

BLACK LIVES EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS MATTER:

UNDERSTANDING HOW POLICING DRIVES SYSTEM AVOIDANCE AMONG VULNERABLE POPULATIONS



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Study Context

STUDY TIME PERIOD

May to September 2020

STUDY TITLE

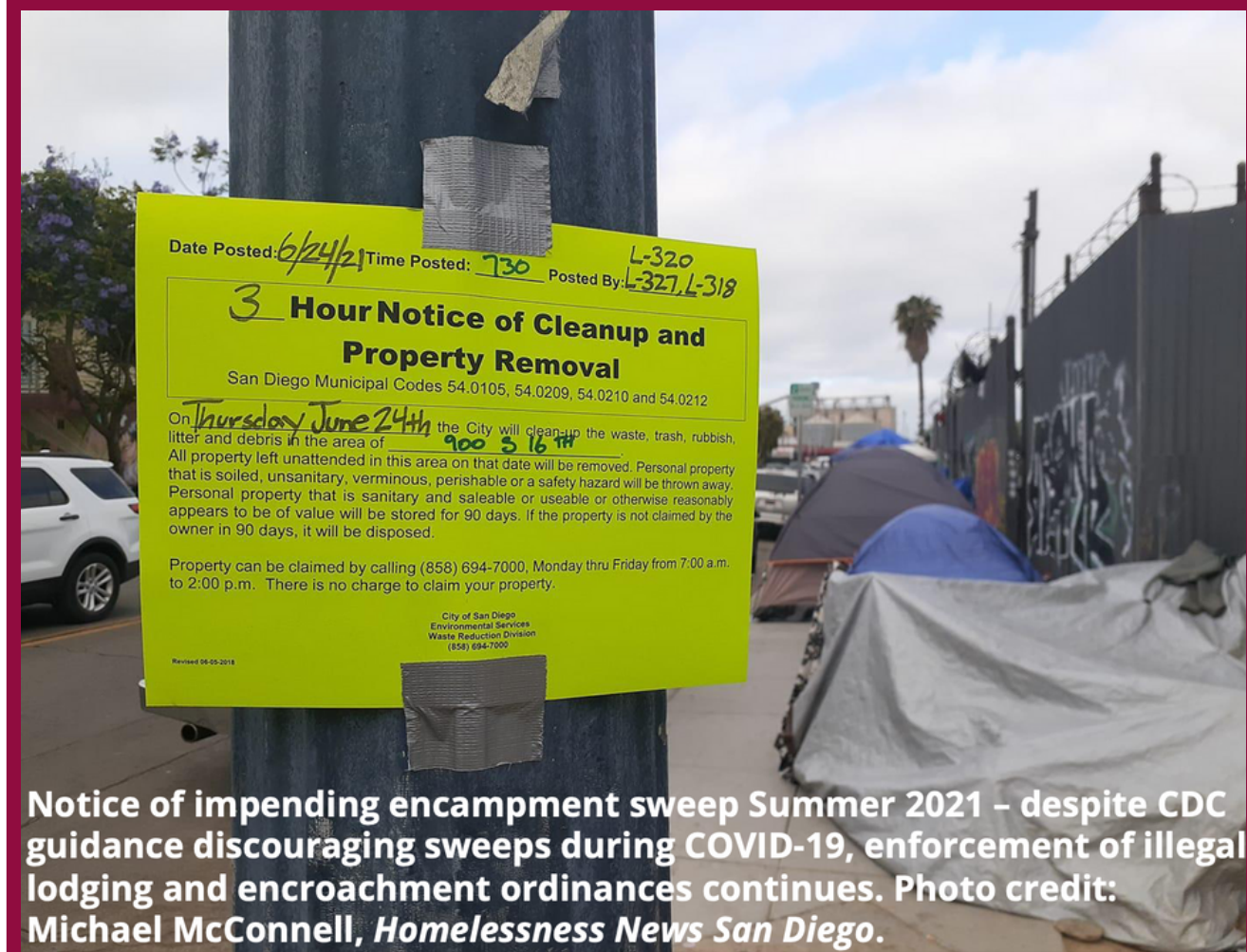
Service utilization and survival strategies of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness during the COVID-19 pandemic.

