Police Harassment and Psychosocial Vulnerability, Distress, and Depressive Symptoms Among Black Men who have Sex with Men in the U.S.: Longitudinal Analysis of HPTN 061

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Abstract

Objectives: To estimate the impact of police harassment on psychosocial vulnerability, distress, and depressive symptoms among Black men who have sex with men (BMSM).

Methods: A sample of 1,155 BMSM were recruited from 2009 to 2010 in 6 U.S. cities (Atlanta, Boston, Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco, and Washington D.C.) and completed a baseline and 12-month follow-up interview. We estimated associations between reported recent police harassment and psychosocial vulnerability (elevated racial/sexual identity incongruence), psychological distress (being distressed by experienced racism and/or homophobia), and depression measured six months later.

Results: Overall, 622 men (59.6%) reported experiencing police harassment between the baseline and 6-month interview due to their race and/or sexuality. Adjusted analyses suggested police harassment was independently associated with an 11- and 9-point increase in distress due to experienced racism and distress due to experienced homophobia scores, respectively. Police harassment perceived to be dually motivated predicted disproportionate levels of distress.

Conclusions: Police harassment is prevalent and associated with negative influences on psychosocial vulnerability and psychological distress among BMSM participants. Reducing exposure to police harassment may improve the psychosocial health of BMSM.