2.0

EXPERIENCES WITH THE NYPD

Communities United for Police Reform (CPR) is committed to building a New York where everyone lives in a community that is safe, healthy and thriving. As summarized in Chapter 1, a large amount of academic and community-based literature has documented in great detail the substantial harms that law enforcement has caused, especially to communities of color. Yet, we understand that there are wide-ranging perceptions of the police and its ability to make the city a safer place. The Community Safety Project emerged from the shared desire of CPR's member organizations to delve into the nuances of policing and safety. The NYPD is arguably the most visible and powerful arm of the government for most New Yorkers. We believe it is crucial to establish public safety priorities and policies based on accurate information about the experiences of those most directly impacted by policing as well as their perspectives on creating safer neighborhoods in the city.

In this second chapter, we use the data collected in the Community Safety Project to illustrate how participants described living in neighborhoods with high levels of police activity. We explore their interactions with the NYPD, what they witnessed, and what impact it has had on their lives. We also ask about their family, friends, and neighbors' experiences and observations of the NYPD. Our study focuses on recent policing during the pandemic as well as policing over time. We acknowledge the complexities of participants' responses, shedding light on how for many, the police represent an omnipresent violent threat while also recognizing the deep desire for safety and, at times, faith in the police as a means to promote safety.

Sections:
2.1 The NYPD is an omnipresent threat
2.2 Police response to calls for service
2.3 Being reported to the NYPD
2.4 NYPD harm and violence
2.5 Summary

2.1 The NYPD is an omnipresent threat

The NYPD is present and proactive in Black, Latinx and other neighborhoods of color through foot patrols, police dogs, command-center trucks, police with militarized equipment and uniforms, gang databases, social media searches, surveillance cameras, watch towers, flood lights and helicopters, to name just a few.[1] Both Adams and de Blasio have used the term "omnipresence" to describe the police saturation of certain neighborhoods or transit as a crime-prevention strategy.[2] Therefore, it was important for us to understand how New Yorkers experience this kind of police presence and the impact it has on their lives. What we learned, via the town hall discussions and survey responses, was that community members describe policing in New York as an "omnipresent threat" rooted more in fear than in support, more in harm than service and more in aggression than in effectiveness.

Police Presence

73% perceived the NYPD to be a constant or frequent presence somewhere in their community life.

More specifically:

48% Reported NYPD officers were constantly or frequently in the neighborhood

42% Reported NYPD surveillance technology were constantly or frequently in the neighborhood

42% Reported NYPD officers were constantly or frequently on public transportation

36% Reported NYPD officers were constantly or frequently in public parks or other greenspaces

31% Reported NYPD officers were constantly or frequently patrolling housing

To the people we surveyed, police activity is very visible. Most (73%) understood the NYPD as a constant or frequent presence somewhere in their community life. Indeed, surveillance is inescapable for people living in heavily policed neighborhoods, as one school-aged youth explained: "Young people where I go to school in East New York are constantly under surveillance, which is uncomfortable."[3] Over half (56%) of the survey participants felt at times unsafe with the NYPD's presence. One person suggested, "I feel safe when there's a community around me more than police or security. When there's police officers around I feel scared and afraid that something bad will happen."[4] The police are bound to neighborhood security in contradictory ways. When police officers are present, they can inspire fear for some and calm in others; they can offer momentary safety while simultaneously being a threat to it. Yet, one reality that remains unchanging is that in heavily policed communities, everyday activities can become suspicious and potentially criminalizing.

Neighborhoods with omnipresent policing means that whole communities, not just certain individuals, have a major strike against them because of where they live. Highly monitored daily practices and behaviors can be racialized symbols of potential criminality (e.g., hoodies, low-riding jeans, hanging out on the street or standing on the corner in a group); cultural stereotypes can seem evasive, suspicious or disordered. "You can just be putting up a peace sign or doing something that police don't understand in a photo, and they presume the worst of black and brown youth," explained a young person about the NYPD's surveillance of youth on social media. "And they can use these photos against you. Police can be out of touch culturally and not understand young people and criminalize them for things that they're

doing in their photos that they THINK are criminal or are associated with criminal behaviors."[5] Over one-third (39%) of the survey respondents felt specifically targeted by the NYPD for at least one reason such as their race or neighborhood, and of them, most (83%) felt targeted for multiple reasons.

The NYPD's close and constant watch heightens the risk of increased contact, violence, and potential punitive outcomes through the criminal legal system. This vulnerability is magnified by the assumptions linking criminality with race (or other marginalized identities) that studies have found are frequently baked into the officers' discretionary decision-making.[6] To some, whether it's walking to school, playing in a playground, riding on the subway, sitting in the park, hanging out on a stoop or going to the corner store, this near-constant state of police surveillance feels like living in a police-occupied territory, as this Queens resident explained:

> "Constant police presence means you live in fear of losing your life to law enforcement 24 hours a day, seven days a week. You are afraid to venture too far from home after sunset. When you hear a siren, you freeze. If you see them following you in a car, you slow down and pray they drive past you."
> — Survey respondent (54, Black, man, Queens)

The NYPD's potential harms are not just found in those moments of direct contact but also in the omnipresent threat of direct contact communicated by heavy surveillance and its authority to potentially act and even kill.

The state gives police discretionary permission — within a set of legal limitations — to interfere, disrupt or restrict community life in the name of public safety.[7] Police officers are not trained to be social workers, medics, educators or community organizers; they are instead violence workers.[8] The tools police officers are equipped with and largely trained for involve control, surveillance and force.[9] Therefore, all police encounters — whether imposed or sought — are significant acts of government intrusion. This makes the NYPD an ongoing omnipresent threat of violence or legal escalation to those living in neighborhoods with heavy police presence, as this young person described:

> "The police tried to pin me as someone in the neighborhood, a predator who was attacking women, that wasn't me. They showed a picture of that person and tried to make me that person so that they would have somebody to arrest. I thought it was so ridiculous that I could be stopped just because I looked a certain way. My mom had to prove to them that it was not me by proving that I'm queer and not into women. It was like wow, I can't even leave my house."
> — Town hall attendee

Many who attended the town halls and who took the survey understood the police as not only failing them but actively hurting them. They pointed to the ways that police profile and criminalize community members and aggressively interfere with daily life. They described living in a context where they are perceived as the disordered problem that needs ordering, where the police assume everyone to be potential criminals or potential threats to the safety of "others."

> "I've gone to the police for help and have instead been ticketed and threatened with arrest. I've been robbed, and the police have done nothing to help me. My daughter has been robbed, and they've done nothing to help her. They've even refused to help us file a report. Police officers don't keep me safe. My friends and family keep me safe."
>
> — Town hall attendee

Police Contact

73% experienced direct contact with the NYPD in their lifetimes.

