, 2020; Lowery, 2017).

Police ethics, brutality, and misconduct have been in the public spotlight at significant levels in the U.S., creating tremendous public health and organizational leadership challenges for many city, state, and county governments. Many community activists have considered it a public health and safety emergency (Cobb, 2016). To ensure that the police are held accountable, body cameras have been placed on the officer to deliver an accurate record of officer engagements for complete situational awareness and tamper-proof digital evidence (Ripley, 2017; Fenton, 2018).

Figure 1. Jim Crow Law Relics



Esther Buley Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (finle no. LC-USW3-037939-E)



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Ferris State University Image Library, 2022



Most police officers take the duties of their jobs seriously and honorably (Standfield, 2011). Police officers make decisions daily, which influence not only the behavior of their department but also the conduct and behavior of the people they are sworn to protect (Standfield, 2011). The stresses, pressures, and duties of the job require a unique level of leadership skills for police officers around ethical judgment, ethical sensitivity, and the critical importance of moral and ethical values (Standfield, 2011). Whisenhand (2009) and Stanfield (2011) noted that when police officers fail to act ethically and beyond reproach, ethical drifting has the propensity to occur. According to Standfield (2011), ethical drifting is the incremental deviation from ethical behaviors and actions that are often

ignored or unnoticed by those engaging in the behavior. Ethical drifting intensifies gradually until even major offenses are rationalized as acceptable (Standfield, 2011).

According to the U.S. Department of Justice (2005), as many as 33% of the police force may be unaware of departmental ethical policies and procedures. As many as 55% had experienced an ethical conflict (U.S. Department of Justice, 2005). Millage (2005) claimed, “Seventy percent of employees from organizations with a weak ethical culture reported observing at least one type of ethical wrongdoing” (p. 13). As a result, ethics is essential and has a safe and fair apparatus for public health and safety.

The scale of penalties or consequences was the perception of the magnitude of an offense and its entire impact. This was the perceived difference between stealing a dollar and a hundred dollars (McMahon & Harvey, 2007). Justifying minor deceit was more accessible because of the correspondingly smaller consequences (McMahon & Harvey, 2007). Social consequences often define how the behavior affects an individual’s social standing (McMahon & Harvey, 2007). The probability of effect was defined as weighing the possibility that the act would cause harm and, therefore, could cause consequences (McMahon & Harvey, 2007). Temporal immediacy was the perception of how much time would elapse between the offense or behavior and potential penalties (McMahon & Harvey, 2007). Proximity and concentration of effect refer to the affiliation or relationship the offender felt towards the victim or victims by their misconduct (McMahon & Harvey, 2007). A dynamic without repercussion or accountability creates a culture where officers’ behavior can harm citizens, where minor infractions can lead to larger ones.

### **Connections between Ethics and Misconduct**

Speaking from an organizational context, ethical decision-making becomes corrosive when situations that do not support ethical behavior or that encourage whistle-blowing arise, giving way to the innate responsibility of corporations and public systems to build protective ecologies to exercise ethical conduct. Lussier and Achua (2012) offer one of many alternatives in suggesting building conducive systems that promote whistle-blowing by keeping disclosure mechanisms in place.

A psychological need to encounter trustworthy environments amid extreme vulnerabilities is essential to preserving ethically conducive social systems that support those who challenge corrupt behaviors or create champions of protecting organizational assets. Robbins and Judge (2017) investigate the hidden link between trust and vulnerabilities by formulating that trust is observed when vulnerabilities are welcomed without fear of outcomes.

Robbins and Judge (2016) noted that infusing ethics into decision-making can be difficult. Supervisors and senior leadership should assimilate ethical decision-making within an organization by developing a code of conduct and ethics and following it fairly and consistently; establishing a safe and protected process for reporting violations; removing barriers and fears of identifying misconduct issues; monitoring ethical performance; rewarding ethical conduct; and broadcast efforts (Standfield, 2011; Robbins & Judge, 2016). These steps create cultures where racist behaviors and police brutality is less likely to occur (Bhargava et al., 2018)

The results and the literature show that emotional acumen requires a high function level of emotional intelligence (Bhargava et al., 2018). Emotional intelligence includes the ability to perceive and understand one’s own and other’s emotions (Goleman, 2007), so people with high emotional acumen and emotional intelligence are expected to display strong empathy (Goleman, 2007), which is defined as the ability to understand and experience the feelings and emotions of others (Fu, 2014; Burke & Cooper, 2013), and thus could interact with different framings of various consequences with a true understanding of the reasons to act or not act in ways that that could harm people of color both physically and mentally.