STUDY FUNDER

University of California Tobacco Related-Disease Research Program Emergency COVID-19 Research Seed Funding: \$16,050

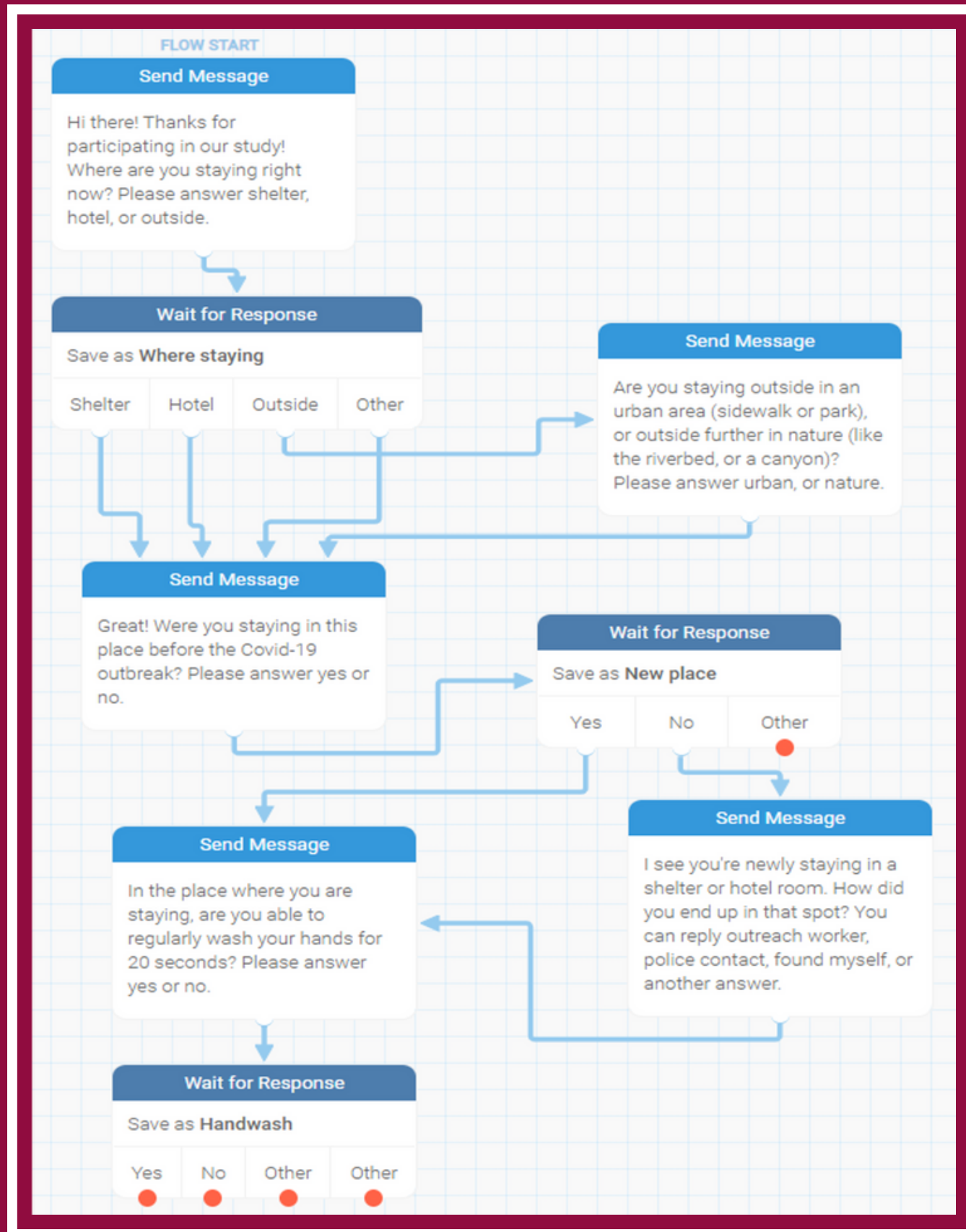
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- Trusted community partners distributed the study and allowed us to oversample Black San Diegans experiencing homelessness
- This was a study of health and social service utilization that turned into a study of racialized policing behavior



Notice of impending encampment sweep Summer 2021 – despite CDC guidance discouraging sweeps during COVID-19, enforcement of illegal lodging and encroachment ordinances continues. Photo credit: Michael McConnell, *Homelessness News San Diego*.

