# Characterizing the Effects of the 2020 Uprisings on the Wellbeing of Undergraduate Students

Daneva Moncrieffe, Candidate for Honors in Sc.B. Cognitive Neuroscience  
Advisor: Audrey Tyrka, MD, PhD, Department of Psychiatry and Human Behavior

## Background

Police violence against Black people in the United States can additionally be understood within the context of systemic racism, anti-Black violence, and white supremacy. The negative impact of systemic racism on physical and mental health has been well researched and documented (Pieterse et al., 2012; Paradies et al., 2015; Williams et al., 2019). In recent years, researchers have shifted their focus to also investigate the impact of exposure to police violence on the mental health of Black people of color more broadly. Das et al. (2015) found that African Americans are sensitized to race-related violence toward other African Americans which is positively correlated with depressive symptoms. Campbell & Valera (2020) found that witnessing police violence via social media has negative psychological and social effects on young people of color (Campbell & Valera, 2020). The current study focuses on uprisings that occurred most intensely during the summer of 2020, such as the Black Lives Matter protests, in order to better characterize the impact of police violence. To investigate this impact, students at Brown, CCRI, and other Providence area colleges will be invited to complete the Characterizing Responses to Events in 2020 (CRE 2020) survey. The aim of this study is to characterize the emotional and stress response of undergraduate students due to police violence and the ensuing uprisings in 2020.

The first hypothesis is that a) Black respondents will report greater negative affect and greater levels of worries regarding police violence and protests/uprisings than white respondents and b) It is hypothesized that respondents of color (non-white respondents) will also report greater negative affect and greater levels of worries regarding police violence and protests/uprisings than white respondents.

The second hypothesis is that race will moderate feelings towards police violence and uprisings compared to COVID-19 pandemic such that Black participants will feel more upset or angry about the former than the latter, with white respondents showing the reverse effect or no difference.

## Methods

### Participants

- 18 years or older  
- Undergraduate students from Brown, CCRI, and other Providence schools

### Recruitment

- Recruitment flyer for survey will be sent via Brown student organization listservs and posted to the social media accounts of those organizations  
- Targeted outreach to students of color via cultural student organization listservs

### Methods: Survey Measures

**Worries and Concerns about the COVID-19 Pandemic and Police Violence**

- 13-item questionnaire developed to better understand how COVID-19 is affecting people’s emotional and mental health

**Emotional Responses to Major Social Events in 2020**

- Adapted from the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS, Watson & Clark, 1982)
- 11 multiple-selection items including the following emotional response descriptors: excited, sad, relaxed, content, angry, happy, anxious, and stressed

**Worries and Concerns about the COVID-19 Pandemic and Police Violence**

- 12-item survey adapted from the COVID-19 and Mental Health Impacts scale (Latkin & Dayton)
- Participants assess worries and concerns related to the COVID-19 pandemic on a 5-point scale regarding how much they agreed with each item

**DASS-21 (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995)**

- Widely-used 21-item validated scale that measures the emotional states of depression, anxiety, and stress
- Participants rank on a 4-point scale how much each item applied to them

**Everyday Discrimination Scale (Williams et al., 1997)**

- Widely-used 9-item measure that measures chronic, day-to-day experiences of discrimination

**Health Behaviors and Media Consumption**

- Adapted from the California Healthy Kids Survey (Latkin & Dayton)
- 8-items asking participants to report the amount of time spent on each behavior or activity in the past week in hours and minutes.

### Methods: Planned Analyses

**First Hypothesis Analysis**

To evaluate the relationship between race and worries regarding police violence and uprising, independent t-tests will be performed.
- Key dependent variables: Worries and Concerns about Police Violence scores and Emotional Responses to Major Social Events police violence subscale score.
- Independent variable: Race

Secondary analysis: If a significant result is found when comparing Black v. white and students of color v. white students, a three-way ANOVA will be performed to compare the difference in scores between Black, white and non-Black students of color.

**Second Hypothesis Analysis**

To evaluate whether race will moderate feelings towards police violence and uprisings compared to the COVID-19 pandemic such that Black participants will feel more negatively towards the former than the latter, with white respondents showing the reverse effect. General linear models will be performed to test for an interaction between race and social event domain, predicting negative responses to these events.

## Discussion

Given previous findings from Paradies et al. (2015) and Williams et al. (2019) which suggest that racism negatively impacts mental health it is predicted that results in this study will follow this pattern. It is anticipated that the emotional response to police violence will be positively associated with negative affect as measured by the Emotional Response to Major Social Events scale. This research will expand on previous findings that depressive symptoms and worrisome thoughts in African Americans are associated with exposure to race-related violence toward other African Americans (Das et al., 2015; Mason et al., 2017) by exploring how race moderates these feelings of worry and stress.

Research such as what is proposed here is, should be of utmost importance to the field of mental health. Additionally, colleges and universities should take these findings into serious considerations in their planning to develop effective interventions to support students in the future struggling with mental health issues, especially Black students. Colleges and universities also have a responsibility to stop police violence and racism on their own campus.