### **METHODS**

A qualitative focus group was conducted utilizing members from the law enforcement community. According to Stringer (2013), focus groups represent an effective way to collect data and gain

insight into an organizational phenomenon in that these participants have an intimate knowledge and understanding of the organization's internal culture, external regulatory conditions, infrastructure, resources, and history. Focus group participants were selected through purposive sampling, resulting in a selection of 12, 6 current, and 6 African American law enforcement officers, each with over ten years of law enforcement experience and 6 (all retired within the last ten years) who served as law enforcement supervisors.

To ensure the reliability and trustworthiness of the qualitative research process, practices were adopted and applied based on the methodology created by Guba and Lincoln (1994). The methods and approaches performed during the focus group are outlined in the following:

1. **Focus Group Size:** Participants were placed in one of three focus groups that were conducted in independent sessions. This approach served to limit groupthink, the dominance of conversation, and persuasive rhetoric among participants.
2. **Unbiased Moderator:** The moderator had no direct affiliation with the mortgage collections division nor had any buy-in with workforce-staffing models.
3. **Peer Examination:** Along with the moderator, two research assistants served as unbiased contributors to the focus group study. The research assistants had no daily association with the participants.
4. **Member Checks:** The moderator verified that all participants' responses were exact and truthful. The moderator confirmed that the information provided by the participants was not devalued or misinterpreted.

The moderator, two researchers, and a peer independently examined the results and coded the data based on trends, themes, and categories. Also, the research team completed a data triangulation to establish the findings.

## **FINDINGS**

The recommendations of the focus groups around police ethics and harmful policing reform included:

1. Train policy from day one and continually on de-escalation strategies to diminish the likelihood and severity of force. One participant said, "The belief among many seems to be that for police to assert control and extreme authority, they must command respect and obedience, even if their actions exceed their legal authority. Police officers sometimes feel the need to inflict immediate violent punishment in ways that enforce that obedience and send a message to the individual and anyone else who might consider disobeying in the future. Because command and force are such integral, even dominant parts of their toolkits, police in the United States often default to using them, with tragic results. The focus is rarely on how to train police to de-escalate altercations."
2. The need for much higher hiring standards and higher pay and benefits for police. One participant stated, "Who becomes a police officer likely needs to change, as well, by setting a higher bar for who can qualify for the job. There are no federal standards for police officers. Federal lawmakers could establish such guidelines, allowing states to treat them as the bare minimum or even expand on them. States could also individually up their licensing requirements for police and create standards for maintaining that license. The job should require at least an associate's college degree to be a police officer."
3. Train all police officers on conscious and unconscious bias consistently. One participant stated, "the failure to address structural racism in policing makes equitable public health outcomes impossible when it contributes to such deadly disparities for people of color. We can begin to solve this public health crisis by prioritizing policing and systemic racism as critical social

determinants of health. Doing so will truly begin to address the underlying needs of vulnerable communities. Although racism in the context of policing is often seen as a criminal justice issue, the reality is that racism and policing disparately affect health outcomes, and ultimately all aspects of life, for Black individuals and people of color. Racism and police violence are public health crises that impact the mental and physical health of those who experience abrasive encounters with the police.”