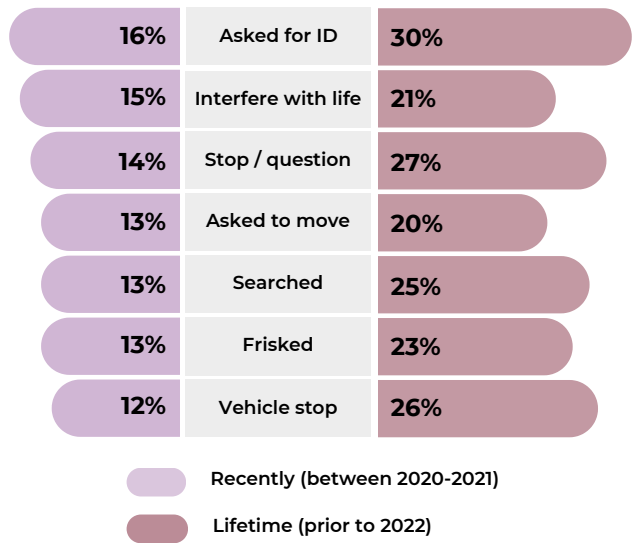**More specifically:**

54% Had unwanted NYPD contact

50% Sought the NYPD for help

Every time a person comes in contact with the police, they are confronting someone with a gun; they are exposed to the increased possibility of entering the criminal legal system; and they are vulnerable to state-sanctioned violence and even death. Nearly three-fourths (73%) of the survey respondents reported direct NYPD contact of some kind in their lives. Half (50%) also reported seeking the NYPD for help at some point in their lives, though, as we will describe in the next section and Chapter 4, this was frequently not without hesitation and was often met with inadequate, dismissive or even accusatory responses, as this Bronx resident explained:

Unwanted NYPD Contact

54% experienced unwanted NYPD contact in their lifetimes and **35%** experienced it since the pandemic.

More specifically:

Recently		Lifetime
16%	Asked for ID	30%
15%	Interfere with life	21%
14%	Stop / question	27%
13%	Asked to move	20%
13%	Searched	25%
13%	Frisked	23%
12%	Vehicle stop	26%

Recently (between 2020-2021)

Lifetime (prior to 2022)

The police contact reported in our survey was substantial and frequently unsolicited. More than half (54%) of all respondents reported experiencing unwanted police

contact in their lives, with over one-third (35%) experiencing unwanted contact during the pandemic. These are all major moments where police officers are limiting their freedom, even for something as seemingly innocuous as being asked to move. "There are usually cop cars outside of school and [the officers] just yell instructions at students like 'go home, don't wander the streets!' It is scary because you know the power they have over you."[10] Unwanted police contact involves, for example, disrupting lives by asking people to move or show their ID. It involves times when the NYPD made it difficult or impossible for individuals to use important services like receiving drug treatment or health care, or interrupting them while attending places like work, school or child care. It also involves vehicle stops and street stops that can escalate into officers laying their hands on individuals through frisks and searches like this Brooklyn resident described:

> "It's terrifying to always run into officers. It's aggressive and horrific. Especially when I was a kid. They said they would embarrass me every time they saw me and they did. They threw me against cars and searched me for nothing. I thought this was normal."
> - Survey respondent
> (Black and Latinx, man, Brooklyn)

Encounters like these have long-term cumulative impacts,[11] whether it occurred two or 20 years ago. Therefore, it is significant that 84% of those who reported unwanted police contact, experienced it two or more times and nearly one-third (31%) experienced it 10 or more times. Overall, 72% of survey respondents who reported recent unwanted police contact also experienced it at other points in their past.

The ways in which policing occupies and accumulates among communities of color represents decades and generations of failed public safety strategies:

> "The experience of being constantly monitored is why so many minority classes of folks feel a burning rage on an ongoing basis. No amount or degree of carceral intervention will prove successful in that regard. When folks who are struggling have acceptable employment tools, health care (mental and body well-being) access, a lifeline to quality education (schools, libraries), appropriate recreational facilities (parks, playgrounds, after-school centers) and secure housing, there is absolutely no need to spend $11 billion on carceral policies that have proven ineffective for decades."
> - Survey respondent
> (54, Black, woman, Bronx)

2.2. Police response to calls for service

In our culture, the police are widely understood as a public good who are there to serve and protect the community. The results from our study call this into question. Still, many seek the police for help in moments of crisis, and in this section, we detail what respondents told us about their experiences during calls for service. It is important to acknowledge that some people in our study indicated that the NYPD "were always there to diffuse the situation"[12] or "always helpful in my experiences"[13] or "were able to take me away from an unsafe situation."[14] We indeed heard positive stories about assistance and security.

One individual said, "People were vandalizing my house, and no one on the block came to help as they started to assault my family until the cops came and handled it."[15] Another explained, "When I was working in a homeless program, there were times I had to call for NYPD, and they were very helpful in the situations."[16] Overall, 46% of the participants reported the NYPD is good or very good at responding to violence in their neighborhood.

Negative experiences when calling the NYPD for help

62% had at least one negative experience when seeking the NYPD for help.

Of those:

52% Reported the NYPD didn't always show up

38% Reported the NYPD showed up half the time or less

37% Reported feeling disrespected, unsafe, or harmed

However, we also learned that for many, calling the police for help is very precarious. Half of the survey respondents reported seeking the NYPD for help. When asked to reflect upon their call(s), respondents reported the NYPD showed up most of the time, and many had their issues resolved. Yet, 52% of those who called the NYPD said the NYPD didn't always show up when asked, and 38% said the NYPD showed up half the time or less. And when the police did show up, over one-third (37%) reported feeling disrespected, unsafe or harmed at least once. Combined — between not showing up, being ignored or troubling interactions — a full 62% of those who sought the NYPD reported at least one negative experience in their lifetime.

"If I feel like it's life or death, then most likely yeah I will call 911 because of systemic default. I would still feel a bit hesitant though because calling 911 could either really help out or not. It's just really a 50/50 coin toss with the situation."

- Survey respondent
(26, Black, woman, Brooklyn)

Fifteen percent of the survey respondents said they would never call or approach the NYPD under any circumstances, while most (65%) reported they would only call if it's an emergency. In other words, the majority suggested they either will not call the police at all or only if it is the last resort without other options. "The only time I would call police would be over a violent crime emergency and only because I don't know who else I could call."[17] People are left then to calculate the potential benefit of seeking help with the potential cost of getting the police involved.

70% of respondents reported that they currently fear calling or approaching the NYPD for help because it will make the situation worse or lead to unnecessary violence.

