OPA Response to Police Brutality and Injustices within a Structurally Racist System

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The Ohio Psychological Association (OPA) condemns the recent police brutality and murder of George Floyd, as well as the shooting of EMT, Breonna Taylor in her own home, Tony McDade, shot by police in Florida, and the death of jogger, Ahmaud Arbery. These murders are only the most recent in a long line of injustices within a structurally racist system towards Black and Brown communities. OPA grieves these unnecessary and violent deaths.

Psychologists are aware that individuals who witness police brutality and violence can experience racial trauma, which can lead to depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder and anger. Racial trauma, whether experienced directly or vicariously, has been linked to not just emotional health concerns and heightened morbidity, but also early mortality. Historical racial trauma also leads to structural and generational trauma that further harms our Communities of Color.

OPA opposes the policing of Black and Brown bodies through violence, unjust laws, a racially biased justice system, and modern-day slavery within prisons. We would ask state and federal lawmakers, law enforcement agencies, and mental health professionals to proactively and consciously look to reduce implicit and explicit bias within themselves, as well as within the systems wherein they work.

OPA would ask that all members and other mental health professionals actively and constantly pursue culturally responsive training to understand the impact of systemic racism and brutal violence towards communities of color and ethnic minority clients. White therapists have a duty to do no harm to the people of color we serve, and this includes active training, personal work on racial bias, and cultural humility. We must actively address racial trauma and systematic racism for individuals, families, and communities.

As OPA President, Dr. Erich Merkle notes, “the practice of psychology should affirm the dignity of all, embrace the diversity of our pluralistic society, and ensure we are advocating for culturally-responsive psychological practices that promote emotional wellbeing and resilience, particularly in this time of discord and divide.” We at OPA are committed to providing a safe, affirming, and accepting Association where all psychologists, inclusive of all races, ethnicities, sexes, gender identities, sexual orientations, disabilities, faiths, practice specialties, or political ideologies can affect healthy social change as educators, therapists, and advocates.

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The Ohio Psychological Association, in Columbus, Ohio, is membership organization of approximately 1,500 Ohio psychologists. Its mission is to advance psychology as a science, as a profession and as a means of promoting human welfare. For more information or for a psychologist referral, visit www.ohpsych.org.