Research Questions & Methods



DRIVING QUESTION

How are people staying safe, healthy, and meeting basic needs while unsheltered during COVID-19?

TARGET POPULATION

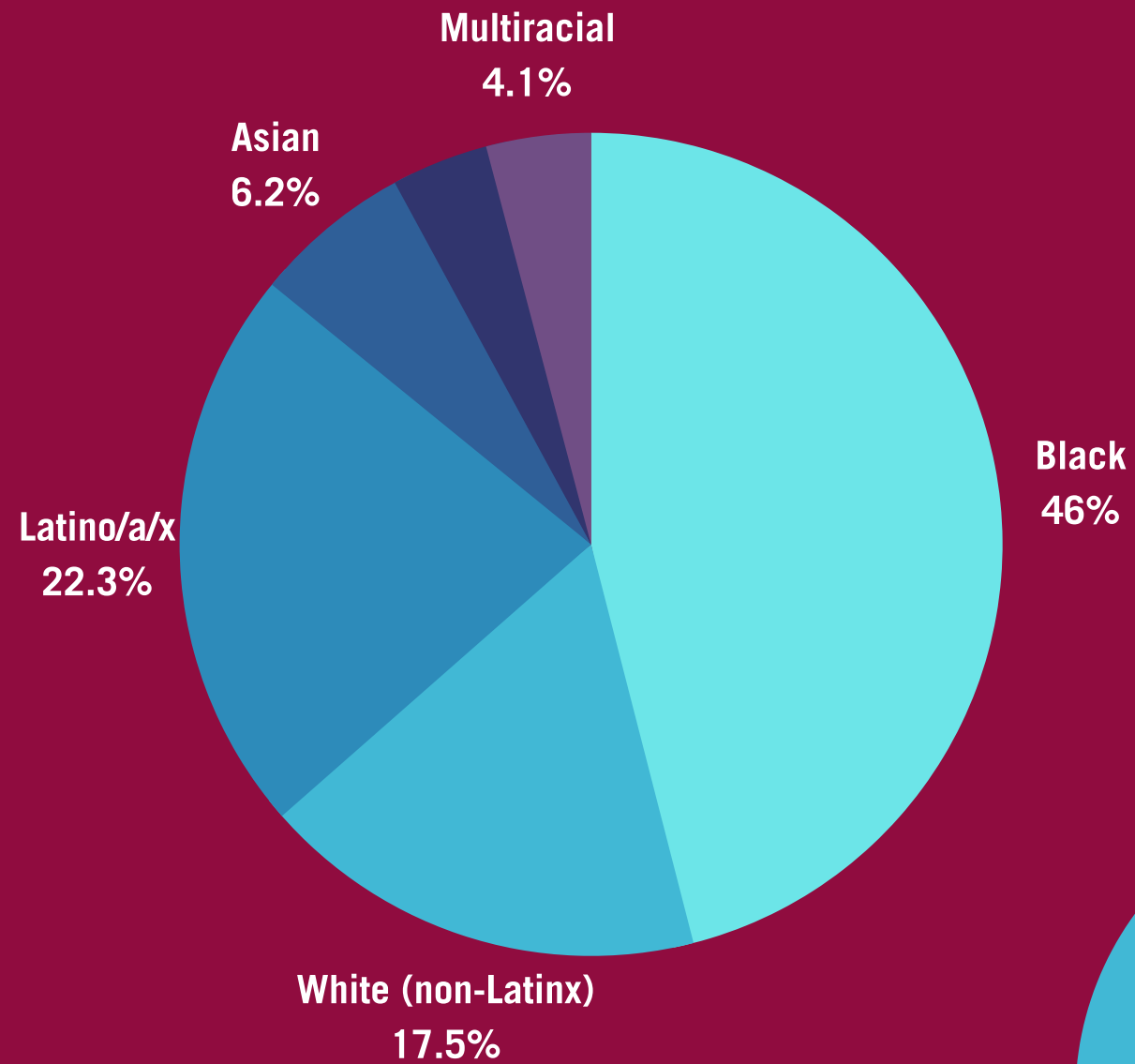
Unhoused San Diegans, especially those experiencing unsheltered homelessness

