

ACTION AGAINST GENDER VIOLENCE

Action Against Gender Violence

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This work is made visible ¹ to honor survivors of gender violence. Moreover, our work honors the girls, women, and non-male persons who didn't survive acts of gender violence.²³⁴

¹<https://data-feminism.mitpress.mit.edu/pub/0vgzaln4/release/3>

INTRO: Imani's Safehouse Inc. and Prison Writes Inc. developed a trauma-informed questionnaire. It was used to engage intersectionality-impacted girls, women, and non-male persons in NYC, from June to July 2022. We conducted twenty interviews to get real answers to "why rates of gender violence in this population have been so high, yet these incidents are significantly unreported to authorities." especially alarming because unresolved trauma is the root cause of their various states of disease^{5, 6}.

Effective Intervention Versus Underreporting: Underreporting poses a problem for women in the community. The moment a girl or woman is empowered to report acts of violence, support can interrupt that cycle of violence. Not only for herself but for other women. Now, women are quietly suffering and even dying from gender violence in this culture that silences.

Cycles of violence lead to trauma. Trauma affects the whole family when passed down through generations. Black and Brown girls and women from historically redlined parts of New York State are more likely to experience economic inequity and gender violence⁷. They are the bodies of women whose presence in "states of exemption" ⁸have been normalized.

²<https://www.wsj.com/articles/a-hidden-cost-of-covid-shrinking-mental-health-services-11602255729>,

³https://nypost.com/2022/03/24/womans-body-found-stuffed-in-fridge-boyfriend-charged-with-murder/?utm_source=url_sitebuttons&utm_medium=site%20buttons&utm_campaign=site%20buttons

⁴<https://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/samuel-little-most-prolific-serial-killer-in-us-history-100619>

⁵[Trauma and the Nervous System: A Polyvagal Perspective](#)

⁶ [Effects of violence against women](#)

⁷<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34178163>

⁸<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fsoc.2021.633975/full>

Statistically they are overrepresented inside prisons, fostercare, and other pipelines to prison. Understandably the traditional figures of authority who are the direct representatives of these violent systems of control, are not the trauma informed care they can turn to.

Women need to be connected to caring alternatives to the authorities because feelings associated with violent systems of control are traumatizing. More access to resources for the women and their communities can empower them, and aid in their process to heal themselves and their communities.

Black and Brown Bodies Stereotyped: Women impacted by the system disproportionately endure cycles of violence. In these states of exemption⁹, the authorities enforce control, as opposed to care. In these spaces where Black and Brown bodies are overrepresented so severely, their presence there is normalized, accepted, and expected. These are the bodies that are stereotyped.

For example, within the Criminal Justice System, although “compared with men, women currently comprise 7% of the federal prison population and likewise are a smaller percentage of total inmates in state and local facilities” and “While there are many fewer females than male inmates in the overall population, over the past 30 years the phenomenon of confining more women to federal, state and local correctional facilities has exploded at an increase of 700%.”¹⁰ In one study of women in the NYS prison system, 91% of girls and women in prison have been victims of gender violence.¹¹¹²

⁹<https://academic.oup.com/book/10542/chapter-abstract/158466297?redirectedFrom=fulltext>

¹⁰<https://www.apa.org/pi/ses/resources/indicator/2019/04/incarcerated-women>

Moreover, “Girls of color who are victims of abuse are more likely to be processed by the criminal justice system and labeled as offenders than white girls”.¹³ Their incarceration, another state of disease, is yet another systemic outcome of unresolved trauma.¹⁴

Who We Are: Our project, Action Against Gender Violence (AAGV) was directed from the lens of Imani’s Safehouse Inc’s founder, Jennifer Fecu, who is a cis queer Black Jewish system-impacted woman, and survivor of gender violence. Data analysis was performed on software by Prison Writes Inc.’s leader, Jessica Hall, LMSW, who identifies as a cisgender white woman. Another Imani’s Safehouse Inc staff member, Jazmin Shelton, contributed to developing the AAGV questionnaire. Both Jazmin and Jennifer are intersectionality-impacted Black women with decades of lived experience. Jennifer Fecu holds a BA minor in Sociology with honors for research, and Jazmin Shelton, an Emergency Medical Technician, is also Imani’s Safehouse Inc. Board Member. Imani’s Safehouse Inc. and Prison Writes Inc. are 501c3 non-profits that develop and implement services that empower intersectionality-impacted girls, women, and non-male persons.

