

Technical Assistance Guidance Series: Serving Black Women  
Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence

Part 4: Using a Web of Trauma to Understand Black  
Women Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence

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## Introduction

For many Black<sup>1</sup> women<sup>2</sup>, violence is an ever-present reality and possibility (Lindsey, 2022). When compared to other racial groups, Black women experienced higher rates of intimate partner violence (IPV), including reproductive coercion, defined as any intentional attempt to control a survivor's ability to make decisions about their reproductive health, non-fatal strangulation, and domestic homicide (see TAG 3). However, intimate partner violence is often more than one traumatic event that occurs in the lives of individual Black survivors. IPV frequently occurs in the context of overlapping oppressions (see TAG 2) and traumas that Black women have experienced over the course of their lifespans. This violence may be experienced at the individual and community levels as well as historically and across generations. As a result, Black survivors often experience all these forms of victimization and trauma concurrently and cumulatively.

The purpose of this Technical Assistance Guidance (TAG) series, **Serving Black Women Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence**, is to give advocates the tools and practical strategies to identify, reach, and effectively serve Black women-identified survivors of intimate partner violence. **TAG 4** is designed to help advocates use a Web of Trauma to better understand how Black survivors experience intimate partner violence within the context of historical trauma, structural violence, cultural violence, institutional violence, community violence, and family violence (Rice, West, Cottman, & Gardner, 2022; Richie, 2022; West, 2021).

### Intimate Partner Violence in the Context of a Web of Trauma

Advocates should not assume that physical, psychological, or sexual intimate partner violence are the only or worst forms of violence that is experienced by Black women. Survivors from marginalized groups often experience relationship violence in the context of multiple forms of victimization, including:

- **Historical trauma**, also referred to as intergenerational trauma, is the collective spiritual, psychological, emotional, and cognitive distress that is associated with multiple traumatic and violent experiences, which began with slavery and continues in contemporary times (Davis & Block, 2020).
- **Structural violence** is one way to describe the social arrangements that put individuals and populations in harms way. "These arrangements are structural because they are embedded in the political and economic organization of our social world; they are violent because they cause injury to people (typically, not those responsible for perpetrating such inequalities)" (Farmer, Nizeye, Stulac, & Keshavjee, 2006, p. 1686).
- **Cultural violence**, which is the widespread attitudes or beliefs, including prejudices or stereotypes, that exist in society and are used to justify physical, sexual, emotional, or structural violence (West, 2021).

- **Institutional violence**, also referred to as state-sanctioned violence, is the “systemic marginalization and harm against Black women committed by persons working in or operating on behalf of a historically oppressive state institution such as law enforcement and health care” (Wilson, Tindall, Walker, & Smith, 2024, p. 87).
- **Community violence** happens between unrelated individuals, who may or may not know each other, generally outside the home. It can include assaults or fights among groups and shootings in public places, such as schools and on the streets ([Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022](#)).
- **Family violence** occurs when one family member commits a violent act against another family member (e.g., a parent/caregiver abusing a child, a child assaulting a parent) (Rice et al., 2022).

Below is a chart that illustrates how intimate partner violence appears within the context of a Web of Trauma.

**Chart 1. Black women’s intimate partner violence in the context of a Web of Trauma**



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This chart is not meant to provide a complete picture of the many forms of violence that Black survivors experience in their lives. Advocates should keep in mind that all these forms of violence can vary based on the intersecting identities of Black survivors (see TAG 2). Although each form of violence will be discussed separately, advocates should recognize that each type of violence is interconnected and often share root causes, such as poverty or perpetrators using power and control over their marginalized and vulnerable victims. Also, survivors who experience one type of violence are at risk for experiencing multiple forms of victimization.

By using a Web of Trauma, advocates can have a more expansive view of what violence is, where it emerges from, and what must be done to respond. A survivor-centered, culturally responsive, trauma-informed, strengths-based service model is an effective way to serve Black women survivors (Kulkarni, 2023). Below are brief definitions of each of these terms, followed by techniques and tools that advocates can use to better serve Black women survivors.

- **Survivor-centered advocacy** avoids a “one-size-fits-all” service delivery model by providing services that are designed to meet each survivor’s goals, priorities, needs, and preferences (Kulkarni, 2019).
- **Culturally responsive practice** means to proactively integrate awareness of the cultural identities of survivors and staff and into our services, policies, structures, and environment (Warshaw, Tinnon, & Cave, 2018).
- **Trauma-informed care** recognizes the pervasiveness and impact of trauma on survivors, staff, organizations, and communities, and ensures that this understanding is incorporated into every aspect of an organization’s administration, culture, environment, and service delivery (Warshaw, Tinnon, & Cave, 2018).
- **Strengths-based approach** highlights how survivors use their power to intentionally access resources and supports despite their marginalized identities (Waller & Bent-Goodley, 2023).

Below are suggestions for how advocates can use a survivor-centered, culturally responsive, trauma-informed, and strengths-based approach to address 1) historical trauma, 2) structural violence, 3) cultural violence, 4) institutional violence, 5) community violence, and 6) family violence.

## 1. HISTORICAL TRAUMA

*Historical trauma* refers to the ongoing and cumulative emotional, psychological, and spiritual wounding, over the lifespan and across generations, suffered by a group of people because of historical events that were destructive to their physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual life. This trauma is individual and collective, because it impacts members of the larger racial group, and is intergenerational, because it harms individuals, families, and communities over time (Davis & Block, 2020).

For example, it has been more than 400 years since the first ship with enslaved Africans landed in Virginia in 1619, more than 240 years since the Declaration of Independence was signed by slave holders in 1776, more than 150 years since the Emancipation Proclamation was issued in 1863, and more than 50 years since the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. One thing that has remained constant is violence against Black Americans (Hannah-Jones, Roper, Silverman, & Silverstein, 2021). A Los Angeles participant in the [2017 California Black Leader’s Survey on Domestic Violence](#) summarized this trauma:

*“African American people, historically in this country we were enslaved, we were murdered, we were raped, we were dragged over this country against our will. We had all that trauma that built up. Then we had the Reconstruction and Jim Crow and the Klan, and all this stuff that kept stacking upon us, being victimized, and traumatized”* (Jemmott, Hill, & Davis, 2017, p. 14).

Some Black survivors recognize that their victimization has occurred in the context of historical trauma. In a sample of African American women trauma survivors of partner conflict, poverty, incarceration, childhood abuse, and abandonment, 66% of participants agreed with the statement: “My race has a history of being oppressed, discriminated against, or threatened by genocide” (Hauff, Fry-McComish & Chiodo, 2017). Below are ways that advocates can provide survivor-centered, culturally responsive, trauma-informed, strengths-based care.