4. Create policies that restrict shooting suspects in the back or when they flee if they are not involved a violent criminal activity.
5. Police must focus on the few people in communities causing chaos and violence. One participant stated, “the vast majority of crime in communities is perpetrated by small pockets of people in a few specific parts of the city. Studies show that 1 percent of a city’s population can be responsible for 50 to 60 percent of all homicides.
6. All police forces need better data to evaluate policing and crime trends through resources from the federal government. This level of data allows the federal government to tell police forces about alarming trends, deficiencies, and areas of effectiveness with police forces and specific officers.
7. Require that all police officers meet monthly with mental health counselors to help them manage the stress and requirement of the job.
8. Set policies that allow prosecutors’ external jurisdictions to file charges and prosecute cases to eliminate conflicts of interest between local prosecutors and police forces.
9. Create policies that are enforced that limit police officer engaging in dangerous chokeholds unless deadly force is authorized. One participant stated, “The use of unnecessary extreme police force targeted disproportionately toward specific populations of people of color represents community violence that significantly drives unnecessary stress, mental trauma, inquiries, and premature death.”
10. The development of policy accountability acts in states. These acts create units in each state’s Attorney General’s Office to investigate all civilian deaths and police misconduct at the hands of police. It will have the full investigatory powers of a state’s attorney, including using a grand jury in any county. One participant stated, “The need for independent external investigations is important to giving the public confidence that justice will be served when police misconduct occurs.”
11. Create mandatory policies with specific guidelines that require officers to report another officer’s use of excessive force immediately where a failure to report also requires disciplinary action for those that do not report the offense. There should also be processes in place that mitigate reporting risks. This includes creating safe and protected mechanisms for officers to report misconduct, racist behavior, and unethical behavior in a manner that protects them from retaliation and reprisal. This also should include a reporting hotline, confidential employee counseling, and assistance around emotions that officers face when they evaluate the positives and negatives of whistle-blowing on other officers.
12. Expand public access to police personnel disciplinary records traditionally shielded under the state’s public information law because they were considered personnel files exempt from the law. This could also include creating community oversight boards that convene hearings where officers with misconduct records from other law enforcement agencies looking to be hired by a new agency must testify with the oversight board, which could veto the hiring. One participant stated, “Policing is a public function, and it is only right that disciplinary records of police officers are accessible to the public because being a police officer is a public trust job.”
13. Eliminate or repeal lengthy job protections officers in the police disciplinary process and replace them with new procedures that give civilians a role in the police disciplinary process.
14. There was a consensus that leadership should set clear expectations of proper and improper behavior and have ongoing training around those cultural norms and expectations. To elaborate,

one participant said, “Law enforcement agencies should not look at training as a check-the-box exercise. The focus should be on developing critical thinking skills that help improve decision-making around ethics and ethical problem-solving. This goes beyond handing out policy manuals and memos that outline what actions are expected. These tools also include bringing internal and external experts to engage with training, assist with oversight, and provide insight. Workshops, easy-to-use reference materials, ongoing and readily available consultation from peers or mentors are just some of the many ways law enforcement agencies can make all employees more reflective and emotionally intelligent around ethical decision making.”

15. **Enhanced Performance Evaluations:** Connect ethical behavior to performance evaluation requirements and requirements for raises and promotions. Integrating ethical behavior into performance places accountability on the officer and law enforcement leadership by requiring detailing of any misconduct allegations. These records provide insight into any behavior patterns for each officer, which would then necessitate appropriate actions to be taken by leadership before the point of no return.
16. **Recognition and Awareness:** Publicly reward ethical behavior and punish unethical ones. Create awards that publicly acknowledge and incentivize those that engage in ethical behavior. This will serve to reinforce the expected behavior. A participant stated, “Performance appraisals should have honest evaluation measures. Ones that compare how all the officer’s behavior stacks up against the code of ethics in the department. People who act ethically should be visibly rewarded for their behavior. Just as importantly, unethical acts should be punished.”
17. **Deliver Educative Criticism:** A participant stated, “it is critical to address minor offenses with timely corrective feedback regarding off-target actions and behaviors. Reinforcement for desired behavior and corrective feedback for behavior that is not desired is critical to help create and sustain a culture of ethical behavior and consideration.”
18. **Top-Down Modeling:** Leaders and supervisors should model ethical and professional behavior. A participant said, “If my boss is unethical and unprofessional, it creates the perception that unethical behaviors are okay.”
19. **Cultural Immersion:** Leaders should have conversations around ethics every day. A participant said, “It is critical to keep the conversation around ethical decision-making and behavior alive every day. It should be front and center all the time.”
20. **New Beginnings:** Make ethics and ethical behavior a central aspect of the hiring criteria. A participant stated, “Include assessments that evaluate ethics as a key aspect of who they hire.” This information then becomes a part of the official employment record. It may be administered repeatedly throughout their tenure in the department to identify any ethical drifts that may begin to take place.
21. **A Test of Character:** Make officers take polygraphs on an annual or every two-year basis. A participant said, “The intelligence organizations require polygraphs as a tool to keep employees honest and ethical. Police carry guns and can take someone’s life. Police also testify in court cases that can lock people away for the rest of their lives. The job carries a lot of responsibility, which makes it important that the employees act ethically and honestly. If employees knew that their behaviors and actions would come under the scrutiny of a polygraph test, they would be less likely to be dishonest or unethical.”
22. **Create policies that would require officers to try to shoot offenders’ limbs instead of targeting locations that could also result in death when the suspect is unarmed.**
23. **Require mandatory body camera usage for all citizen engagement with strict rules concerning when body cameras can be turned on and off.**

These recommendations are critical to ensuring the possibility of ethical cultures and cultures where unethical behavior can be safely reported in law enforcement organizations. They create a framework for employees to think critically about their behaviors and reflect on the actions that are out of line with what would be deemed ethical, non-racist, and non-brutal behavior.