Location: Recruitment of interviewees for the Action Against Gender Violence Project (A.A.G.V.) relied on location¹⁵ to ensure 100% of the participants were intersectionality impacted, non-male individuals. At the time of the project, there were two New York City non-

¹¹<https://www.aclu.org/other/words-prison-did-you-know>

¹² In New York, a 1999 study of female prisoners at Bedford Hills Correctional facility found that over 80% of those prisoners had a childhood history of physical and sexual abuse, and more than 90% had experienced physical or sexual assault during their lifetime.[xli]

¹³<https://www.aclu.org/other/words-prison-did-you-know>

¹⁴<https://www.aclu.org/other/words-prison-did-you-know>

¹⁵<https://rosibraidotti.com/2019/11/21/necropolitics-and-ways-of-dying/>, Location as in the “posthumanist feminist” concept.

male adults, single, unhoused, and seeking shelter. We chose one intake shelter to focus on. At this location, we found all residents were:

- Non-male,
- (shelter) system impacted, and
- indigent.

All participants had multiple intersectionality factors, and thus an increased likelihood they have survived gender violence. The feminist humanist perspective on the virtue of location¹⁶ is evident and helped our process.

Based on the initial findings from these June-July of 2022, interviews, there is cause to continue collecting data from this demographic, primarily at this location (or this type of location), to learn the best ways to bridge human rights to these underserved women, because these New Yorkers also deserve to be free from gender violence. All 20 participants were compensated with a \$100 visa card for their time and participation.¹⁷ Funding for A.A.G.V. was provided by the social impact foundation, North Star Fund, COVID-19 Rapid Response Grant 2020.

The disproportionate harm felt by intersectionality-impacted girls, women, and non-male persons from gender violence cannot be ignored anymore. This data showed that their safety needs to be prioritized. More importantly, it is not hard to reach people when we care enough to engage. Engaging impacted stakeholders in this work to challenge systemic gender inequality is not only sensible; it is the only ethically sound way to solutions.

¹⁶[Rosi Braidotti – Necropolitics and Ways of Dying](#)

¹⁷<https://research.uoregon.edu/manage/research-integrity-compliance/human-subjects-research/compensation-participation-research#1>

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Jessica Hall, Prison Writes Inc, contact@prisonwrites.org, and/or <https://www.prisonwrites.org/>.

Rationale: The surge of reported gender violence since the COVID-19 pandemic¹⁸ informed our decision to take immediate Action Against Gender Violence (AAGV). AAGV was this project to engage the impacted women to understand the problem and possible solutions. Female identifying persons in NYC who are intersectionality impacted are more vulnerable to gender violence.¹⁹ So, for example, an unhoused female Black sex worker may be subjected to violence from police, community members, and even clients.²⁰ Being a white woman is not intersectional, being a white queer woman who is also a system-impacted immigrant would be. Another example of intersectionality is just being a Black female.

The famous Georgetown University study about the adultification of Black girls. Its data revealed intersectionality impacted Black women, girls, and non-males face adultification, and have likely been subjected to gender violence as early as five years old.²¹ The criminalization of young Black girls directly correlates with the Georgetown University study on the phenomenon²² of adultification. For young Black girls, **not** having a safe space to report can lead to prison sentences, and/or death.

¹⁸<https://www.reuters.com/world/pandemic-surge-gender-violence-met-with-vanishingly-small-funds-says-un-2022-06-23/>

¹⁹<https://wrd.unwomen.org/practice/risk/intersectionality>

²⁰[SISTAAZHOD: Conversations on Violence](#)

²¹<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L3Xc08anZAE>, and https://www.fordham.edu/download/downloads/id/10260/course_materials.pdf,

²²<https://genderjusticeandopportunity.georgetown.edu/adultification-bias/>

For these women, most have survived gender violence since childhood, the authorities were scary, and represented another source of violence to fear. Other options are necessary. Never should the authorities be their only option. Having the ability to report gender violence interrupts the cycle of violence. It is their human right to be able to report -to connect and receive caring and trustworthy support. Having another option can empower these women to get help. Ending gender violence not just our goal, it is a worldwide goal.²³