## Survivor-Centered Advocacy

**Ask survivors about their experiences with historical trauma.** Advocates can ask survivors about their personal and family exposure to historical trauma. For example, service providers can ask: “*In the past or recently, have you, your family members, or your partner experienced discrimination based on your race, ethnicity, skin color, accent, sexual orientation, gender identity, or some other aspect of your identity?*” (Davis & Block, 2020). This question can also help advocates understand a Black survivor’s multiple intersecting identities in the context of historical and contemporary trauma and violence.

To learn more, advocates can:

- Read [Increasing access to healing services and just outcomes for older African American crime survivors: A toolkit for enhancing critical knowledge and informing action within the crime victim assistance field](#) (Davis & Block, 2020).
- Watch the accompanying video [Panel 1: Understanding Racial and Historical Trauma](#) (Davis & Block, 2020).

As Black survivors share their stories of historical trauma, advocates should avoid responding with silence, victim-blaming, or minimization. Instead, service providers should strive to offer support and empathy.

## Culturally-Responsive Practice

**Learn about historical and current racial trauma.** Although Black women are resilient, slavery and its aftermath have hindered the ability of some Black Americans to develop healthy interpersonal relationships (St. Vil, St. Vil, & Fairfax, 2019). Advocates can learn how historical and racial trauma mirror similar power and control tactics that are used by perpetrators of intimate partner violence (e.g., emotional abuse, physical violence, sexual victimization, use of children).

To learn more:

- Review the Power and Control Wheel of Historical Trauma to learn about racially motivated historical trauma and the trauma of contemporary anti-Black racism (Rogers & Bryant-Davis, 2022)
- Watch the accompanying video [Purpose of the Power and Control of Historical Trauma Wheel](#) presented by Dr. Gimel Rogers.

## Trauma-Informed Care

**Explore the intergenerational nature of historical trauma.** Advocates can openly explore the links between historical trauma, slavery, and the contemporary physical and sexual violence experienced by Black survivors. A Black rape survivor and participant in a culturally specific support group explained:

*“I think it helped me connect the dots because for me I never really realized that how Black women are treated today connects to what happened in slavery... what I really like about this group is we go deeper by connecting in a way our ancestors and family history and learning how to untie the ties from there so we can deepen our own healing in our own lives by untying the knots from past trauma from our ancestors” (Ayeni, 2022, p. 1004).*

When advocates explore historical trauma in a compassionate and thoughtful manner, Black survivors described the opportunity to learn about their history as insightful, liberating, and an essential part of their healing journey.

## Strengths-Based Approach

Explore the generational nature of resilience. Despite historical trauma, Black women are remarkably resilient. LaTrice Buck, an advocate at Inspire Counseling explained:

*“...my resilience is based on my history, my ancestors, I stand on the shoulders of those who have suffered and struggled for me to stand here” (Davis & Block, 2020).*

Advocates can ask the survivor to reflect on how her intersecting identities and family history have influenced her experiences with partner violence and how her culture and legacy have been a source of resilience:

- How have your identities (age, visible and invisible disabilities, religion/spirituality, social economic class, sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity, and immigration status) influence your experience with IPV?
- How has your cultural and racial identity positively impacted your healing journey and provided a source of strength (Baptise & Gooden, 2023; Moore-Lobban & Gobin, 2022)?



## 2. STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

Referred to as America's "original sin," slavery continues to define the contemporary experiences of Black Americans by setting the stage for current social structural inequalities such as racism, sexism, and class-based discrimination. All these forms of oppression converge to create *structural violence*, which "is one way of describing social arrangements that put individuals and populations in harms way. The arrangements are *structural* because they are embedded in the political and economic organization of our social world; they are *violent* because they cause injury to people (typically, not those responsible for perpetrating such inequalities)" (Farmer et al., 2006, p. 1686).

For example, structural violence can take the forms of high rates of unemployment, poverty, homelessness, and concentrated neighborhood disadvantage, including substandard housing and limited access to social services ([California Task Force to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans](#), 2023). Violence is not just one "event." Rather, it is a process or ongoing social conditions embedded in the everyday lives of Black Americans. [Coretta Scott King](#), noted civil rights leader, described the widespread scope of structural violence when she said:

*"I must remind you that starving a child is violence. Suppressing a culture is violence. Neglecting school children is violence. Punishing a mother and her family is violence. Discrimination against a working man is violence. Ghetto housing is violence. Ignoring medical need is violence. Contempt for poverty is violence."*

Although structural violence is often invisible, it can directly and indirectly increase the risk for intimate partner violence in Black communities. For example, nearly two-thirds (72.6%) of participants in the [2017 Black Leaders Survey on Domestic Violence](#) cited systemic racism as the root cause of domestic violence in the Black community, and most leaders (85.6%) identified economic stress as major contributor to Black partner abuse (Jemmett et al., 2017).

Researchers have supported these observations. Experiencing higher levels of racial discrimination was associated with male perpetration of psychological aggression and female perpetration of physical aggression (Lavner, Barton, Bryant, & Beach, 2018). In the 12 months prior to the 2010 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS), Black women survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault reported higher rates of food, housing, and healthcare insecurity as measured by stress from the inability to pay for meals, rent, or medical care (Fedina, Ashwell, Bright, Backes, Newman, Hafnter, et al., 2022).

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has worsened both poverty and victimization, especially for Black survivors. Advocates can learn about impact of COVID-19 on the economic well-being of Black women and the impact of the pandemic on Black survivors by reading the following the reports:

- [\*Resilient but not recovered: Black women in the COVID-19 pandemic\*](#) (Javaid & Cole, 2022)
- [\*Measuring the economic impact of COVID-19 on Survivors of Color\*](#) (Ruiz, Ruvalcaba, Berenstein, & Fluegeman, 2020).

Below are ways that advocates can address structural violence that is survivor-centered, culturally responsive, trauma-informed and strengths-based.

## Survivor-Centered Advocacy

**Tailor programs to the economic needs of survivors.** Advocates can take an individualized survivor-centered approach by focusing on the most immediate economic needs of each survivor. To illustrate, before addressing their trauma-related mental health needs, some survivors may need financial or material resources. As one Ethiopian immigrant survivor explained:

*“Everything starts with the basic needs... for me, getting that ten bucks an hour is more important than spending two or three hours with you, talking about these things that made me crazy already”* (Corley & Sabri, 2021, p. 490).

It is essential to develop programs to meet the unique needs of individual survivors. For example, researchers discovered that providing childcare subsidies enable Black, low-income mothers to maintain employment at the same level as their non-victimized peers (Showalter, Maguire-Jack, Yang, & Purtell, 2019). Also, researchers evaluated a longitudinal flexible funding program in Washington, D.C. and discovered that Black survivors were able to avoid homelessness when provided with immediate, individualized financial assistance that could be used to pay rent or moving expenses. To reach more survivors, advocates can offer “low barrier” services that do not require survivors to provide reams of evidence to document their economic needs (Sullivan, Bomsta, & Hacskaylo, 2019).