RESEARCH DESIGN

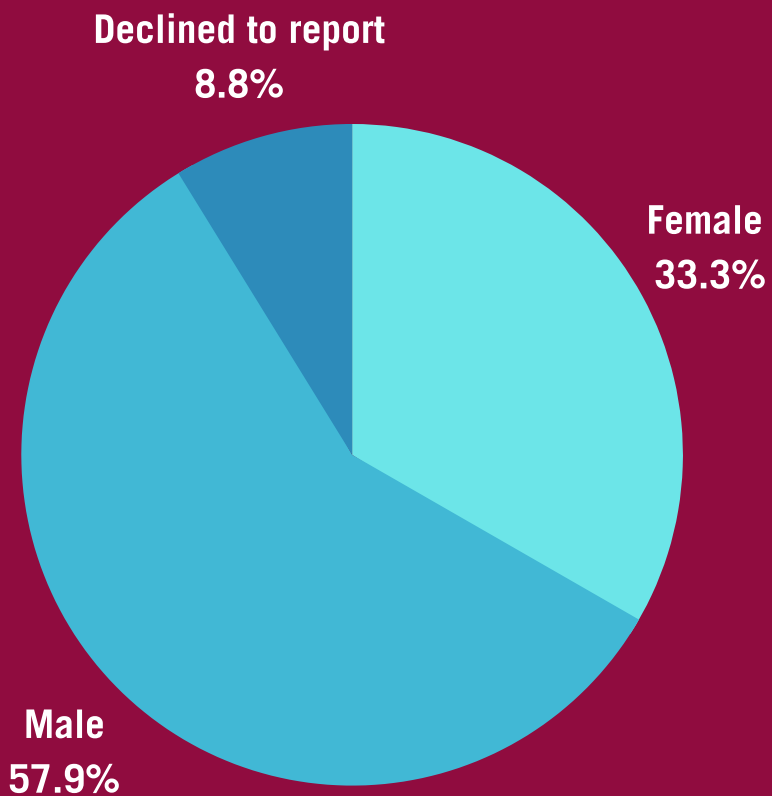
- Survey questions developed with input from non-profits and community advocates doing direct outreach
- Web-based and text messaging survey platforms, distributed by community partners
- Survey (n=244) and follow-up oral and written interviews (n=57) explored access and barriers to health and human services

