

Study examines emergency department visits for patients injured by law enforcement in the US

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From 2006 to 2012, there were approximately 51,000 emergency department visits per year for patients injured by law enforcement in the United States, with this number stable over this time period, according to a study published by *JAMA Surgery*.

Deaths of civilians in contact with police have recently gained national public and policy attention. While journalists track police-involved deaths, epidemiologic data are incomplete, and trends in nonfatal injuries, which far outnumber deaths, are poorly understood. Elinore J. Kaufman, M.D., M.S.H.P., of New York-Presbyterian Hospital Weill Cornell Medicine, New York, and colleagues used the Nationwide Emergency Department Sample, a nationally representative sample of [emergency department](#) (ED) visits, to determine whether the incidence of ED visits for injuries by law enforcement increased relative to total ED visits from 2006 to 2012.

During this time period, there were 355,677 ED visits for injuries by law enforcement, and frequencies did not increase over time. Of these visits, 0.3 percent (n = 1,202) resulted in [death](#). More than 80 percent of patients were men, and the average age of patients was 32 years. Most lived in zip codes with median household income less than the national average, and 81 percent lived in urban areas. Injuries by law enforcement were more common in the South and West and less common in the Northeast and Midwest. Most injuries by law enforcement resulted from being struck, with gunshot and stab wounds accounting for fewer than seven percent. Most injuries were minor. Medically identified substance abuse was common in [patients](#) injured by police, as was mental illness.

"While public attention has surged in recent years,

we found these frequencies [approximately 51,000 ED visits per year] to be stable over 7 years, indicating that this has been a longer-term phenomenon," the authors write.

"While it is impossible to classify how many of these injuries are avoidable, these data can serve as a baseline to evaluate the outcomes of national and regional efforts to reduce [law enforcement](#)-related [injury](#)."

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