## Culturally Responsive Practice

**Conduct culturally responsive screening for structural violence.** Regardless of the survivor’s outward appearance or economic status, advocates can screen all clients for structural vulnerabilities in the form of financial insecurity by asking questions such as:

- Do you have enough money to live comfortably—pay rent, get food, pay utilities/ telephone?
- How do you make money?
- Do you have a hard time doing this work?
- Do you run out of money at the end of the month/week?
- Do you depend on anyone else for income? (Bourgois, Holmes, Sue, & Quesada, 2017).

## Trauma-Informed Care

Black women survivors often experience unstable employment, criminal justice involvement, poor credit, and evictions, which may result in higher rates of homelessness (Willie, 2020). Housing instability can be exacerbated by structural violence in the form of oppressive policies and laws, such as nuisance property laws that fine or evict survivors for calling the police. Using in-depth, semi-structured interviews with African American women in St. Louis, researchers found that nuisance property laws limited their access to safe housing, discouraged them from calling the police, increased their vulnerability to violence, and compounded the trauma of IPV (Arnold, 2019). In contrast, states with eviction defense policies (vs. none), Black survivors reported fewer safety concerns and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms (Willie, Linton, Whittaker, Martinez, Sharpless, & Kershaw, 2021).

**Advocates can engage in system advocacy and activism.** Using a trauma informed approach, advocates can engage in system advocacy and activism by working to expand strong, and well-funded social safety net infrastructures to allow survivors to access culturally responsive domestic violence resources such as housing and assistance with employment, childcare, transportation, and financial needs (Ruiz et al., 2020). For suggestions, advocates can read the following reports:

- [Understanding and addressing COVID's impact on housing among Black IPV survivors: Implications for regional-specific culturally sensitive solutions](#) (Willie, 2020).
- [Understanding the cycle of housing insecurity for marginalized survivors of domestic and sexual violence](#) (Kulkarni & Hill, 2020).
- [Addressing for & appropriately responding to the housing needs of domestic & sexual violence survivors: A decision tree as an alternative to a scoresheet](#) (Sullivan & Lopez-Zeron, 2020).

**Address the mental health consequences of current racial trauma.** Racial trauma is a form of race-based stress and reactions, such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), experienced by Black individuals related to dangerous events, such as threats of harm and injury, humiliating and shaming events, witnessing the harm of others, and actual and perceived experiences of discrimination (Davis & Block, 2020). Exposure to racial trauma has been linked to higher rates of partner violence. For example, using a sample of 344 rural southern Black couples, researchers discovered an association between IPV and racial discrimination, as measured by being unfairly stopped and frisked by police, followed by store clerks, called insulting names, or physically assaulted because of their skin color/race (Lavner et al., 2018).

Using a trauma-informed response, advocates can ask Black survivors about their IPV in the context of individual racial trauma: *"In the past or recently, have you, your family members, or your partner experienced discrimination based on your race, ethnicity, skin color, accent, sexual orientation, gender identity, or some other aspect of your identity?"* (Davis & Block, 2020). With this information, advocates also can create space for Black women to process their partner violence in the context of racial trauma that occurs from

violence within and against their communities and across the country. For example, videos of police killings, featuring images of brutalized Black bodies, have been beamed around the world on an endless loop, which has caused psychological distress for Black Americans. In fact, negative interactions with the police, exposure to videos of police lethal use-of-force against Black citizens and worry about being stereotyped as a criminal have been associated with higher rates of self-reported posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD symptoms (Read, Yan, & Bailey, 2023). Exposure to vicarious racial trauma can cause emotional harm when Black women fear that the person harmed could have been them or someone they know (for suggestions see Baptiste & Gooden, 2023).

## Strengths-Based Approach

**Help survivors achieve economic independence.** To achieve safety, many Black survivors need and want economic security. As one African immigrant survivor explained:

*“I think economic empowerment is key. If a woman is empowered economically, she can take care of herself and her kids, then the abusive problems may reduce”* (Corley & Sabri, 2021, p. 490).

For suggestions to support the economic independence of survivors, advocates can use [Lesson Plans](#) from [The Allstate Foundation Moving Ahead Curriculum: A Financial Empowerment Resource](#) (2020) to teach budgeting and debt management.

Angela Y. Davis, a political activist, said, “In a racist society, it is not enough to be a non-racist, we must be anti-racist.” Therefore, culturally-responsive advocates can strive to develop anti-oppressive practices that are “overtly, covertly, or indirectly, racist, classist, sexist, and so on and actively work to dismantle structural oppression” (Kulkarni, Stylianou, & Wood, 2019, p. 148).

### 3. CULTURAL VIOLENCE

*Cultural violence* is the widespread attitudes or beliefs, including prejudices or stereotypes, that exist in society and are used to justify physical, sexual, emotional, or structural violence (West, 2021). Cultural violence, in the form of stereotypes, can shape how society perceives Black women, how Black women are treated, and what Black women believe about themselves.

Honestly, what do you see when you work with a Black survivor? Do you perceive Black women as emotionally strong enough to handle their abuse without intervention? The “Strong Black Woman” image “refers to the constant attempts for Black women to uphold a stereotype of being militantly strong and responsible for the overall well-being of the Black image while simultaneously denying their own needs in an attempt to maintain the status quo” (Kelly, Spencer, Stith, & Beliard, 2020, p. 54). This expectation of Black women has been endorsed by service providers of all racial backgrounds. For example, a White executive director at a domestic violence described Black survivors this way:

*“It’s almost like the Black take care of their own better. Either that or they’re just tougher, more used to it, [or] tolerate it longer” (Donnelly, Cook, Ausdal, & Foley, 2005, p. 25).*

Embracing the Strong Black Woman image has been associated with increased rates of victimization and lower rates of help-seeking. For example, in an online survey of Black adolescents (ages 18-19), participants who endorsed the Superwoman image, as measured by items such as “Black girls are reluctant to ask for help,” reported more teen dating violence victimization (Debnam, Milam, & Finigan-Carr, 2021). As Kayla, a Black survivor of severe physical partner violence, explained:

*“I always feel like I had to do everything on my own, that’s how I grew up didn’t say anything to get help from anyone, I just kept it to myself cause I’m figuring, I thought I could fix it” (Harper, 2022, p. NP13744).*

As an advocate, do you perceive Black women as “angry” and “loud” and combative? According to Colsaria Henderson, the Executive Director of Community Overcoming Relationship Abuse (CORA):

*“There are higher rates of Black and brown survivors being labeled aggressive, and being exited from shelter as a result. There’s a different idea that happens when someone with brown skin gets upset than someone who’s white” (cited in Kippert, 2020, p. 3).*

Below are some ways that advocates can use survivor-centered, culturally responsive, trauma-informed, and strengths-based practices that advocates can use to avoid inflicting cultural violence.