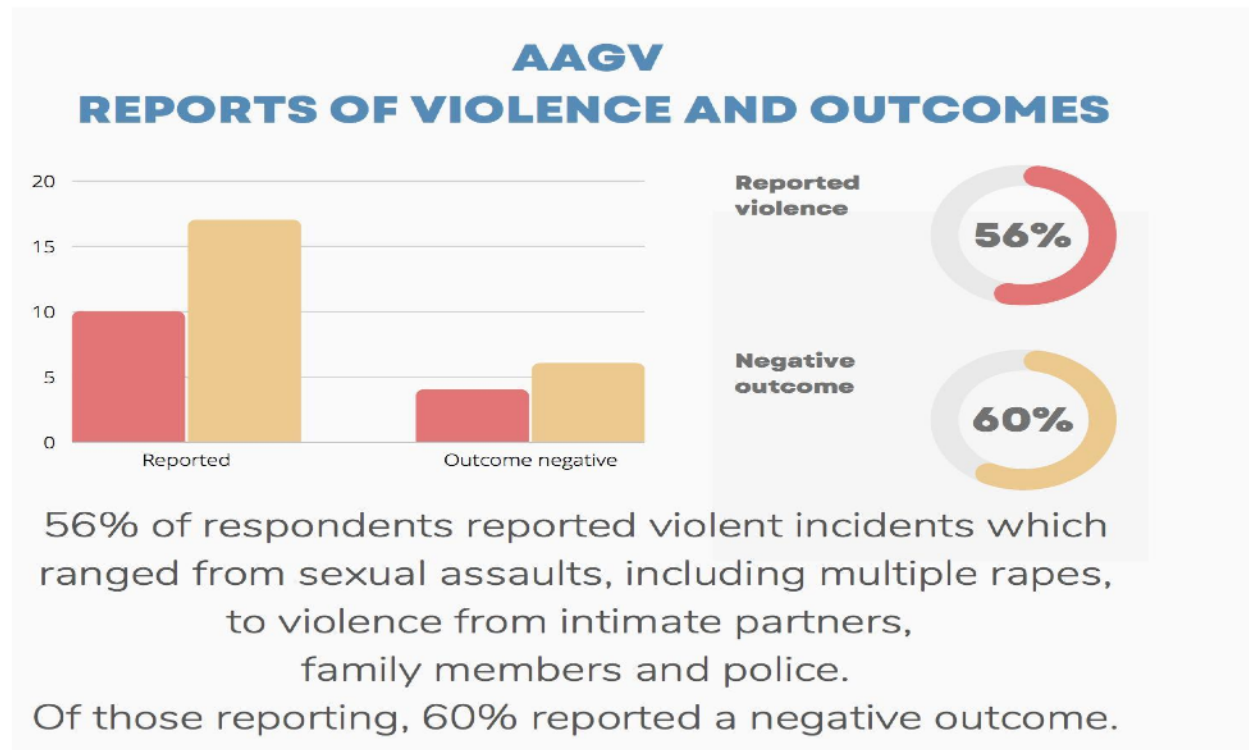
It is so important that in the USA, and especially New York City (a known sanctuary city), we lead the way by equally protecting our own intersectionality-impacted girls, women, and non-male persons. In 2019, New York started to allow the sentencing court to resentence a domestic violence survivor who suffered sexual, psychological or physical abuse that contributed to his or her conviction, with The Domestic Violence Survivors Justice Act (DVSJA). And on the day Governor Hochul signed off on the Adult Survivors Act, she was quoted deciding that, "Today, we take an important step in empowering survivors across New York to use their voices and hold their abusers accountable... The fight against sexual assault requires us to recognize the impact of trauma within our justice system."²⁴

"Last year, 640 unhoused people died in shelters, hospitals or the streets, 4 percent higher than in 2020, when COVID-19 first struck New York City. The rise in fatalities was fueled by an uptick in drug overdoses, and occurred even as the city's shelter population reached its lowest level in a decade."²⁵ The connection between

²³<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/ending-violence-against-women-and-girls/>

²⁴<https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-hochul-signs-adult-survivors-act>

trauma, prison, and homelessness is inseparable, and deserves further interdisciplinary study.



AAGV Reports on Violence and Outcomes: These surveys indicated that when women have reported to family and police, they experienced further violence, and furthermore, violence perpetrated against them often comes from these very same sources. Gender violence takes so many forms, each individual needs services tailored to their unique needs. Different types of innovative community based services are vital to link support necessary to effectively process and heal from trauma on a large scale.