Table 1. D. Burrell and N. Bhargava’s Emotional Acumen Model for Ethical, Moral, and Legal Decision-Making (2018)

D. Burrell and N. Bhargava’s Emotional Acumen Model for Ethical, Moral, and Legal Decision-Making (2018)	
Level 1	Observation and Awareness: At this stage there is a discovery, observation, and witness of an ethical, moral, or legal issue of concern.
Level 2	Reflective Emotional Analysis: At this stage, significant disquiet leads to a deeply reflective and critical emotional examination of the issue of concern and how serious it is or has the potential to be. At this stage, an individual must try his/her best to gather the facts and be as neutral as possible while describing or analyzing those facts. One should not be inclined towards distorting the facts or information for his/her personal benefit.
Level 3	An Emotional Sense of Duty and Obligation: At this stage, there is either an emotional inability to remain a bystander about the issue and not do anything about it, or there is a personal emotional onus and responsibility to act.
Level 4	Emotional Intuition: This stage is about intuitions or conscience. When our emotions are cultivated by compassion, they highlight what our cognizant and coherent mind has overlooked. Our emotions are one mode to check whether one is rationalizing.
Level 5	Emotional Courage: At this stage, there is a deep exploration of the range of emotions that could include fear of retaliation and apprehension of the potential backlash, but still, there are compelling overriding reasons to take action and do something. Here, a prediction about the future is made which are relevant to the situation(s) at hand. Though an individual can never predict the future, certain things are more likely than others to occur.
Level 6	Emotional Questioning with Self: At this stage, an individual should always ask oneself before acting the following questions: a) Will I be able to live with myself if I made a particular choice? b) Will I feel better or worse about myself? c) Am I willing to let other people know about the situation or my decision to act? d) Will I feel guilty or ashamed of not taking any action sooner, or will I feel proud of my decision to act? Do I want everyone around me to act the way I did?
Level 7	The Emotional and Communal Intellect to Act: At this stage, there is an understanding of how to manage the emotional perceptions and emotional consequences required to act and navigate social interactions, politics, and fallout.

## CONCLUSION

One of the essential perspectives is that this research is not an indictment of all police officers. This study is not intended to be anti-police. Law enforcement officers have stressful, complicated, complex, and essential jobs in the communities where they function. It is critical that police organizations that have bad actors and cultures that include racist and ethical misconduct focus on change. The data shows the necessity to look at police brutality as a public health issue. This creates a need for collaborative engagement between departments of health and human, law enforcement organizations and political leaders. Such engagement must focus on discovering and distinguishing authentic solutions and involvements explicitly aimed at reviewing and putting an end to racially motivated police brutality and its existence as a public health issue. Numerous solutions are needed that can be wrapped under civic duties focused on health equity.

These resolutions require consideration and responsiveness focused on a comprehensive understanding of the historical context of the history and trends of racist policing and police brutality. Understanding the origins leads to understanding current and past harmful policies, practices, and behaviors and the health trauma they cause. Health inequity in America is tied to understanding full impact of both policies and the actions of people in connected government systems. For example, according to the American Civil Liberties Union (2022), “funding for police in schools has been rising, while public schools face a critical shortage of counselors, nurses, psychologists, and social workers. Millions of students are in schools with law enforcement but no support staff:

- 1.7 million students are in schools with police but no counselors
- 3 million students are in schools with police but no nurses
- 6 million students are in schools with police but no school psychologists

- 10 million students are in schools with police but no social workers
- Fourteen million students are in schools with police but no counselor, nurse, psychologist, or social worker.”