## Survivor-Centered Advocacy

**Advocates can explore their implicit biases.** To provide survivor-centered care, advocates can identify and acknowledge their [implicit biases](#), which are mental associations that individuals make without their awareness, intention, or control, which often conflict with their conscious attitudes, behaviors and intentions (see [Racial Equity Tool Glossary](#)). Advocates can take the Harvard University's [Implicit Association Test](#) (IAT) to learn more.

As advocates gain a greater awareness of their implicit biases, they can ask themselves difficult questions when interacting with survivors, such as:

- “May some service providers (including me) find it difficult to work with this survivor?”
- “Could the interactional style of this survivor alienate some service providers, evoke potential stigma, stereotypical biases, and negative moral judgments?”
- “Could aspects of this survivor’s appearance, ethnicity, accent, etiquette, addiction status, personality, or behaviors cause some advocates to think this survivor does not deserve/want, or care about receiving services?”
- “May some service providers assume this survivor deserves her/his/their plight in life because of the survivor’s lifestyle or appearance” (Bourgois et al., 2017, p. 302).

With this awareness, advocates can avoid perpetrating cultural violence by seeing each survivors’ individuality and humanity.

## Culturally Responsive Practice

**Learn about the historical origins of racial stereotypes.** Oppressive images of Black women have been pervasive throughout history and media. Specifically, Black women have been depicted as overweight, darker-skinned Mammies with toothy grins who enjoy constant domestic work and emotional caregiving, as angry Black women who are physically and verbally combative, and as sexually irresponsible, promiscuous Jezebels who openly discuss their sexual antics (West, 2018). Even Black girls as young as five years old have been perceived as older, more mature, and sexually active. The most violent and deeply disturbing images of Black women are amplified and normalized in pornography (West, 2022) and reality television (Kalutuna-Crumpton, 2023). Referred to as “adultification bias,” these perceptions are a form of cultural violence that contribute to shaming and victim blaming Black women and girls (Epstein, Blake, & Gonzalez, 2017).

Advocates can learn about the historical origin of these images and identify Black survivors’ psychological consequences associated with the internalization of these representations by:

- Watching [Subjects of Desire](#) (Holness & Sondhi, 2021), a documentary that unpacks beauty images and dangerous portrayals of Black women in the media and their impacts on Black women’s self-perceptions.
- Watching the video [Megan Thee Stallion: Why I Speak Up for Black Women](#) and discussing how images of Black women promote gender-based violence.

- Reading and discussing reports on the impact of adultification bias on Black girls and women and watch the accompanying videos:
  - ◊ [Girlhood Interrupted: The erasure of Black girls' childhood](#) (Epstein et al., 2017)
  - ◊ [Listening to Black women and girls: Lived experiences of adultification bias](#) (Blake & Epstein, 2019).
  - ◊ [End Adultification Bias Video](#).

## Trauma-Informed Care

**Learn about the neurobiology of trauma.** Black survivors who embrace the Strong Black Woman image may use physical force in self-defense. Barbara, a 35-year-old survivor, explained how she used retaliatory aggression to protect herself:

*"I am a strong Black woman... we would fight, but I would make it a point to get my licks in" (Monterrosa, 2021, p. NP9167).*

Other Black survivors expressed frustration, which often took the form of anger, after they were mistreated or denied compassionate services and care (Waller & Bent-Goodley, 2023). Consider the experience of Megan Thee Stallion (2020), an entertainer, who was shot in the foot and severely injured by a fellow performer, Tory Lanez, after leaving a party:

*"Black women who struggle against stereotypes and are seen as angry or threatening when we try to stand up for ourselves and our sisters... and we are entitled to our anger about a laundry list of mistreatment and neglect that we suffer."*

Advocates should challenge the stereotype that Black women are inherently violent, mutual combatants, or that they are excessively strong enough to defend themselves. With training in the neurobiology of trauma (see TAG 1) and understanding of the indicators of trauma brain injury (see TAG 3), service providers can understand a wide range of Black women's trauma reactions, such as the use of physical aggression in self-defense or retaliation (see TAG 1) (Kelly et al., 2020; Monterrosa, 2021; Waller & Bent-Goodley, 2023).

**Explore internalized victim-blaming beliefs.** Some Black survivors may be fearful of reinforcing the stereotype that Black men are rapists or domestic abusers. Advocates can help Black women place responsibility for the victimization on the perpetrator without casting all men as violent. This sensitive area can be explored by asking:

*"As you share what you experienced, I hear you downplaying what happened to you. It also sounds like you don't want me to think he is a bad person. Some Black women I have worked with in the past worried about how I might judge Black men. They worried that because I am a white woman, I might come away thinking that all Black men are rapists. Is this something, you might be worried about?" (Baptiste & Gooden, 2023, p. 120)*

To promote help-seeking, trauma-informed advocates can inquire about victim-blaming narratives that Black survivors grew up with, what aspects of these narratives they reject, and what, if any parts, do they continue to believe.

**Educate the media about stereotypes of Black survivors.** Mainstream media has a complicated history when covering crimes against Black women – from completely neglecting their victimization to circulating offensive stereotypes. For example, in front-page news stories Black female crime and homicide victims were portrayed as risk-takers by associating with “deviants,” living with known criminals, and excessive drinking and drug use, which are narratives that suggest that Black victims were to blame for their murder (Slakoff & Brennan, 2019). Some of the images of Black victims are deeply traumatic for survivors. For example, the 2014 video of Ray Rice, former Raven’s football player, knocking unconscious his now-wife Janay, and dragging her limp body from an Atlantic City elevator (see [Ray and Janay Rice speak out on recent NFL assault incidents](#)).

Acts of cultural violence, in the form of promoting stereotypical images, can be destructive when they:

- Desensitize media viewers and the public to violence against Black girls and women;
- Shape public perceptions of violent crime and its correlation to potential punishment (e.g., perpetrators should receive lenient sentences when they commit violence against Black women because they are unsympathetic victims); and
- Retraumatize Black community and family members who feel compelled to repeatedly combat this stigmatizing narrative and contemplate whether the risks of scrutiny or disbelief are worth the benefits of coming forward and sharing their stories (Maddox, Luna, & Kasreliovich, 2023).

Below are trauma-informed ways that advocates can work the media:

- Use the Color of Change’s (2022) [Media Coverage Style Guide on Protecting Black Survivors](#) to demand that media outlets commit to better reporting, and sponsor training sessions for newsroom staff to avoid reinforcing harmful stereotypes and retraumatizing survivors and their families.
- Use high profile cases of domestic violence or sexual assault that involve Black women to create press releases to educate the public and combat media stereotypes (see [NSVRC & PCAR Joint Statement on Guilty Verdict in R. Kelly Sex Trafficking Trial](#), 2021).
- Avoid missteps that could further alienate Black survivors by consulting with Black advocates and survivors to craft the language in press releases.