Recognizing Gender Violence is Not Just Physical: "Violence is often associated only with physical violence, neglecting other nonphysical forms. Violence is a complex issue and categorizing different types of violence can never be exact. ...using these as a basis, we shall

²⁵<https://citylimits.org/2022/03/08/2021-was-deadliest-year-on-record-for-homeless-new-yorkers/>

distinguish five interrelated types of violence: [physical violence](#), [verbal violence \(including hate speech\)](#), [psychological violence](#), [sexual violence](#), and [socio-economic violence](#). There are also **two other** categories of violence: [domestic violence](#) and [\(sexual\) harassment](#), both of which may be a combination of all five types of violence mentioned above. In reality, some or many forms of violence can be present at the same time, **particularly in abusive relationships**. All forms can occur both in the **private sphere** (in families and intimate relationships) and in the **public sphere**, committed by (unknown) **individuals** in public space, or by **organizations, institutions, and states**.²⁶ This is why it is crucial for persons at the highest risk to have the best self-reporting methods/options possible. Also, there are various types of gender violence that can be impossible for someone outside of the abusive relationship to recognize or observe in public; these remain definitely invisible until it is self-reported. Self Reporting is necessary to identify and record gender violence statistics more accurately and effectively to serve the needs of the city of New York.

Effects of trauma: The effects of trauma from gender violence are pervasive underlying factors in countless states of disease. Trauma is now understood by multiple fields of expertise to be a significant factor for drug use, mental illness, medical issues, as well as social pathologies, including incarceration.²⁷ Long-term trauma has been known to substantially decrease the life expectancy of the victim. Quality of life as well as emergency life-saving services can correlate to breaking tragic cycles of gender violence. People living economically on the margins have fewer, often no options they can trust. If and when they are perceived to be criminals; how can they also be viewed and treated like a patient or the victim in need of trauma-informed care? Decriminalization movements humanizes the people otherwise “criminalized”.

²⁶<https://www.coe.int/en/web/gender-matters/socio-economic-violence>

²⁷<https://thetraumafoundation.org/>, <https://youtu.be/ZdIQRxwT1I0>

Methodology: Our methodology is rooted in the intersectional feminist perspective and approach, as set forth by Klein and Dignazio, in their published work on more just ways to collect and cook data, called, “Data Feminism”.²⁸ and **Necropolitics**, “the use of social and political power to dictate how some people may live and how some must die.”²⁹ Planning and research for the project began in the fall of 2021. At the beginning of 2022, The North Star Fund provided funding for this project. From June-July 2022, the data was collected, written on the forms from the one-on-one interviews. Responses were later organized in an excel spreadsheet and graphs were created to illustrate the outcomes.

The question we started with was, *“why do intersectionality-impacted girls, women, and non-male persons endure violence at a higher rate, yet they are more likely to underreport gender violence?”*³⁰

Interviews were conducted onsite in June- July of 2021. Due to new rules since COVID-19, we received permission and support from the staff to do the interviews across the street from the shelter, in the open, and outside. Anticipating that survey questions could trigger a response associated with unresolved trauma issues, we considered it optimal that the Mental Health workers were stationed on the premises of the intake shelter, and were directly across the street to care for our participants, if necessary. Also, we handed out the number for the SAMHSA suicide line as an alternative choice for a safe space to talk, which accepts calls that are not limited to suicide.

At the end of the interview, interviewees were asked three introspective questions to help them self-assess their immediate well-being after the interviews. Not one participant said

²⁸<https://youtu.be/ZdIQRxwT1I0>

²⁹<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Necropolitics>

³⁰<https://kpu.pressbooks.pub/nevr/chapter/why-do-survivors-not-report-to-police/>

they needed immediate care for stress induced by the questions asked and answered, yet five interviewees cried, and two said their responses to the interviewee were the first time they spoke on these incidents. Both of these two women were crying during parts of the interviews, and one said she kept the secret because her father was a law enforcement officer and knew no one would intervene because of his connections.

Stigma of Criminalization: The stigma of criminalization associated with being Black, female, system impacted, LGBTQ, drug use, transgender, immigrant, and belonging to any other marginalized group of people can directly present deterring factors that prevent vital reporting. These groups are overrepresented on the inside of prisons and in the community on probation and parole supervision. The same racially codified laws that criminalized marijuana use and sale, neurodiverse people, sex work, street drug use, and sales, homosexuality, and other structurally racist regulations directly correlate to the barrier between criminalized groups and accessing services when they need. Authorities and people within their communities have a stigmatized understanding of who the criminal is from who the victim is. As high as 91% of women in NYS prisons are victims of violence. These are women who are systematically punished for being victimized.

