

1 Police stop and depressive symptoms: Examining moderating role of race

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4 Author Note

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8 Conceptualization, Writing - Original Draft Preparation, Writing - Review & Editing.

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## Abstract

12 Police contact represents a detrimental stressor that may be associated with elevated  
13 depressive symptoms, particularly among marginalized groups. Using a simulated dataset  
14 of 500 participants, we examined whether experiencing a police stop predicted PHQ-9  
15 depressive symptom severity, and whether this association was moderated by race. Results  
16 from a linear model showed that individuals who had been stopped by police reported  
17 substantially higher depressive symptoms,  $B = 13.15$ ,  $SE = 0.68$ ,  $t(498) = 19.42$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  
18 accounting for approximately  $R^2 = .43$  of the variance. A second model including race  
19 and the police stop  $\times$  race interaction demonstrated improved model fit ( $R^2 = .47$ ). The  
20 interaction term was significant,  $B = -6.38$ ,  $SE = 1.62$ ,  $t(496) = -3.93$ ,  $p < .001$ , suggesting  
21 that the psychological impact of police stops was stronger for BIPOC participants than for  
22 White participants. These findings highlight the potential role of race in shaping  
23 vulnerability to the mental health consequences of police contact.

24 *Keywords:* police stop; psychopathology; black; race; legal system exposure

25 Word count: X

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27 Police interactions, especially involuntary or intrusive stops, are increasingly  
28 recognized as significant stressors that may undermine mental health. A growing body of  
29 research shows that being stopped by the police can evoke fear, threat, and feelings of  
30 injustice, all of which may contribute to elevated depressive symptoms. However, the  
31 psychological impact of police contact is not experienced uniformly across communities.  
32 Race remains a central factor shaping how individuals perceive, interpret, and internalize  
33 police encounters. For many racial and ethnic minority groups, especially Black and Latino  
34 communities, police stops occur within a broader historical and social context marked by  
35 discrimination and disproportionate surveillance. The present study examines the  
36 association between police stops and depressive symptoms and investigates whether this  
37 relationship differs by race. Understanding racial variation in the mental health  
38 consequences of police contact is essential for clarifying risk pathways and identifying  
39 populations most adversely affected. This work contributes to ongoing discussions on  
40 policing, public health, and racial inequality by evaluating whether race moderates the  
41 psychological burden of police stops.

42 **Methods**

43 We report how we determined our sample size, all data exclusions (if any), all  
44 manipulations, and all measures in the study.

**45 Participants****46 Material****47 Procedure****48 Data analysis**

49 We used R (Version 4.5.1; R Core Team, 2025) and the R-packages *papaja* (Version  
50 0.1.4; Aust & Barth, 2025) and *tinylabels* (Version 0.2.5; Barth, 2025) for all our analyses.

**51 Results****52 Discussion**

53

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