We also learned that of those participants who had previously called the police for help, 45% reported there were times it was a difficult decision. When asked why, 66% of their open-ended responses explained their hesitancy as fear for what the NYPD would (or wouldn't) do. Respondents reported assuming the NYPD would generally be unhelpful, unreliable or even hostile toward them. One person reported to police officers standing on the corner she was robbed, and "they told me to call in my complaint — really? I was just freaking robbed."[18]

Another felt that "police act aggressively before knowing the situation."[19] Others worried about being falsely accused: "Found someone overdosed and felt like I was being blamed for what had happened."[20]

> "A call for help often ends with a Black/brown individual laying dead in the street at the hands of the NYPD with no accountability to follow."
>
> - Survey respondent
> (54, Black, man, South East Queens)

Calling the NYPD is "risky," as another person noted, "you could get hurt or arrested although you yourself called police."[21] It was understood as especially risky for Black people, "Because being Black teaches you that you can get murdered by them for free."[22] One respondent explained, "They don't respect Black people," and another said, "My partner (Black man) was posing a threat to my safety. I hung up out of fear that they may harm him once they arrived."[23] A mother bluntly explained why she avoided calling the police: "I didn't want my Black son shot."[24] Indeed, from 2013-2023, almost 2,927 Black people in the U.S. were killed by the police, and they are almost three times as likely to be killed by police than white people.[25]

In addition to violence and even death, respondents worried that calling police would lead to legal escalation. They worried about being criminalized, arrested and imprisoned. Some respondents felt "[the NYPD] treat victims like criminals"[26] or "Just can't trust police [because] they tend to make things worse or lock the innocent ones up."[27] Some experienced this firsthand in their past: "My friend was shot and instead of helping they yelled and interrogated us." [28]

Yet, despite genuine concerns about calling police, many respondents understood the NYPD as the only viable choice in their circumstances. One said, "I was not sure if they were the correct people to call, but I didn't have anyone else to call." [29] It is not surprising people call the police when in need; support services are frequently scarce, and the NYPD is often the quickest and most readily or only available public resource in times of emergency or violence. "I felt like calling 911 and having them decide to send the police was the only option,"[30] a respondent said. The NYPD is the general default. It is significant, however, that people living in heavily policed neighborhoods, especially people of color, must live with this life-threatening decision. "They are the only one we can call; however, we are in fear for our lives,"[31] stated a respondent.

> "Calling the police would be my last resort. If I, or my loved ones, were hurt, my only option is to call 911, and that means the cops. Non-police response is especially necessary with mental health crises. Instead, people who need services are met with guns. And even when there are situations involving guns or violence, we can bring in violence interrupters who have influence in a particular neighborhood. I've seen this happen. Trusted community members have better results than cops ... The proof is in the pudding: The safest communities are the ones with the most resources, not the most police. If we had the resources we needed, we wouldn't need the police."
>
> - Survey respondent
> (Black and Latinx, man, Brooklyn)

2.3 Being reported to the NYPD

Research on calls for police service reveals that seeking police support is not an uncommon occurrence, particularly in communities of color.[32] This trend is partly driven by the lack of resources, leaving the police as one of the few accessible and well-funded options for addressing various issues, such as disputes and family matters.[33]
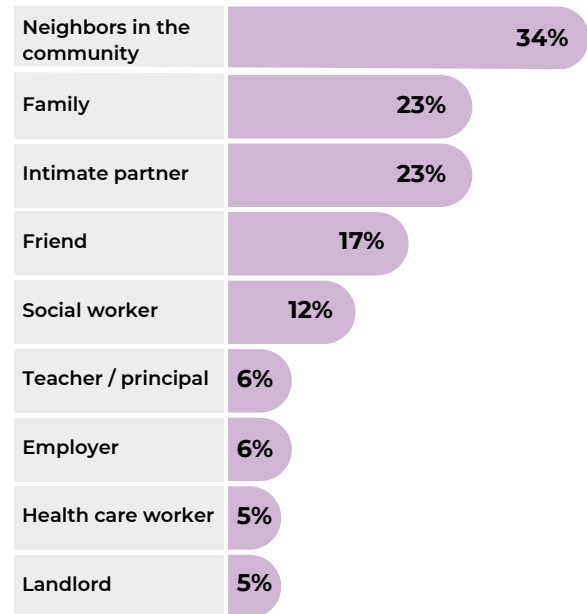
Our research underscores the significance of the police's role in under-resourced communities, given the limited alternatives available.

Survey data revealed that calls to the police often occur within intimate or proximal relationships, which led us to delve deeper into the implications of the other side of calls for service, the experiences of those whom the police were called on.

Eighteen percent of the survey respondents told us there was at least one time in their life where someone complained about or reported them to the NYPD. Over half (51%) were calls from people close, like family or friends, which are often complicated and layered situations. "My biological mother is mentally disturbed and abused me; when I learned to defend myself, I would. Calling the cop was her way of winning as the big bad wolf,"[34] one respondent said. Another person explained, "My ex partner was a very jealous man. I couldn't have friends or go places with my girlfriends because he always felt like I was cheating. On that day, he just wanted to show me that he [had] control over my life and still thinks he does."[35]

Who contacted the NYPD to complain or report you?

18% of the calls to the NYPD were from service professionals like teachers/principals, social workers and healthcare workers.

Neighbors in the community	34%
Family	23%
Intimate partner	23%
Friend	17%
Social worker	12%
Teacher / principal	6%
Employer	6%
Health care worker	5%
Landlord	5%

Of course, calls to complain or report also came from outside family or friend networks. Over one-third (34%) said neighbors in the community called. Some referenced the idea of weaponized calls: "My mom and my aunt was undocumented during those calls. And I have people threatened to call 911 for that because of their dislike of them. The number has been weaponized towards me and my family."[36] Others explained that they were wrongly perceived as suspicious: "I was just homeless and sleeping; no need to call police"[37] or "Someone confused a music device as a weapon. If that was the actual reason, then I think the call was justified. However, I suspect race was a factor."[38]

Importantly, 18% said service professionals called — people like social workers, health care workers or teachers/principals — who are there to offer support, not to criminalize and extend the carceral network. "I've just seen so many things that happen inside of a school," explained a young person, "where School Safety Agents [SSA] should have been there to 'protect and defend' someone from getting their stuff stolen, from getting beat up, from getting whatever, bullied, whatever the case may be, and SSAs are nowhere to be found; but the minute a teacher calls the SSA and says, 'Can you remove this child from my classroom,' that's not protecting — that's policing."[39]

These findings reveal the extension of the police's reach. The act of involving the police in a situation effectively transforms teachers/principles, health care workers and social workers who are supposed to be sources of support and care into de facto enforcers of the carceral punishment system. This blurs the roles of human service workers and underscores the entanglement of essential community figures with law enforcement practices. The evolution from seeking police assistance to involving an entire network of professionals who rely on the police has far-reaching implications, further reinforcing the presence and influence of the carceral state in daily life.

Of the people who had the police called on them, some felt the police calls were justified because they "broke the law"[40] or "they called the police for me stealing."[41] However, most (57%) felt in their situation that more suitable options or strategies were available or should be available other than involving the NYPD, even in serious situations (as is discussed more in Chapter 4).