Respondent Demographics

RACE/ETHNICITY



GENDER

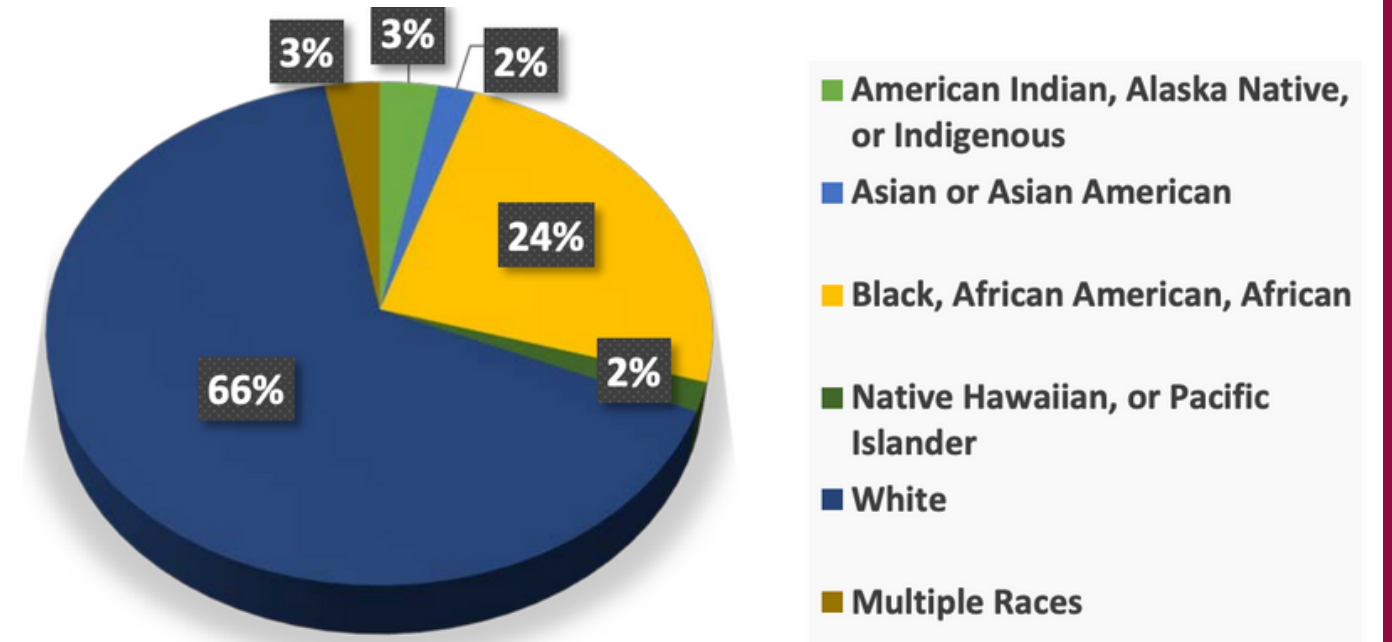


MEDIAN AGE: 40.8



8% MILITARY VETERANS

Race (Unsheltered & Sheltered)



SAN DIEGO
Regional Task Force
on Homelessness

San Diego Continuum of Care 2022 WeAllCount City Totals

Black San Diegans account for 4.7% of the general population, but in official counts, they comprise about a quarter of unhoused people overall

People experiencing homelessness face barriers to seeking services from ALL providers, especially police.