## Strengths-Based Approach

**Explore Black survivors’ internalized stereotypes.** For some Black women, embracing the Strong Black Woman image can be a source of strength, a sign of resilience, or a create a sense of pride. As a result, some Black women may resist the “victim” label or help-seeking efforts, in part, because Black women have been acknowledged for their strength and resilience in the face of adversity (Debnam et al., 2021; Kelly et al.,

2020). At the same time, Monterrosa (2021) discovered that “The desire to want to live up to this stereotype is apparent. However, these women are aware of the unrealistic demands imposed on them to achieve this standard. Black women also desire the agency that would allow them to be emancipated from this impractical burden” (p. NP9167). Advocates can help African American survivors simultaneously express their vulnerability and celebrate their resilience as both assault victims and resilient survivors (for suggestions for achieving this delicate balance see Baptiste & Gooden, 2023; Moore-Lobban & Gobin, 2022).

**Educate the survivor’s network about stereotypes.** To better support Black survivors, their informal network should be educated about oppressive images of Black women. In an online study of 432 African Americans men and women, participants who endorsed the “Jezebel” image, which depicted Black women as hypersexual, manipulative, and promiscuous, expressed more justification for IPV (Cheeseborough, Overstreet, & Ward, 2020). These oppressive images are often transmitted to the media. Among Black adults, greater exposure to television and music videos was indirectly linked to acceptance of IPV through greater endorsement of sexual objectification of women and stereotypes of Black women as angry or hypersexual (Moss, Ward, & Overstreet, 2022). Advocates can provide media literacy to help survivors and community members, which will help them to develop nonviolent and healthy relationships, give them skills to critique media content, and avoid victim-blaming beliefs.

**Partner with Black women to engage in activism.** Advocates can partner with survivors to use social media to educate themselves and others about stereotypes that harm survivors. For example, Black survivors can tell their stories on websites, such as <https://www.endadulthoodbias.org/>. Use the [#SayHerName Campaign](#) and media coverage as a template for understanding how community organizations, advocates, and survivors can use social media to empower Black women and regain control over their stories and challenge harmful images (Crenshaw, 2023).

## 4. INSTITUTIONAL VIOLENCE

Advocates who work in anti-violence organizations, law enforcement agencies, and the medical community have done heroic work by saving lives and helping survivors work toward healing. Yet, some advocates also have caused harm by engaging in discriminatory behavior or compromising the safety of survivors. *Institutional violence*, also referred to as state-sanctioned violence, is the “systemic marginalization and harm against Black women committed by persons working in or operating on behalf of a historically oppressive state institution such as law enforcement and health care” (Wilson, Tindall, Walker, & Smith, 2023).

Inspired by the 2020 [racial justice reckoning](#) to address police brutality and anti-Black racism, 47 anti-violence coalitions acknowledged their history of indifference to privilege, racism, and other oppressive actions that have contributed to institutional violence by:

- Choosing increased policing, prosecution, and imprisonment as the primary solution to gender-based violence.
- Investing significantly in the criminal legal system, despite knowing that the vast majority of survivors choose not to engage with it and that those who do are often re-traumatized by it.
- Justifying imprisonment and ignoring the fact that prisons hold some of the densest per-capita populations of trauma survivors in the world ([Moment of Truth: Statement of Commitment to Black Lives, 2020](#)).

However, institutional violence also can be subtle and less overt, yet still psychologically damaging. For example, service providers may use *microaggressions*, which have been defined as: “everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership” (Davis & Block, 2020, p. 71).

With the suggestions below, advocates can use survivor-centered, culturally responsive, trauma-informed, and strengths-based care to address institutional violence.

## Survivor-Centered Advocacy

**Take an intersectional approach.** Black survivors can experience institutional violence based on their multiple intersecting identities (see TAG 2). Here are a few examples:

- Black lesbians may experience heterosexism and racism when they contact the police. Billie, who self-identified as a poor, Black lesbian, explained her reluctance to call the police when her partner reported that the officers had “been jabbin’ at her... in the car they disrespected her. Like [asking her] what kinda sex ya’ll have” (Simpson & Helfrich, 2014, p. 455).
- Black transgender women frequently experience verbal, physical, and sexual assault when they interact with service providers in multiple institutions, including the educational system, law enforcement, and prison system (for rates see Guadalupe-Diaz & West, 2020).
- Black immigrant survivors, particular those who are undocumented, can experience institutional violence when their perpetrators report them to immigration or child protective services (Monterrosa & Hattery, 2023).

By using an intersectional survivor-centered approach, advocates can recognize the unique forms of institutional violence that Black survivors experience based on their multiple identities. To better identify institutional violence, advocates can use Part Two of the Power and Control Wheel’s [Institutional and Cultural Supports for Battering](#), which asks survivors to identify the various institutions (e.g., courts, police, clergy, immigration) that abusers use to coercively control survivors (Kuennen, 2023, p. 607).

## Culturally Responsive Practice

**Advocates can acknowledge their privilege.** As gatekeepers, advocates often determine which survivors gain access to services. Despite their best intentions, advocates can create service barriers and policies that retraumatize marginalized survivors. Alicia Sanchez Gill (2018), a social worker and self-identified “queer, Afrolatinx survivor” asserted that:

*“We determine eligibility criteria, restrict hours of service, and create and enforce punitive rules... We decide who can participate in the community advisory or client board, and disregard or actively push out clients seen as ‘troublemakers’ for their lack of gratitude, for having a disagreeable attitude, or for questioning authority” (p. 561).*

Advocates can avoid retraumatizing survivors by acknowledging their own positions in the matrix of domination, privilege, and power. Apologizing for personal privilege is not the goal. Rather, advocates should strive to identify their *institutional positionality*, which is “having awareness of one’s position and how one’s identity as an individual within the justice system influences, and potentially biases, your understanding of the role, function, efficacy, and impact of the system and the field” (Davis & Block, 2020, p. 71).

**Advocates can address microaggressions.** Black survivors sometimes experience institutional violence in the form of microaggressions. Nnawulezi and Sullivan (2014) conducted interviews with 14 Black women residents in three domestic violence shelters. Although most participants reported that shelters were generally equitable and safe spaces, Black survivors reported interpersonal microaggressions (e.g., racially based insults or differential treatment) and environmental microaggressions (e.g., lack of staff diversity and limited access to ethnic hair care products).

