

Criminalized Black Women and their Resilience

Notwithstanding the prevalence of exposure to domestic violence, sexual assault and criminalization, Black women demonstrate collective perseverance and resilience. While many faith-based organizations and social service providers often provide links to services that meet survivors' basic needs (e.g., food, clothing, and temporary shelter), they often fail to provide a complete continuum of care that supports Black women's resilience. As many Black women survivors have varied experiences and/or challenges with education, permanent housing, and healthcare and interact with variety of systems requiring active engagement that often threaten recovery and stability, providing access to trauma-informed and gender-responsive services and support is crucial to mitigating their trauma experiences.

The ABC's of Supporting Black Women's Resilience

Awareness

- Faith communities must be responsible to the people they serve and address issues surrounding domestic violence and sexual assault.
- Social service providers must consider a person-centered, culturally responsive, trauma-informed approach that acknowledges the healing and well-being strategies that have been successfully used by Black/African American women for generations.
- Faith communities, social service providers, and system actors can enhance the well-being of survivors by educating family members and friends about the immediate and long-term consequences of domestic violence and sexual assault.

Balance¹

- Social service providers should promote holistic healing and wellbeing practices. For example, the SASHA (Sexual Assault Services for Holistic Healing and Awareness) Center in Detroit uses a mind, body, spirit approach.²
- Storytelling, journal writing, creating and listening to music are all artistic expressions that can help survivors toward recovery.
- Participation in various forms of activism has been instrumental in the journey towards healing, safety, and wellbeing for many survivors. Survivors have testified about their victimization in churches, courtrooms, congressional hearings. A group of survivors also participated in the powerful Black Women's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, hosted by Black Women's Blueprint, which focused on rape and sexual

assault of Black Women across the country. Community-based organizations should encourage and support survivors to assume leadership positions in the field.

- A holistic approach also includes collaboration between system players and service provider or faith-based programs in order to streamline engagement.

Community

- A strong social support network, such as a faith community and engaged family, support survivors in recovery.
- Black women also have used online technologies to mobilize a multiethnic coalition of activists to raise awareness about domestic violence and sexual assault and provide support and community for survivors.

With culturally sensitive and appropriate services, Black women survivors can both express their vulnerability and celebrate their resilience.

1. Bryant-Davis, Thema, et al. "Surviving the Storm: The Role of Social Support and Religious Coping in Sexual Assault Recovery of African American Women." *Violence Against Women* 17, no. 12 (2011): 1601-1618; Rapp, Laura, et al. "The Internet as a Tool for Black Feminist Activism: Lessons from an Online Antirape Protest." *Feminist Criminology* 5, no. 3 (2010): 244-262; West, Lindsey, Roxanne Donovan, and Lizabeth Roemer. "Coping with Racism: What Works and Doesn't Work for Black Women?" *Journal of Black Psychology* 36, no. 3 (2010): 331-349.
2. Learn more about SASHA's work here: <http://www.sashacenter.org>.

For More Information

E-mail: dvinfo@courttinnovation.org.

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