TYPES OF BARRIERS

ADMINISTRATIVE BURDENS

lack of insurance, learning about programs, maintaining appointments, making/keeping connections to social workers and services, transportation, etc

PSYCHOLOGICAL COSTS

racism, sexism, stigma, lack of cleanliness and privacy, being separated from loved ones and pets, losing belongings, stress of constant movement, etc

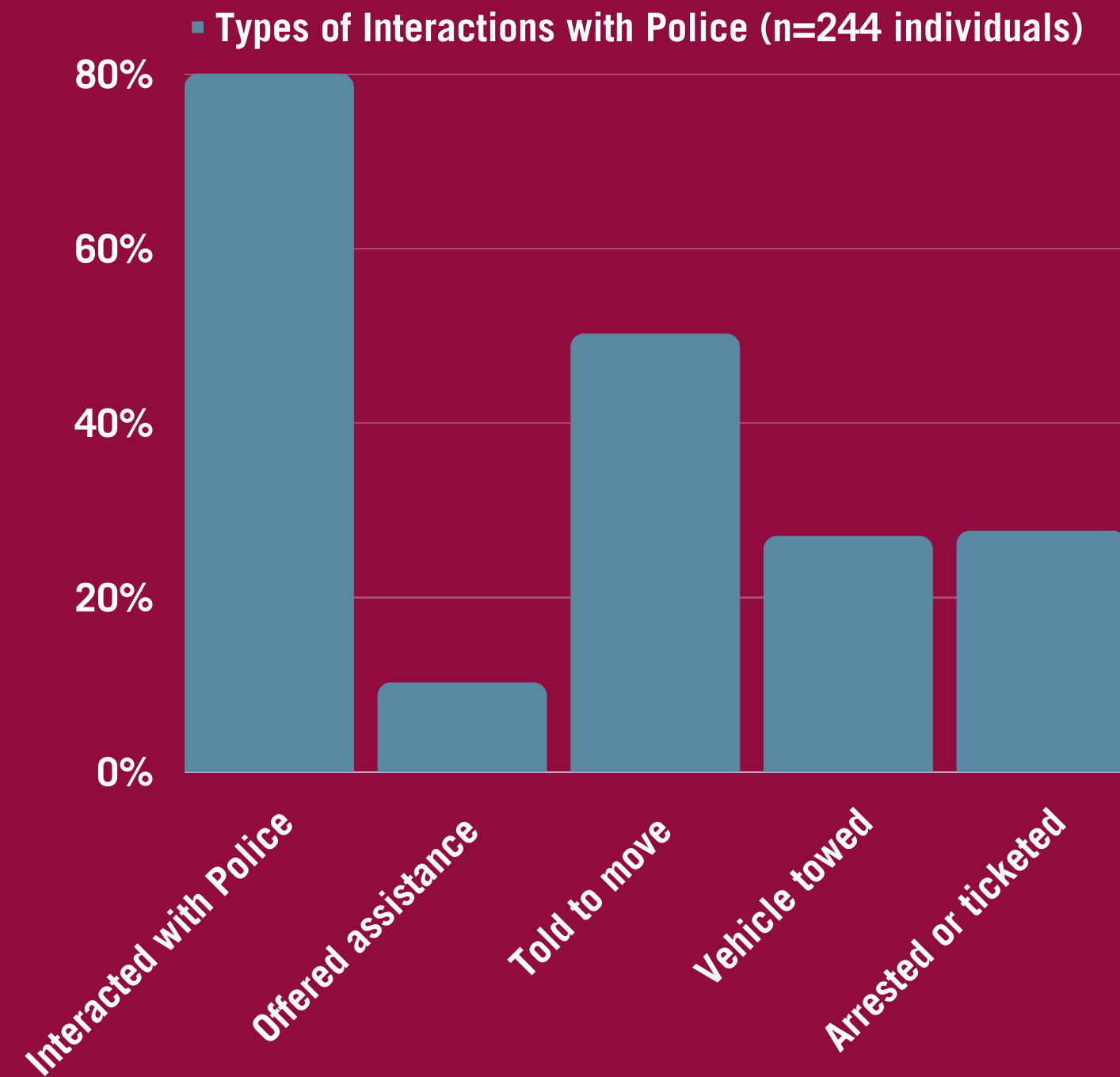
Barriers are exacerbated by fear of police profiling and criminalization of survival strategies

