

## Racial Distress in the Digital Age: A Mixed-Methods Exploration of the Effects of Social Media Exposure to Police Brutality on Black Students

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**Abstract :** The 2020 movement for Black Lives, ignited by anti-Black police brutality and exemplified by the public execution of George Floyd, underscored the dual potential of social media for political activism and perilous exposure to traumatic content for Black students. This study employs Critical Race Technology Theory (CRTT) to scrutinize algorithmic anti-blackness and its impact on Black youth's lives and educational experiences. The research investigates the consequences of vicarious exposure to police brutality on social media among Black adolescents through qualitative interviews and quantitative scale data. The findings reveal an unprecedented surge in exposure to viral police killings since 2020, resulting in profound physical, socioemotional, and educational effects on Black youth. CRTT forms the theoretical basis, challenging the notion of digital technologies as post-racial and neutral, aiming to dismantle systemic biases within digital systems. Black youth, averaging over 13 hours of daily social media use, face constant exposure to graphic images of Black individuals dying. The study connects this exposure to a range of physical, socioemotional, and mental health consequences, emphasizing the urgent need for understanding and support. The research proposes questions to explore the extent of police brutality exposure and its effects on Black youth. Qualitative interviews with high school and college students and quantitative scale data from undergraduates contribute to a nuanced understanding of the impact of police brutality exposure on Black youth. Themes of unprecedented exposure to viral police killings, physical and socioemotional effects, and educational consequences emerge from the analysis. The study uncovers how vicarious experiences of negative police encounters via social media lead to mistrust, fear, and psychosomatic symptoms among Black adolescents. Implications for educators and counselors are profound, emphasizing the cultivation of empathy, provision of mental health support, integration of media literacy education, and encouragement of activism. Recognizing family and community influences is crucial for comprehensive support. Professional development opportunities in culturally responsive teaching and trauma-informed approaches are recommended for educators. In conclusion, creating a supportive educational environment that addresses the emotional impact of social media exposure to police brutality is crucial for the well-being and development of Black adolescents. Counselors, through safe spaces and collaboration, play a vital role in supporting Black youth facing the distressing effects of social media exposure to police brutality.

**Keywords :** black youth, mental health, police brutality, social media

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