Many of the calls were perceived to be for trivial incidents: "It was a minor argument, which could be easily resolved"[42] or "The police were called by a stranger on me, because my friend was teaching me to drive in a park, the stranger did not like that we were practicing in the parking lot."[43] Respondents felt these moments could have been better handled through direct communication: "It was a noise complaint when I was having a party; they could've asked us to be more quiet"[44] or "We were trespassing, but there were no signs or any indication that we weren't allowed there. If we had been told calmly, we would have left. Instead, we were chased by police."[45]

Of the people who had police called on them, **57%** of the participants felt in their situation there were (or should be) more suitable options or strategies available other than involving the NYPD.

Whenever the police are involved, there is the threat of violence, arrest or death. However, it is important to note that those who chose to call the police - for example, to support someone who was injured or to prevent/end violence - may not have felt safe confronting people in moments of crisis or tension and felt that calling was, in fact, a way of providing safety to their community. Again, the NYPD is often understood as the only realistic choice for help under the circumstance. Some respondents who had the NYPD called on them acknowledged the need for intervention in their situation but suggested that alternative strategies would have been more effective. For example, one person said, "A social worker would have been a better option than three broken ribs

and a warning."[46] In fact, rather than NYPD intervention, many respondents explained it was services they most needed, such as "Safe Horizons,"[47] "Social worker from ACS,"[48] "counseling,"[49] "Mental health doctor,"[50] "Mediation,"[51] "call my therapist,"[52] "Housing program,"[53] "Health care workers for mental health,"[54] "Call rehab not jail"[55] or "Call my drug counselor."[56] We will address these kinds of investments in the coming chapters.

2.4 NYPD harm and violence

Our findings illuminate that people in highly policed New York neighborhoods often hold deeply complex beliefs, attitudes and proposals for community safety, supporting this report's approach of presenting data about the multiple truths that communities hold. Notably, our findings suggest that while police officers have provided moments of successful intervention and important services for New Yorkers, for many respondents the police are also a constant threat to safety.

> **71%** of participants reported they were harmed by or experienced violence from the NYPD at least once in their life.

We recognize the desires many participants hold for police intervention while also acknowledging that the police frequently fall short in meeting individuals' needs and can pose risks to community members in terms of violence and abuse. It is therefore of critical importance to keep in mind how, on the whole, policing as a public institution — along with the criminal legal system — have historically served to uphold social, racial and economic inequalities through the disproportionate criminalization, surveillance, discipline, control and containment of poor communities,

communities of color and others who are marginalized.[57]

It is unsurprising then, though no less concerning, that whether within the context of unwanted police contact or calls for police service, almost three-quarters (71%) of survey respondents reported the NYPD harmed them at least once in their life. Many reported aggressive physical encounters with police. "So [the NYPD] telling us that we fit a description of two Spanish, Latinx guys that's been seen dealing drugs," explained a Bronx resident about an experience he and his recently immigrated brother had with police. They were not carrying or dealing drugs, but the contact still became violent:

> "He dragged me by my balls — by my balls, not by my arm, my neck, not even my back ... So, because my brother pulling me inside while the police trying to pull me outside, from the driver's side, the cop on the driver's side opened the door and, he start[s] punching my brother and punching him and punching him and telling him to let go of me, so the officer could drag. And long story short, they take us out, they beat us up. ... we're bloody and everything."
> - Survey respondent
> (36, Latinx, man, Bronx)

The NYPD physically touched slightly over one-third (36%) of survey respondents. The NYPD handcuffed one-quarter, and of those, 75% indicated that they were let go.

Almost one-fifth (17%) of the participants reported the NYPD used or directed a weapon toward them, and just under one-third (32%) had at least one physically violent encounter with the NYPD in their lives that involved being hit, slapped, choked or punched.

Some of NYPD Harm and Violence Reported by Respondents

Physical harm to self or property	*Recently	**Lifetime
Experienced physical violence by the NYPD.	17%	32%
NYPD used or directed a weapon toward them.	9%	17%
NYPD damaged or took their property.	7%	16%
Verbal harm		
Disrespected by the NYPD.	19%	36%
NYPD threatened violence or legal escalation toward them.	15%	27%
Harassed by the NYPD.	11%	20%
NYPD made bigoted comments toward them.	11%	19%
Sexual and gender-based harm		
Received sexual attention from the NYPD.	7%	11%
Received gender-based neglect or voyeurism by the NYPD.	6%	11%
Experienced sexual violence by the NYPD.	5%	9%
NYPD asked for sexual favors in exchange for something or with threat of harm.	4%	5%

*Recently (between 2020-2021)
**Lifetime (prior to 2022)

"When the cop showed up, they said, 'aren't you supposed to be the man? You're supposed to check them.' He [NYPD] believed that I was supposed to be the man and that I was supposed to enforce my will against her because I was masculine" was how a trans-identified person described a domestic incident with their partner. "[The NYPD] said it in such a mocking way too,"[58]

this person reflected. "Police treated us like we were worthless"[59] was how another participant described her experience with stop and frisk. The NYPD does not collect information about disrespectful, threatening or prejudiced police encounters, but they can also be significant moments of harm. Over one-third (36%) of the survey respondents reported that the NYPD disrespected them; the NYPD threatened over one-quarter (27%) with violence or legal escalation; and the NYPD harassed one-fifth at least once in their lives.

> "See physically, I've been beaten from them; I have marks still today on my shoulders where they, um, threw me down to the ground, you know, um, and stepped on my shoulders where the marks are now still there to this day. I have pain in the shoulders."
>
> - Survey respondent
> (50, Black, woman, Bronx)

Most significant, some participants described triggering racist interactions. "I'm coming home from having to work one time in my own neighborhood. And then a couple of them [NYPD] were around, and they were asking where I was going, and I was actually heading home. They was like, 'Where you going boy?'" a Black Brooklyn resident recounted. He explained,

> "I'm a tall male actually. I'm 6'5 … The word 'boy' is just set in racial issues and set in slave issues. Like it's really setting that kind of field where you say to somebody that you [are] trying to condescend, that you clearly look down upon, or they try to make you feel less like a human … If you're a this officer come to my home unexpectedly and then throw out, …

> … you know, very nasty derogatory things to me … it was a time when I went to tell him that we can no longer continue with this behavior…'boy,' I understand that. You gotta call them a boy obviously, a child maybe so …but like when you're a man and you know that for a fact and then you could say that kind of stuff, especially to Black men. Um, it's like, that's like something that you know; it's like being done purposely."
>
> - Survey respondent
> (29, Black, man, Brooklyn)

This is not a story of subtle misunderstandings or differing vocabulary interpretations. This is the NYPD using language with racial overtones to intimate, disempower and dehumanize. It is a form of racialized violence. Nearly one-fifth (19%) reported that the NYPD used bigoted, sexist or racist language toward them in their life, with over one-tenth (11%) experiencing this during the pandemic (between 2020 and 2021).