"They have given me a ticket when we had to sleep in the car! I got my car towed - begged that I lost my house and they still had it towed many months ago. They never help me."

"I feel they (the police) understand what resources will be helpful, but don't do a thing about it."

"Some police don't have any humanity in them. They would see you sleeping in a car and they would cite you a ticket as they say it's illegal."

Unhoused San Diegans rarely receive assistance via police.

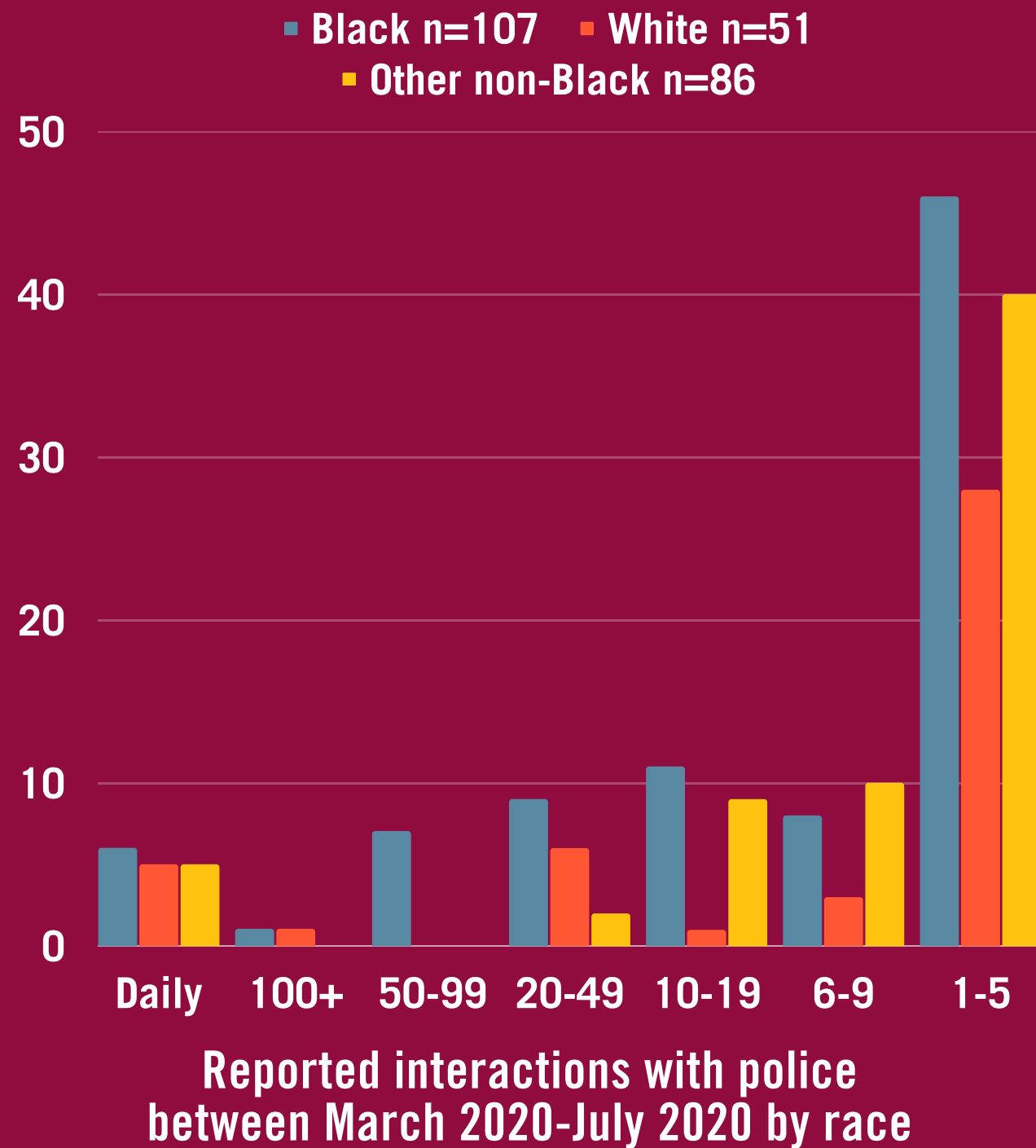


"I am a lifeless Black unimportant soul to them."

"Just a few weeks ago, I was in the streets and they shouted BLUE LIVES MATTER. I was with a couple of black friends in the park. When we responded BLACK LIVES MATTER they stopped and checked our IDs. We have no records."

"As long as the color of my skin is Black and as long as I am poor, they will never respect me!"

People avoid services, in part because they are offered by the police. Their negative perceptions can spill over to other service providers.



“Best interaction is no interaction”

“We try to avoid them (the police) as we are Black and we are always afraid for our lives as Black people.”

“I know I’m Black, but I’m not a criminal.”

“I’ve seen a full spectrum of police. I was fortunate...I’m going to admit, I’m a petite little White girl...I witness a very different dynamic.”

Discussion & Implications: Redefine Public Safety

FIRST, DO NO HARM

Eliminate anti-homeless policing that harms unhoused people and drives adverse behavioral change

DECRIMINALIZATION

Repeal "quality of life" municipal codes that punish the life-sustaining behaviors of unhoused people

RECISSION

Remove all homeless outreach efforts and responsibilities from the purview of police departments and their officers

REALLOCATION

Reallocate funding and responsibility for addressing homelessness to trained professionals

ADDRESS BASIC NEEDS

Recognize the human right to water, toilets, and trash disposal; Make public spaces safe and healthy while folks wait for permanent housing

CENTER THE VOICES AND PERSPECTIVES OF PEOPLE OF COLOR THROUGHOUT HOMELESS-SERVING SYSTEMS

Concrete Examples of Research Implications

FIRST, DO NO HARM

Pass the PrOTECT ordinance: eliminate pretext stops that disproportionately affect BIPOC and LGBTQ+ communities

DECRIMINALIZATION

Eliminate encroachment, illegal lodging, vehicle habitation, and other ordinances that do little to address crime and generate unnecessary criminal-legal contact, fines/fees, arrests, loss of possessions, and trauma

RECISSION & REALLOCATION

Put homelessness outreach into the hands of trusted professionals.

Alternative response models in other cities:

Albuquerque, NM: Behavioral Health Responders
San Francisco, CA: Peer Responders (Street Crisis Response Team)

Atlanta, GA: Policing Alternatives and Diversion Initiative

Oakland, CA: Reimagining Public Safety Task Force

ADDRESS BASIC NEEDS

San Jose, CA and Sonoma County, CA: Trash pickup at encampments

Portland, OR: trained attendants at the Hygiene Hub offers toilets, showers, and first aid –by and for unhoused people



CENTER THE VOICES AND PERSPECTIVES OF PEOPLE OF COLOR THROUGHOUT HOMELESS-SERVING SYSTEMS

Thank You!

*Many thanks to the HSS research team at SDSU
and our community partners in this research:
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**Project website:
www.hss.sdsu.edu**



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