Below are three ways that advocates can address microaggressions:

- **Create a welcoming environment.** Culturally responsive advocates and their organizations can convey a clear message that their agency is welcoming and supportive by displaying materials, such as posters, literature, and magazines that reflect Black women in their office. Advocates should also strive to have ethnic foods and personal care items available for Black survivors and members of their support network (Nnawulezi and Sullivan, 2014).
- **Recognize a range of microaggressions,** including insults related to gender identity and expression, sexuality identity, social class background, physical and mental abilities, immigration status, religious/spirituality affiliation, or any other identity marker. Equally as important, advocates should avoid microaggressions that minimize and invalidate survivors’ experiences through:
  - ◊ **Gaslighting** “describes the act of manipulating others to doubt themselves or question their own sanity; people confronted for committing microaggression deny the existence of their biases, often convincing the targets of microaggressions to question their own perceptions.”

- ◇ ‘*splaining*’ derived from mansplaining to whitesplaining, is an act in which a person of a dominant group speaks for or provides rationale to people of marginalized groups about topics related to oppression or inequity”
- ◇ *Victim blaming* “refers to assigning fault to people who experience violence or wrongdoing and is used as a tool to discredit people of marginalized groups who speak out against microaggressions or any injustice” (Johnson, Nadal, Sissoko, & King, 2021, p. 1024).
- *Take an organizational approach to addressing microaggressions.* After advocates identify microaggressions, they can prevent institutional violence by using the following resources to take an organizational approach to addressing microaggressions:
  - ◇ Using the [Perpetuating Racism Wheel for Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Advocate Program](#) to identify how your organization uses power and control techniques to enact racist practices.
  - ◇ Using the [Dismantling Racism Wheel for Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Advocate Programs](#) to create an organization that promotes equality and non-oppressive practices (Women of Color Caucus and Social Justice Task Force of the Virginia Sexual & Domestic Violence Action Alliance, 2014).

## Trauma-Informed Practice

- ***Provide trauma-informed care to survivor-defendants.*** Police interactions can provide safety and, at the same time, can cause unintentional or negative consequences. For example, some jurisdictions have mandatory arrest policies, which require police to detain IPV perpetrators if there is probable cause that an assault has occurred. Black women are disproportionately more likely to be criminalized, arrested, or punished for using physical force to protect themselves and their children. As a result, Black women become *survivor-defendants* when they are arrested instead of the primary aggressor or along with the primary aggressor (dual arrest). In addition, Black women have been arrested or incarcerated for a variety of reasons related to their trauma and abuse, including participation in illegal activities to survive or escape abuse, such as prostitution, shoplifting, or low-level drug offenses (Richie & Eife, 2021; West, 2007).

Below are ways that advocates can become trauma-informed:

- Watch and discuss Marissa Alexander’s [TED Talk Not Another Victim — I’m An Empowered Survivor Defendant](#). Just nine days after surviving domestic abuse so severely that she went into premature labor, [Marissa](#) was arrested and sentenced to 20 years in prison for firing a single warning shot into the ceiling during a confrontation with her abusive partner.
- Learn about innovative projects, such as [Survivor’s First](#) (Facilitating Information and Resources for Survivors of Trauma), a program in partnership between YWCA and the King County Prosecuting Attorney to directly connect survivor-defendants to intervention services without criminal charges. For additional suggestions, watch the video [Survivors FIRST: Working with domestic violence survivor-defendants](#).

- Visit the website [Survived & Punished: End the Criminalization of Survival](https://survivedandpunished.org/) (<https://survivedandpunished.org/>) to identify culturally-specific and trauma-informed needs of Black and marginalized survivors, including:
  - ◊ [Criminalizing Domestic Violence Curricular Unit and Activities](#) (Kaba, 2018),
  - ◊ [Punished by design: The criminalization of trans & queer incarcerated survivors](#) (Said, Lindsay, & Tien, 2022), and
  - ◊ [Defending self-defense: A call to action by Survived & Punished](#), which includes Anti-Violence Organization Self-assessment tool to address the criminalization of survivors (Bierria & Lenz, 2022).

**Advocates can create trauma-informed rules and policies.** Advocates sometimes must adhere to policies that create inequities for some survivors, such as domestic violence shelter policies that require curfews, designated mealtimes, limited family visitation hours, and restricted parenting practices (Nnawulezi & West, 2018). Advocates have explained how overly strict rules, which some survivors may experience as a form of hyper-surveillance and coercive controlling behavior, can replicate the abusive tactics used by abusers:

*“You’re trying to get out of the relationship or you’re trying to navigate a relationship when somebody’s constantly watching you, monitoring you, telling you what you can do, what you can’t do, and now you’re in a place that’s supposed to be supportive but to some extent, we’re all monitoring you”* (Goodman, Fauci, Hailes, & Gonzalez, 2020, p. 229)

Advocates can decrease the risk of creating trauma-related distress and institutional violence by:

- Using the [Abusive Power and Control within the Domestic Violence Shelter](#) to identify how anti-violence organizations and advocates can inadvertently abuse their power control over survivors, which can replicate the abusive tactics used by their perpetrators (Koyama & Martin, 2002).
- Modifying shelter rules to promote safety, privacy, comfort, and a sense of control. Specifically, service professionals can ask themselves the following questions:
  - ◊ What was the original intention of the rule?
  - ◊ By making and enforcing this rule, what do you hope to convey to survivors?
  - ◊ What do survivors think the purpose of the rule is, how is the rule being enforced, and the impact of the rule on their experiences at the shelter? (Kulkarni, Stylianou, & Wood, 2019).
- Having honest dialogues with survivors and acknowledge racism or inequalities within service delivery when shelter rules cannot be changed. Here is how one advocate envisioned the conversation:
 

*“It’s not fair that you have to be in by 10:00 because you’re an adult and that’s ridiculous that this is what the system requires... yeah this system is racist and its not fair and I don’t agree with it and this is the system I have to work in and so how can we work together”* (Kulkarni, Lawrence, & Roberts, 2023, p. 1199).

## Strengths-Based Approach

**Encourage survivor representation at every level of the organization.** To minimize institutional violence, advocates can center the voices of survivors and allow them to craft institutions and systems that work better for them. For instance, survivors can sit on advisory boards, be hired as peer support specialists, share their stories on speaker's bureaus, and organize policy advocacy initiatives.

## 5. COMMUNITY VIOLENCE

According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), *community violence* happens between unrelated individuals, who may or may not know each other, generally outside the home. It can include assaults or fights among groups and shootings in public places, such as schools and on the streets. High rates of violence are perpetrated *against* the Black community in the form of *hate crimes*, defined by the [Federal Bureau of Investigation](#) (FBI) (2023) as a type of violent or property crime – murder, arson, assault, vandalism – that is “motivated in whole or in part by an offender’s bias against race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender or gender identity.”