Sexual and gender-based police encounters are another form of harm faced by community members living with omnipresent policing but seldom part of the public discourse, despite more recent work that has brought these issues in the spotlight. Over one-tenth (11%) reported experiencing sexual attention like receiving catcalls or getting asked for their number, and just under one-tenth (9%) reported experiencing searches that felt sexualized, such as when, as this woman recalls, "I was searched by a male officer, and even when I demanded a female officer, he continued to touch and violate me."[60] Or this search, where a respondent said, "I'm not a suspect, but yet you [NYPD] have your hands all over my crotch and, you know, my buttock."

This led to a sexualized slur. "I'm explaining to him I'm very uncomfortable and instead of being professional, that's when it comes out, 'It's not my fault you're a fag. It's not my fault you're uncomfortable because you're a fag.'"[61]

As part of the Community Safety Project, in addition to the survey, we conducted 38 in-depth interviews and held a virtual town hall with people who had a range of sexual and/or gender-based police experiences (see a forthcoming report by Priscilla Bustamante and CPR organizations). These interviews, such as from this person who had previously been involved with sex work, helped illuminate the violent distortion of power, consent and safety that occurs in these abhorrent encounters.

> "Oh yes, it went as far as doing the whole act. But I went through with it because he would, he would tell me things like, 'well, you know, if you ever get arrested again, I can help you' … And being a young mother, you know, and struggling and going through, you know, life's obstacles, the ups and downs, I figured, well, let me go ahead and do it, you know? But it was like I was being pressured because he would pop up to my house unexpectedly. And this is a heavy man. There was plenty of phone calls and threats. So, I went along with it for about a good four months until I said to myself, I have to move, I have to change my address, and then maybe I can get around this situation that I'm in because it was very scary to have because I'm a woman of God and I knew that I was trying to change my life and I knew that it was wrong. I knew he had a wife. And then he forced himself on me. Just like,…

> ... 'No, you're gonna give me this because you've been giving it to me, so you just gonna accept it and shut up.'"
>
> - Survey respondent
> (50, Black, woman, Bronx)

Under no circumstances should law enforcement use its position to coerce or force sex. This is a public betrayal of the highest order, and yet, in just our survey alone, 86 people reported that the NYPD sexually assaulted them, and 79 reported the NYPD asked for sex in return for something.

The NYPD has outsized power, influence and discretion in poor communities of color. The opportunities to observe and experience police contact as well as the harm resulting from police contact are much greater in neighborhoods flooded with the NYPD. The police are a more active and potentially disruptive presence in community life. They more proactively and aggressively enforce minor offenses; they are also more often sought for assistance and intervention given the lack of other resources available. In those ways, the harms and risks of police violence and the potential carceral consequences such as arrest and incarceration that come with omnipresence are not just experienced individually but shared with friends, family, close acquaintances and neighbors. "I just came home with my sister and my little brother so they're in the house by themselves, looking out the window at me get humiliated," remembers a Brooklyn resident. He was stopped outside his home, having just picked up his sister and little brother at school while his mom was at work. "I ended up arrested. Charges were dismissed and everything. My mother rushed home from work."[62] 45% of survey respondents reported that people close to then experienced NYPD violence, arrest

and/or incarceration. The NYPD's criminalizing presence can impact and harm loved ones in far-reaching ways from general fears of death to financial burdens, lack of child care, lack of housing support and prison visits (to name just a few).

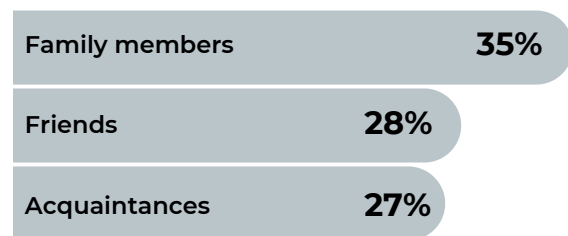## NYPD experiences by people close to respondents

45% reported that people close to them experienced NYPD violence, arrest and/or incarceration.

More specifically:

The nature of system contact for people close to respondents:

NYPD violence	**22%**
Arrest	**36%**
Incarceration	**25%**
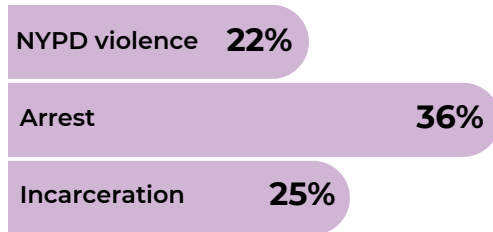
People close to respondents who experienced system contact:

Family members	**35%**
Friends	**28%**
Acquaintances	**27%**

System contact of people close to respondents:

	Experienced NYPD violence	Arrested	Incarcerated
Family members	15%	28%	20%
Friends	14%	22%	15%
Acquaintances	14%	18%	12%

The NYPD can disrupt community relationships, create insecurity in peoples' lives and produce a hostile neighborhood environment.

Officers can limit residents' movements and engagement in public spaces, with some New Yorkers reporting that they simply stay home to avoid the police.[63] These trends are particularly concerning because policing may undermine social connection and increase community fragmentation,[64] which can diminish physical and mental health.[65] Over half (54%) of survey respondents who reported recent unwanted police contact indicated that at least several days in the previous two weeks they had little interest or pleasure in doing things as compared to those who had not experienced recent unwanted police contact (38%). Study participants noted a heightened sense of vulnerability where their everyday relationships with friends and family become scrutinized through police surveillance. For instance, one respondent commented on the NYPD's gang database, "I feel like it's unjust. You don't know that person's history. I can have a not-great history, but it's not right to just decide that I'm guilty and treat me like I'm guilty indefinitely because of my association with a gang or believed association."[66]

Community members can find themselves negotiating where they go and who they see, such as this person who is describing the need to stay away from a certain neighborhood because of the police threat: "[It] keeps family away from family... I'm not going to hang over there anymore. I'm not about to get in trouble. It keeps you away from places that are in your own home, places you used to hang at."[67] It also forces people to stay away in fear they will cause trouble for their friends and family. Another respondent explained, "They end up saying, 'I can't go to that neighborhood because I don't want to bring my baggage, the issue attached to me — to my family and friends.' They try to see their families, but they don't do it in certain places."[68]

Living in neighborhoods with high police activity substantially impacts people's lives and the lives of their loved ones, family members, friends and neighbors.[69] This research demonstrates how the NYPD's omnipresence is a community experience, and the implication is that the police can be a collective and continuously harmful presence even without direct contact, including simply observing severe police activity. Significant numbers of respondents reported witnessing violence by NYPD officers in their community such as this Manhattan resident described:

> "Maybe [the NYPD are] just doing that to show off, like to show others around that they're in power and I can do this to you too. And then people like me just feel like we can't do anything about it. Because we're scared that if we do, they'll probably come and shoot us, man, or kill us, man. And it's going to be their word against our word. They're the law enforcement, and we're just regular citizens."
>
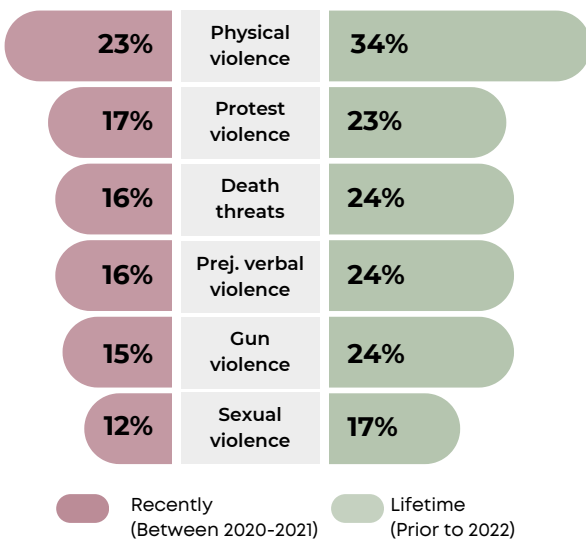> - Survey respondent
> (34, Latinx, man, Manhattan)

Such an experience can create collective feelings of trauma, threat and helplessness that impact individuals even though they were not directly targeted. Over one-third (37%) of survey respondents reported witnessing NYPD violence in their neighborhood, including nearly one-quarter (24%) who witnessed police threaten to kill someone as well as 13% who actually saw the NYPD shoot at someone. This also

includes over one-third (34%) who observed physical violence at the hands of the NYPD and nearly one-quarter (24%) who heard the NYPD use language that was bigoted or prejudiced.

Witnessed NYPD violence in their Community

37% witnessed some form of NYPD violence in their lifetimes and **26%** witnessed violence during the pandemic.

Specific forms of violence included:

Recently	Form	Lifetime
23%	Physical violence	34%
17%	Protest violence	23%
16%	Death threats	24%
16%	Prej. verbal violence	24%
15%	Gun violence	24%
12%	Sexual violence	17%

Recently (Between 2020-2021) Lifetime (Prior to 2022)

Studies have consistently demonstrated that both direct and indirect police contact can have serious repercussions on mental and physical health, leading to increased rates of chronic diseases, stress and anxiety.[70] Contact with the police, including being stopped by the police or experiencing police abuse, is associated with poor physical health,   while living in a neighborhood with high rates of police frisks is associated with increased odds of being diagnosed with diabetes, high blood pressure and past-year asthma episodes. Contact with the police[72] is also associated with poor mental health, including trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder, physiological distress, depression, anxiety, suicide attempts and suicidal ideation. [73]

For young Black men in particular, research has shown that police violence, whether directly experienced or feared, can act as a chronic traumatic stressor and negatively impact their mental and physical well-being.[74]

Our study found that Fifty-six percent of those survey respondents who experienced recent unwanted police contact said they felt down, depressed or hopeless several days or more in the previous two weeks as compared to those who had not reported unwanted police contact (40%). And over half (51%) of the survey respondents expressed being worried about their own safety with police and/or the safety of their friends/family most days or everyday (and 70% worried to some degree). This included having friends/family members or oneself killed, injured, wrongly arrested, disrespected, stopped or sexually assaulted by police. The threat of police violence, arrest, incarceration and potential death is very real to the participants in our study (One said, "Police killed my brother in [year], so ever since then I don't trust them"). Police stops are frightening, explained a Brooklyn man: "It made me very scared to the point that it would be, sometimes, sometimes cops would have to be like, 'Are you okay? You alright? Like, you [are] shaking.'"[75] Just the police's mere presence can be frightening, even to children. "Like there's an incident where the drug dealers was out there arguing and fighting," one respondent described. "When the cops came, my kids ran so fast, they ran into the building. They wasn't scared of the guys with the guns and the drug dealers that's on my block; they were more afraid of the cops."[76] In heavily policed New York neighborhoods — from children to elderly — our study found that few are ultimately left untouched by the NYPD and the harms they enact.
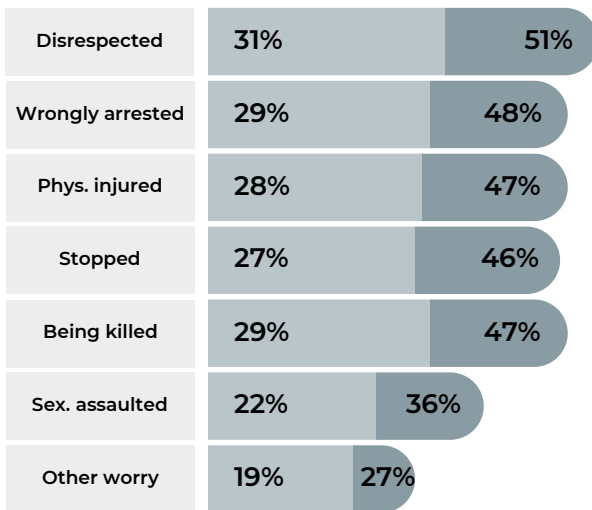
Feeling Worried About NYPD Contact

51% expressed being worried about their own safety with police and/or the safety of their friends/family most days or everyday, and **70%** worried to some degree.
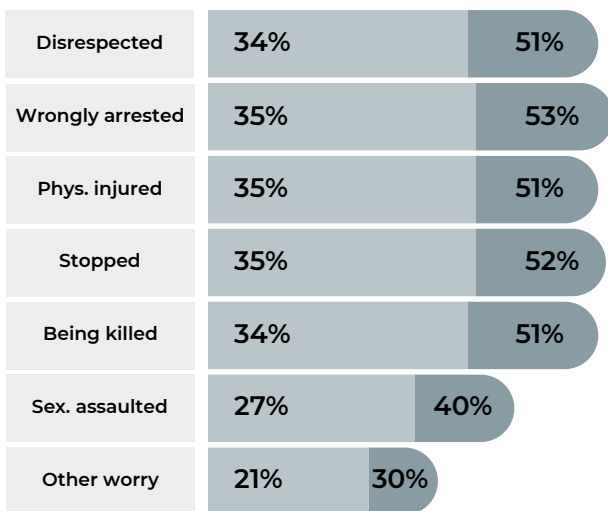
More specifically:

Worried for self

43% worried for one's own safety most/everyday (**61%** to some degree)

	Worry most or every day	Worry to some degree
Disrespected	31%	51%
Wrongly arrested	29%	48%
Phys. injured	28%	47%
Stopped	27%	46%
Being killed	29%	47%
Sex. assaulted	22%	36%
Other worry	19%	27%

