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BUREAU OF JUSTICE STATISTICS
Contact: Kara McCarthy (202) 307-1241
After hours: (202) 598-9320

REPORT: FROM 2002-11 BLACKS WERE 2.5 TIMES MORE LIKELY THAN WHITES TO EXPERIENCE NONFATAL FORCE BY POLICE

WASHINGTON – In a study released today by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), an annual average of 44 million U.S. residents age 16 or older had one or more face-to-face contacts with police from 2002 to 2011, and an estimated 1.6 percent experienced the threat or use of nonfatal force during the most recent contact. About three-quarters of those who experienced force described the force as excessive.

Among those who had contact with the police, blacks (3.5 percent) were 2.5 times more likely than whites (1.4 percent) and 1.7 times more likely than Hispanics (2.1 percent) to experience the threat or use of nonfatal force. Also, blacks (2.8 percent) were more likely than whites (1.0 percent) or Hispanics (1.4 percent) to perceive the nonfatal force as excessive.

The threat or use of nonfatal force included shouting, cursing, threatening, pushing or grabbing, hitting or kicking, using pepper spray, using an electroshock weapon, pointing a gun or using other force. The experiences reported are based on average annual estimates from four data collections of the BJS Police–Public Contact Survey (PPCS), a sample self-report survey of U.S. residents age 16 or older. They do not include data from police records. The PPCS is the only national source of data on the use of nonfatal force and excessive force by police.

Police-initiated stops accounted for the majority (51 percent) of face-to-face contacts. Among these stops, street stops (7.6 percent) were more likely than traffic stops (1.1 percent) to involve nonfatal force.

The analyses show that police use of nonfatal force varied by race and Hispanic origin. Blacks (4.9 percent) experienced nonfatal force during police-initiated contacts at a rate nearly three times higher than whites (1.8 percent) and nearly two times higher than Hispanics (2.5 percent). Additionally, blacks (14 percent) were more than two times more likely than Hispanics (6 percent) to experience nonfatal force during street stops.

Blacks (1.6 percent) were more likely than whites (0.6 percent) to experience verbal force. Similarly, a higher percentage of blacks (1.6 percent) experienced physical force than whites (0.7 percent) or Hispanics (0.9 percent). Blacks (1.3 percent) were more likely to perceive the use of physical force to be excessive than whites (0.5 percent) or Hispanics (0.7 percent).

(MORE)

The perception that the force used was excessive varied by the type of police action taken. Persons who were hit or kicked were more likely to perceive the police action to be excessive (97 percent) compared to those who had a gun pointed at them (81 percent), were pushed or grabbed (79 percent), were threatened with force (76 percent) or were shouted or cursed at (49 percent). In addition, those who were injured were more likely to perceive the force as excessive (94 percent) than those who were not injured (74 percent).

Among residents who experienced force, 87 percent believed the police did not behave properly. However, during contacts that did not involve force, 90 percent of residents believed the police behaved properly. Blacks (84 percent) were less likely to believe the police behaved properly during contacts without force than whites (91 percent) or Hispanics (88 percent).

Other findings include—

- Males and persons ages 16 to 25 were more likely to experience police contact and the use of nonfatal force than females and persons age 26 or older.
- Persons in urban areas (2.1 percent) were more likely than those in suburban (1.5 percent) or rural (1.2 percent) areas to experience nonfatal force, although rates of police contact were similar across all areas.
- Residents who experienced the use of force (44 percent) were more likely to have had multiple contacts with police than those who did not experience force (28 percent).
- Traffic stops involving an officer and driver of different races were more than twice as likely to involve the threat or use of force (2.0 percent) than traffic stops involving an officer and driver of the same race (0.8 percent).
- Blacks (1.4 percent) were twice as likely as whites (0.7 percent) to experience nonfatal force when also experiencing a personal search during their most recent contact.

The report, *Police Use of Nonfatal Force, 2002–11* (NCJ 249216), was written by BJS statisticians Shelley Hyland, Ph.D., Lynn Langton, Ph.D., and Elizabeth Davis. The report, related documents and additional information about the Bureau of Justice Statistics' statistical publications and programs can be found on the BJS website at <http://www.bjs.gov/>.

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