Health equity is tied to unbalanced abilities to receive appropriate and complete healthcare (Wegemer & Luise, 2022; Lopez et al., 2021). Critical public health implications for civic failures include destructive decision-making actions, in-action, and misconduct by those, with salaries paid by the taxes of citizens with jobs that require them to protect and serve those tax paying citizens. Some examples include data analyzed by the American Civil Liberties Union (2022), demonstrating a troubling racial gap in how police officers behave toward black students that impact both the mental and physical health of those students. Black girls are 4X more likely to be arrested in school than white girls nationally (American Civil Liberties Union, 2022). Students of color are more likely to go to a school with a law enforcement officer, be referred to law enforcement, and be arrested at school (American Civil Liberties Union, 2022). In predominantly white school districts, police and resource officers are most worried about protecting students from intruders. In contrast, in urban and predominantly black districts, police perceive and treat black students as the primary threat (American Civil Liberties Union, 2022).

Research shows that schools with a police presence are more likely to refer children to law or criminal enforcement, even for non-serious behaviors (American Civil Liberties Union, 2022). Data also shows that black students in most states are more likely to be arrested than other students at school. Instances of police brutality in schools include black students as young as six years old being harmed, handcuffed or improperly restrained pose a severe and costly liability for school districts (American Civil Liberties Union, 2022). These trends represent a significant public health issue.

Sandwiched between psychological concerns and civic responsibility is the continued negative influence of police transgressions and viciousness on people from specific communities’ mental and physical health. These communities continue to be people of color, including immigrants, the homeless, those experiencing a disability and mental illness, and the LGBTQ community. What is needed is a dedicated plan of improvement, a sound and appropriate method to address police misconduct and brutality (up and down the chain of command), police and community education, as well as continued relationship building between police communities and marginalized people.

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*Darrell Norman Burrell is visiting scholar at the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Institute for Leadership, Equity, and Justice at Rutgers University. Dr. Burrell has two doctorate degrees and five graduate degrees. Dr. Burrell received his first doctoral degree in Health Education from A.T. Still University in 2010. In 2021, Dr. Burrell completed his 2nd doctorate, a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Cybersecurity Leadership and Organizational Behavior at Capitol Technology University, Laurel, MD. Dr. Burrell completed a Master of Arts in Interfaith Action at Claremont Lincoln University as a Global Peacemaker Fellow in 2016. He has an EdS (Education Specialist Post Master's Terminal Degree) in Higher Education Administration from The George Washington. He has two graduate degrees, one in Human Resources Management/Development and another in Organizational Management from National Louis University. Dr. Burrell has a graduate degree in Sales and Marketing Management from Prescott College. He has over 20 years of management, teaching, and training experience in academia, government, and private industry. Dr. Burrell can be reached at [dnburrell@captechu.edu](mailto:dnburrell@captechu.edu)*

*Sharon Burton's delivers 20 plus years of experience. Earned doctorate degrees: Ph.D. in Cybersecurity Leadership from Capitol Technology University, and a DBA from National Graduate School of Quality Management. She holds the following certifications: Master Lean Six Sigma Black Belt, Change Management, Advanced Telemedicine and Telehealth, Kaizen Leadership, Strategic Workforce Planning, and Kirkpatrick Four Levels Evaluation. Certificates: Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion, and Artificial Intelligence/Robotic Processing. Diplomas: Artificial Intelligence Computer Vision 2.0, Robotic Starter Training, and Business Analyst Training. One badge is earned in Artificial Intelligence (AI) Computer Vision. Publications include 70+ peer-reviewed and academic texts: journal articles, textbook chapters, business books, and conference proceedings. Publications - Artificial Intelligence, Cyber Security, Leadership, Andragogy, Business Process Improvement, Diversity and Inclusion, Entrepreneurship, Quality Customer Service, Engaged Scholarship and Civic Responsibility, and Mentoring & Coaching. Dr. Burton serves as a dissertation chair and adjunct faculty member for Capitol Technology, and adjunct faculty for Post University. She can be reached at [sharonlburton2@comcast.net](mailto:sharonlburton2@comcast.net). See more about Dr. Burton at [www.slbarton.com](http://www.slbarton.com)*

*Grace McGrath is a Forensic and Legal Psychology graduate student at Marymount University who also works at Marymount University as a Graduate Admissions Coordinator. They are a graduate of the University at Albany with a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration from the Class of 2020. Their career aspiration is to work on federal higher education policy related to sexual violence. Outside of school and work, Grace volunteers their time for nonprofits related to prison reform and victims of crime.*