Worried for friends / family

43% worried about the safety of their friends or family most/everyday (**60%** to some degree)

	Worry most or every day	Worry to some degree
Disrespected	34%	51%
Wrongly arrested	35%	53%
Phys. injured	35%	51%
Stopped	35%	52%
Being killed	34%	51%
Sex. assaulted	27%	40%
Other worry	21%	30%

Worry most or every day   Worry to some degree

2.5 Summary

The findings throughout this section offer evidence that those living in highly policed neighborhoods frequently experience policing as pervasive, harmful, violent and fearful. Our study offers unique insight and support to the body of evidence that police saturation is often experienced as a punishment on whole communities, especially communities of color, with ongoing and far-reaching consequences. In sum, what we found is that while community members want to be and feel safe, the experiences they or their community members have had with the NYPD often run counter to that. People, especially Black and Latinx New Yorkers, living in highly policed neighborhoods report feeling that the police are an omnipresent force and that they are under near-constant surveillance. They report high levels of police contact in which they have directly experienced a range of physical, verbal, and sexual/gender-based violence and abuse. They also have witnessed this or know of their friends, family or neighbors experiencing this. For many, the cumulative effect of these experiences creates an individual and collective sense of insecurity and fear. These findings raise alarm bells for a public safety approach that prioritizes NYPD enforcement and fails to account for the perceived and experienced harms.

Chapter 2: Endnotes

1 Andrew Guthrie Ferguson, *The Rise of Big Data Policing: Surveillance, Race, and the Future of Law Enforcement* (NYU Press, 2017).
Linnemann, T., & Turner, J. (2022). Three-dimensional policeman: Security, sovereignty and volumetric police power. Theoretical Criminology, 26(1), 23–39. https://doi-org.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/10.1177/1362480620981103

2 Bilach, T. J., Roche, S. P., & Wawro, G. J. (2022). The effects of the Summer All Out Foot Patrol Initiative in New York City: a difference-in-differences approach. Journal of Experimental Criminology, 18(2), 209-244. https://doi-org.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/10.1007/s11292-020-09445-8
Goldstein, J. (2014, September 19). 'Stop-and-Frisk' Ebbs, but Still Hangs Over Brooklyn Lives. The New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/20/nyregion/friskings-ebb-but-still-hang-over-brooklyn-lives.html?_r=0
Government of the City of New York. (2020, July 17). Mayor de Blasio and Commissioner Shea Unveil End Gun Violence Plan. https://www.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/526-20/mayor-de-blasio-commissioner-shea-end-gun-violence-plan
Novak, K.J. (2014). Preventive Patrol. In: Bruinsma, G., Weisburd, D. (eds) Encyclopedia of Criminology and Criminal Justice. Springer, New York, NY. https://doi-org.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/10.1007/978-1-4614-5690-2_269

3 Town hall attendee - demographics unknown

4 Survey respondents - demographics unknown

5 Town hall attendee - demographics unknown

6 Buchanan, Kim Shayo, and Phillip Atiba Goff. "Racist stereotype threat in civil rights law." UCLA L. Rev. 67 (2020): 316-360.

7 Bellin, J. (2014). The inverse relationship between the constitutionality and effectiveness of New York City "stop and frisk." Boston University Law Review, 94(5), 1495-1550.
Jashnani, G., Bustamante, P., & Stoudt, B.G. (2020). Dispossession by accumulation: The impacts of discretionary arrests in New York City. Race and Justice, 10(3), 269–296. https://doi.org/10.1177/2153368717742476

8 Seigel, M. (2018). Violence work: policing and power. Race & Class, 59(4), 15–33.

9 Bass, S. (2001). Policing space, policing race: Social control imperatives and police discretionary decisions. Social Justice, 28(1), 156-176.
Rossler, M.T. (2019). The Impact of Police Technology Adoption on Social Control, Police Accountability, and Police Legitimacy. In Political Authority, Social Control and Public Policy (Vol. 31, pp. 209–224). Emerald Publishing Limited.
Smith, B.W., & Holmes, M.D. (2014). Police use of excessive force in minority communities: A test of the minority threat, place, and community accountability hypotheses. Social Problems, 61(1), 83-104.

10 Town hall attendee - demographics unknown

11 Bustamante, P., Jashnani, G., & Stoudt, B.G. (2019). Theorizing cumulative dehumanization: An embodied praxis of "becoming" and resisting state-sanctioned violence. Social and Personality Psychology Compass, 13(1), e12429–n/a. https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12429
Jashnani, G., Bustamante, P., & Stoudt, B.G. (2020). Dispossession by accumulation: The impacts of discretionary arrests in New York City. Race and Justice, 10(3), 269–296. https://doi.org/10.1177/2153368717742476

12 Survey respondent - 62, Black, woman, Bronx

13 Survey respondent - 38, white, man, Queens

14 Survey respondent - 27, Latinx, woman, Queens

15 Survey respondent - Age unknown, race unknown, gender unknown, Staten Island

16 Survey respondent - 47, Black, woman, Brooklyn

17 Survey respondent - 27, white, woman, Queens

18 Survey respondent - 56, Black, woman, Brooklyn

19 Survey respondent - 64, Latinx, woman, Manhattan

20 Survey respondent - 41, white, man, Manhattan

21 Survey respondent - 29, Black, man, Brooklyn

22 Survey respondent - 54, Black, man, Brooklyn

23 Survey respondent - 25, Black, woman, Brooklyn

24 Survey respondent - 44, Black, woman, Manhattan

25 Mapping Police Violence. (n.d.). https://mappingpoliceviolence.org/

26 Survey respondent - 56, Black, woman, Bronx

27 Survey respondent - 35, Black, man, Manhattan

28 Survey respondent - 18, Black, woman, Brooklyn

29 Survey respondent - 22, Latinx, trans/questioning, Staten Island

30 Survey respondent - 31, white, woman, Manhattan

31 Survey respondent - 38, Black, woman, Brooklyn

32 Ming Xie and Janet L. Lauritsen, "Racial Context and Crime Reporting: A Test of Black's Stratification Hypothesis," *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* 28, no. 2 (2012): 265-293, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10940-011-9140-z.

33 Monica C. Bell, "Situational Trust: How Disadvantaged Mothers Reconceive Legal Cynicism," *Law & Society Review* 50, no. 2 (2016): 314-347, https://doi.org/10.1111/lasr.12200.
Ming Xie and Eric P. Baumer, "Crime Victims' Decisions to Call the Police: Past Research and New Directions," *Annual Review of Criminology* 2, no. 1 (2019): 217-240, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-criminol-011518-024748.