Black Americans have consistently been the victims of hate crimes over the past decade. However, hate crimes surged in 2020 – a year in which the killing of George Floyd in Minnesota drew new attention and protests centered on law enforcement. In 2020, nearly two-thirds (63.1%) of the 9,065 single-bias incidents were motivated by the offenders’ bias toward race/ethnicity/ancestry. Anti-Black or African American hate crimes, in the forms of intimidation, assault, and destruction of property, continue to be the largest bias incident category, with 31.1% of all single-bias incidents in 2021. Hate crimes also can involve multiple victims. In May 2022, a self-defined “white supremacist,” who sought to “kill as many blacks as possible,” lived-streamed his massacre of 10 African Americans at a supermarket in Buffalo, New York (Stanley, 2022).

In addition, Black Americans experienced high rates of violence that committed by members *within* their communities, such as high rates of homicide. In 2020, there were 9,753 Black homicide victims in the United States, which is a victimization rate nearly four times the overall homicide rate (23.41 per 100,000 compared to 6.03 per 100,000). For homicides in which the victim to offender relationship could be identified, most victims (76%) were killed by someone they knew – friend, acquaintance, family member, or intimate partner (Violence Policy Center, 2023).

Exposure to community violence in any role (witness, victim, or perpetrator) is associated with higher rates of intimate partner violence. In fact, researchers conducted a 15-year longitudinal study of Black adolescents in Flint, Michigan and found that participants who

experienced family conflict and community violence reported more IPV in adulthood. Scholars concluded: “These findings suggest broadening attention to include community violence prevention as a complementary strategy for IPV prevention” (Thulin, Heinze, & Zimmerman, 2021, p. 85).

Below are ways that advocates can provide survivor-centered, culturally responsive, trauma-informed, and strengths-based care for Black survivors who are impacted by community violence.

## Survivor-Centered Advocacy

**Use an intersectional approach.** Community violence exposure, both the type and frequency, may vary based on the identity of Black survivors. Below are some examples:

- Black transgender women experience community violence in the form of verbal harassment or physical attacks while using public accommodations, such as government offices and restrooms (Guadalupe-Diaz & West, 2020).
- Black Caribbean and African American survivors experience different types of community violence. Using data from the National Survey of American Life, researchers discovered that the perception that muggings, burglaries, and assaults was a problem in their neighborhood was associated with more intimate partner victimization among Black Caribbean women. Whereas, among African American women witnessing community violence and seeing someone injured by neighborhood violence were associated with IPV (Lacey, Shahid, & Jeremiah, 2021).
- Impoverished Black women experience their community violence in the context of structural violence, such as limited economic opportunities, in conjunction with high rates of gender-based violence (speech that threatens and demeans women/girls, victim-blaming beliefs, and low social sanctions for physical and sexual violence) (Popkin, Bogle, Zweig, Saxena, Breslav, & Michie, 2015).

Advocates can use an intersectional approach to explore how the unique forms of community violence impact Black survivors based on their multiple intersecting identities.

## Culturally Responsive Practice

**Learn about the origins of community violence.** Advocates should note that Black communities are not inherently violent or dangerous. Community violence reflects the historical legacy of slavery and structural violence in the form of racist policies, such as racial covenants that prevented Blacks from living in white communities, the practice of “redlining” that prevented financial investments in Black neighborhoods, and the overrepresentation of toxic waste dumps in Black communities. As a result, Black Americans are disproportionately segregated into impoverished, under-resourced areas with less access to employment and educational opportunities, social services, and safe housing. This concentrated neighborhood disadvantage contributes to all forms of

criminal conduct, including intimate partner violence. To avoid racial insensitivity, it is important that advocates learn about how historical trauma, structural violence, cultural violence, and institutional violence converge to create high rates of community violence (see Currie, 2020).

## Trauma-Informed Care

**Conduct trauma-informed screening.** Black survivors who experience their partner violence in the context of community violence often experience more trauma and mental health challenges. For example, Black survivors who experienced housing insecurity reported high rates of trauma and fear of that they would be robbed or raped while walking or waiting on public transportation, fear of violent or drug abusing neighbors, and fear of relapsing into unhealthy relationships or addictions. One Black survivor described the cumulative impact of community violence:

*“like all these things are occurring in our lives and this is like the re-triggering of what we’ve experienced due to the impacts of domestic violence”* (Kulkarni & Notario, 2023, 17).

The combination of community violence, structural violence (poverty, concentrated neighborhood disadvantage), and cultural tolerance of gender-based violence, can result in *coercive sexual environments* that are characterized by high rates of physical and sexual violence against Black women. Black women and girls who live in these communities report more fear and mental health challenges (Popkin et al., 2015).

To learn more, advocates can read the reports:

- [\*The relationship between community violence and trauma: How violence affects learning, health, and behavior\*](#) (Violence Policy Center, 2017).
- [\*Let girls be girls: How coercive sexual environments affect girls who live in disadvantaged communities and what we can do about it\*](#) (Popkin et al., 2015).

Service providers are encouraged to assess trauma-related community violence exposure by asking survivors about a range of community and environmental violence:

- Are you exposed to any toxins, chemicals, or excessive noise in your day-to-day environment?
- Are you exposed to violence, drug use, or criminal activity in your neighborhood?
- Have you been attacked/mugged/beaten/chased in your neighborhood?
- Do you know anyone, such as a child, sibling, close friend, who was the victim of homicide? (Bourgois et al., 2017).

## Strengths-Based Approach

Advocates can help Black survivors build resilience. Advocates can use a strengths-based approach by focusing on helping Black survivors build resilience as they cope with community violence. For example, they can:

- Read the report [Adverse community experiences and resilience: A framework for addressing and preventing community trauma](#) (Pinderhughes, Davis, & Williams, 2015).
- Visit the website [Ujima Inc. The National Center on Violence Against Women in the Black Community](#) to learn strategies for coping with community violence.

## 6. FAMILY VIOLENCE

Family violence occurs when one family member commits a violent act against another family member (e.g., a parent/caregiver abusing a child, a child assaulting a parent). Like other racial groups, Black women who experienced childhood victimization in the form of observing violence between parents/caregivers or experiencing childhood physical abuse is associated with being the victim or perpetrator of adult IPV (Rice et al., 2022). Specially, Black women who experienced child abuse were more than three times the percentage of victims of severe intimate partner violence than nonvictims (13.5% vs. 3.9%). Among Black women who witnessed violence in their family of origin, the percentage of severe partner violence was almost two-fold that of nonvictims (36.3% vs. 17.6%) (Lacey et al., 2021).

Black survivors often report that family violence occurs across multiple generations, as Deonna explained:

*“I guess somehow, I managed to get in a similar romantic relationship that was like that was like that... But it seems to be common for the women in my family to find these kinds of men”* (Petion, Chang, Brown-Thompson, Mitchell, Grinnage, & Huffstead, 2023, p. 75).

Yet, despite their shared identity as IPV survivors, there were few conversations about violence among Deonna, her grandmother, and great aunt.