34 Survey respondent - 30, Latinx, woman, Queens

35 Survey respondent - 35, Black, woman, Brooklyn

36 Survey respondent - 20, Black, trans/questioning, Brooklyn

37 Survey respondent - 23, white, trans/questioning, Brooklyn

38 Survey respondent - 41, Black, man, Brooklyn

39 Town hall attendee - demographics unknown

40 Town hall attendee - demographics unknown

Chapter 2: Endnotes

41 Survey respondent - demographics unknown
42 Survey respondent - 36, white, man, Manhattan
43 Survey respondent - 19, white, woman, Brooklyn
44 Survey respondent - 37, white, woman, Brooklyn
45 Survey respondent - 19, Latinx, woman, Bronx
46 Survey respondent - 44, race unknown, trans/questioning, Staten Island
47 Survey respondent - 41, Black and Latinx, trans/questioning, Brooklyn
48 Survey respondent - 18, Black and Latinx, woman, Bronx
49 Survey respondent - demographics unknown
50 Survey respondent - 55, Black, woman, Staten Island
51 Survey respondent - 56, other person of color, man, Bronx
52 Survey respondent - 46, Black, woman, Manhattan
53 Survey respondent - 32, Latinx, trans/questioning, Staten Island
54 Survey respondent - 61, white, man, Staten Island
55 Survey respondent - 54, white, man, Staten Island
56 Survey respondent - 45, Latinx, man, Manhattan
57 Brian Warde, *Inequality in US Social Policy: An Historical Analysis* (Routledge, 2016).
58 Town hall attendee - demographics unknown
59 Town hall attendee - demographics unknown
60 Survey respondent - 57, Black, woman, Bronx
61 Survey respondent - 34, Latin, man, Manhattan
62 Survey respondent - 25, Black, man, Brooklyn
63 Emily Kaufman, "Policing Mobilities Through Bio-Spatial Profiling in New York City," *Political Geography* 55 (2016): 72-81, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2016.07.006.
64 Naa Oyo A. Kwate and Shatema Threadcraft, "Dying Fast and Dying Slow in Black Space: Stop and Frisk's Public Health Threat and a Comprehensive Necropolitics," *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* 14, no. 2 (2017): 535-556, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1742058X17000169.
Melissa B. Gomez, "Policing, Community Fragmentation, and Public Health: Observations from Baltimore," *Journal of Urban Health* 93, no. 1 (2016): 154-167, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11524-015-0022-9.
65 Julianne Holt-Lunstad, "Social Connection as a Public Health Issue: The Evidence and a Systemic Framework for Prioritizing the 'Social' in Social Determinants of Health," Annual Review of Public Health 43, no. 1 (2022): 193-213, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-publhealth-052020-110732.
Julianne Holt-Lunstad and Andrew Steptoe, "Social Isolation: An Underappreciated Determinant of Physical Health," Current Opinion in Psychology 43 (2022): 232-237, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2021.07.012.
66 Town hall attendee - demographics unknown
67 Town hall attendee - demographics unknown
68 Town hall attendee - demographics unknown

69 Alexa A. Freedman, Andrew V. Papachristos, Britney P. Smart, Lauren S. Keenan-Devlin, Sadiya S. Khan, Ann Borders, Kiarri N. Kershaw, and Gregory E. Miller, "Complaints About Excessive Use of Police Force in Women's Neighborhoods and Subsequent Perinatal and Cardiovascular Health," Science Advances 8, no. 3 (2022): eabl5417, https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.abl5417.
Monique Jindal, Kamila B. Mistry, Maria Trent, Ashlyn McRae, and Rachel L. J. Thornton, "Police Exposures and the Health and Well-Being of Black Youth in the US: A Systematic Review," JAMA Pediatrics 176, no. 1 (2022): 78-88, https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2021.2929.
Joscha Legewie and Jeffrey Fagan, "Aggressive Policing and the Educational Performance of Minority Youth," American Sociological Review 84, no. 2 (2019): 220-247, https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122419826020.
Abigail A. Sewell and Kevin Jefferson, "Collateral Damage: The Health Effects of Invasive Police Encounters in New York City," Journal of Urban Health 93, S1 (2016): 42-67, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11524-015-0016-7.
70 Sirry Alang, Donna McAlpine, Ellen McCreedy, and Rachel Hardeman, "Police Brutality and Black Health: Setting the Agenda for Public Health Scholars," American Journal of Public Health 107, no. 5 (2017): 662-665, https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2017.303691.
Rahwa Haile, Tawandra Rowell-Cunsolo, Marie-Fatima Hyacinthe, and Sirry Alang, "'We (Still) Charge Genocide': A Systematic Review and Synthesis of the Direct and Indirect Health Consequences of Police Violence in the United States," Social Science & Medicine 322 (2023): 115784, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2023.115784.
Jennifer D. Wood and Patricia M. Griffin, "The Policing and Public Health Interface: Insights from the COVID-19 Pandemic," Policing and Society 31, no. 5 (2021): 503-511, https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2021.1946058.
71 Azure B. Thompson, Maria Baquero, Desmond English, Michele Calvo, Simone Martin-Howard, Tawandra L. Rowell-Cunsolo, Myles Garretson, and Dhruv Brahmbhatt, "Associations Between Experiences of Police Contact and Discrimination by The Police and Courts and Health Outcomes in a Representative Sample of Adults in New York City," *Journal of Urban Health* 98, no. 6 (2021): 727-741, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11524-021-00583-6.
72 Abigail A. Sewell and Kevin Jefferson, "Collateral Damage: The Health Effects Of Invasive Police Encounters In New York City," Journal of Urban Health 93, S1 (2016): 42-67, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11524-015-0016-7.

Chapter 2: Endnotes

[73] Melissa N. McLeod, Daliah Heller, Meredith G. Manze, and Sandra E. Echeverria, "Police Interactions and the Mental Health of Black Americans: A Systematic Review," *Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities* 7, no. 1 (2020): 10-27, https://doi.org/10.1007/s40615-019-00629-1. Rahwa Haile, Tawandra Rowell-Cunsolo, Marie-Fatima Hyacinthe, and Sirry Alang, "'We (Still) Charge Genocide': A Systematic Review and Synthesis of the Direct and Indirect Health Consequences of Police Violence in the United States," *Social Science & Medicine* 322 (2023): 115784, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2023.115784.

[74] Jocelyn R. Smith Lee and Michael A. Robinson, "'That's My Number One Fear in Life. It's the Police': Examining Young Black Men's Exposures to Trauma and Loss Resulting From Police Violence and Police Killings," *Journal of Black Psychology* 45, no. 3 (2019): 143-184, https://doi.org/10.1177/0095798419865152.

[75] Survey respondent - 32, Black, man, Brooklyn

[76] Survey respondent - 50, Black, woman, Bronx

"Community safety [is] ... knowing I can walk down the street without encountering profound human suffering and need on every block."

- Town hall attendee