### Survivor-Centered Advocacy

**Advocates can take an intersectional approach.** Advocates can ask themselves and survivors: *“What unique forms of family violence do Black survivors experience based on their multiple identities?”* Here are some examples:

- African immigrant women may be abused by their extended family members or in-laws, who pressure them to remain with an abuser to avoid repaying the bride-price: *“They [spouse] say ‘I paid for you’. The woman become the property of the man... if he’s an abuser, when it comes to divorce or separation, or the woman plans to leave, the family of that woman, they don’t want to refund whatever this man paid”* (Corley & Sabri, 2021, p. 488).

- Black transgender women may be physically or emotionally abused by parents or siblings because of their gender identity. Angel explained:  
*"...my father, he hates me... He continues to struggle with my decision – to live like this; live within my true gender... live as Trans and be happy. His favorite line to me is 'It's just a phase.' He tells me when I stop 'playing' and be a 'man' that we can have a regular father and son relationship"* (LaMartine, Nakamura, & Gracia, 2023, p. 115).
- Older Black women survivors of IPV may be physically or economically abused by their adult children or grandchildren. For an example, watch the video [Module 4: Ms. Annette's Story](#) in the report [Increasing access to healing services and just outcomes for older African American crime survivors: A toolkit for enhancing critical knowledge and informing action within the crime victim assistance field](#) (Davis & Block, 2020).

## Culturally Responsive Practice

**Advocates can normalize help seeking.** Some family members may discourage Black survivors from seeking professional help with IPV-related problems. Instead, they were expected, like other women in their family of origin, to quietly endure intergenerational abuse. As one participant in a focus group explained:

*"My mom questioned [looking for help]. She would say that when she was young that she experienced a lot of domestic violence and childhood domestic violence as well as all of her sisters and my grandmother, and why didn't she need therapy?"* (Schmidt, Kedia, Dillion, & Howell, 2023, p. 8101).

However, with culturally responsive services, Black survivors understand the value of professional help, as Deonna learned:

*"...it's not until after going through some therapy and doing some soul searching that I realized how far back it started, and it probably happened for my grandmother's sisters just as far as I know"* (Petion et al., 2023, p. 75).

**Culturally responsive advocates can explore Black survivors' family history of IPV.** Family members may admit to witnessing the victimization, enabling it, concealing it, or being co-conspirators in various forms of family violence. Service providers can normalize and encourage help-seeking by addressing the internalization of the Strong Black Woman image, which is often passed down across generations. In addition, advocates can help Black survivors disrupt the cycle of family violence by educating their children about intimate partner violence. In a focus group of 21 Black women, participants had a deep desire to discuss dating violence with their daughters. However, barriers to these conversations included discomfort and perceptions about their daughters' maturity level. Advocates can use role-play activities to help Black survivors to develop their knowledge, comfort, and skills to have age-appropriate conversations with their daughters and other family members (Stephens, Pierre, & Helpingstine, 2022). This can help break the silence and cycle of intergenerational family violence.

## Trauma-Informed Care

**Advocates can be trauma-informed mandated reporters.** Black women, many whom have survived intimate partner violence, their children, and family are overrepresented among child protective services (CPS) clients. Jacquelyn Campbell (2022), a domestic violence expert, explained the consequences of this form of institutional violence:

*“Black women have told me they did not disclose because if they were pregnant the child protective services would be called and they would lose custody of their unborn child. They have also told me that they did not disclose their own abuse to their child’s health provider, because they were afraid that protective services would be called because their children witnessed DV” (p. 26).*

To prevent termination of their parental rights, Black survivors may forgo social services that could be beneficial to their household’s overall well-being (Roberts, 2022).

Advocates can become educated about historical trauma related to Black family separation. For example, during slavery, Black children were routinely sold away from parents. After slavery ended, “apprentice laws” were used to force Black children into unpaid agricultural work and domestic servitude. In current times, the child welfare system has regulated, surveilled, policed, controlled, and devalued Black women’s parenting practices, which has resulted in a disproportionate number of Black children being placed into state care (Roberts, 2022). Trauma informed advocates can ask: *“How does historical trauma influence Black women’s current parenting practices?”*

To avoid further traumatizing Black women, advocates can work to understand survivors’ parenting in the context of their history of IPV and their current and historical oppression related to gender, race, immigration status, and poverty. For suggestions on how advocates can navigate the tension between their supporter and mandated reporter role in their work with marginalized survivors, see Goodman and colleagues (2020). Ultimately as mandated reporters, advocates can balance the “contradiction between having power over survivors – to observe, evaluate and report their parenting – even as they work to restore, strengthen and share power with survivors” (Goodman et al., 2020, p. 234).

## Strengths-Based Approach

**Advocates can promote non-violent parenting practices.** Family violence can be passed intergenerationally through harsh parental physical punishment. During slavery, and afterward, speaking back or perceived childhood misbehavior could mean death, prison, or whipping by slave owners or police. Some Black parents used spanking to compel obedience and discipline (Patton, 2017). With an understanding of cultural parenting practices, advocates can respectfully explore best parenting practices that do not involve physical punishment, which could potentially help break the pattern of generational abuse. To learn more, advocates can visit [SpareTheKids https://sparethekids.com/](https://sparethekids.com/), an online anti-spanking portal established by Dr. Stacey Patton to educate service providers about the how race, power, and privilege impact the parenting practices of their clients and the institutional practices that sometimes result in racial disparities.

## Conclusion

For many Black women, violence is an ever-present reality and possibility in their lives (Lindsey, 2022). If advocates feel compelled to question the truthfulness of Black women's trauma, they may ask themselves if their privileged identities and backgrounds have protected them from racial, systemic, and gender-based trauma. The desire to "fact check" may be an indication that Black women's trauma is so foreign to the advocate that it is easier to interrogate the survivors' veracity than to sit with her violent reality.

As a field, advocates and victim-serving organizations can no longer take a narrow view of intimate partner violence. Consistent with the [Moment of Truth: Statement of Commitment to Black Lives](#), advocates and victim-serving organizations can repair some of the harm by working to combat the full range of violence experienced by Black and marginalized communities. This can be accomplished by using a Web of Trauma to create a survivor-centered, culturally responsive, trauma-informed, strengths-based approach to understand intimate partner violence within the context of historical trauma, structural violence, cultural violence, institutional violence, community violence, and family violence.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> In this TAG, the term "Black" is used to refer collectively to individuals of African and Caribbean ancestry and "African American" is used to refer specifically to those of African ancestry who were born in the USA.

<sup>2</sup> In this TAG, the term women-identified is used to refer to *cisgender women*, people who were assigned female at birth (AFAB) and identify as women, and *transgender women*, people who were assigned the male sex at birth (AMAB), but who identify and live as women.

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The NRCDV welcomes your input. If you have any comments or additional information to provide, please contact our Programs & Prevention Team at [nrcdvTA@nrcdv.org](mailto:nrcdvTA@nrcdv.org).

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