A prevailing concept of necropolitics is that the subject accepts their predetermined fate³¹ - women who suffer violence in silence on some level have accepted their fate.

This understanding and acceptance of who is a target for being subjected to violent and at best paternalistic surveillance and control is a phenomenon that is not taking place in secret. The entire society participates in enforcing and reinforcing this norm in contemporary culture.

³¹<https://thedisorderofthings.com/2018/12/03/the-right-to-maim-the-interstitial-existence-between-biopolitics-and-necropolitics/>

Since COVID-19, studies showed structural racism to be deadliest amongst Black and marginalized communities. As these groups have been criminalized for generations. This correlates to the instinctive avoidance of the act of reporting. Hypothetically speaking the police and authorities are in power positions to protect the public.

In these marginalized necropolitical³² groups, the police and authorities at best have a paternalistic role and at worst have a license to kill - all in the name of control. In necropolitical environments, violence is normalized and authorities are given permission to enforce control with acts of violence.

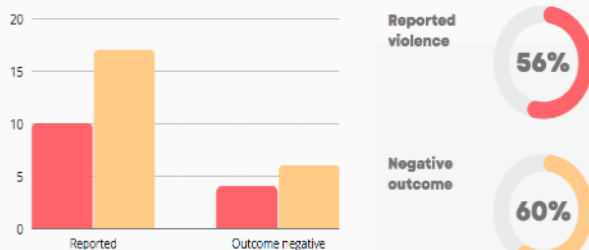
Women that suffer violence in these communities may instinctively live in fear of the only ones with more power to interrupt violence. This silence results in them suffering more violence. This is a problem recorded by this study. It was alarming because the only systems in place to protect the persons in greatest need of protection are failing them, and in too many instances, killing them. Awareness of the community at large that these are the women who are disengaged from law enforcement and other figures of authority because of criminalization actually is another risk factor.

In general, women who engage or have engaged in drug use, sex work, hospitals, the juvenile justice system, or have been in the foster care system, imprisoned, or released from prison are all system-impacted. We see this human rights issue needs the attention of the authorities and the community at large to invoke a progressive culture of respect and acceptance for their lives and their healing, increasing their chances of becoming free from gender violence systematically.

³²<https://criticallegalthinking.com/2020/03/02/achille-mbembe-necropolitics/>

Scored Highest on ACES: As indicated by prior research, these outcomes reinforce data that women who score high on ACES are more likely to experience sexual violence and physical abuse as adults.”³³ For this reason, particular attention and resources need to be made

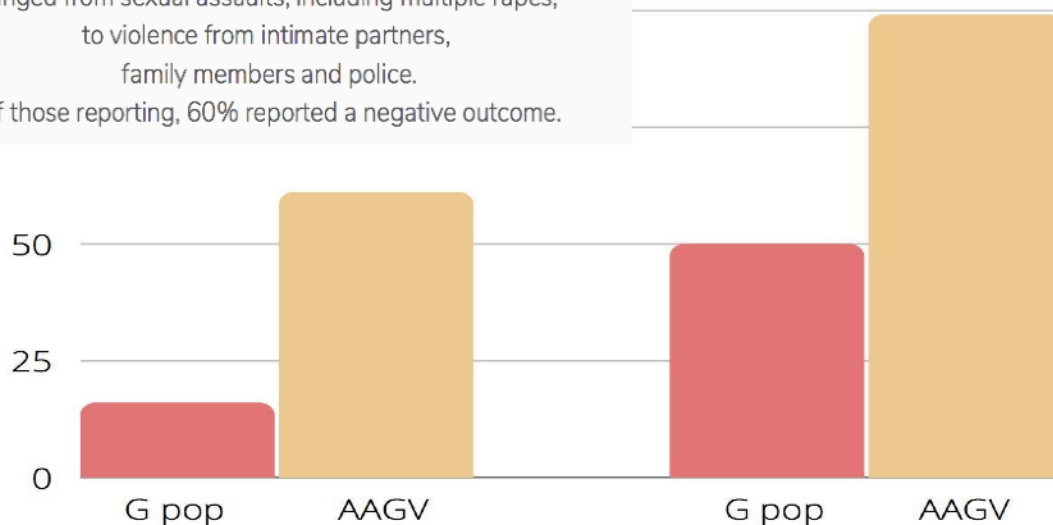
AAGV REPORTS OF VIOLENCE AND OUTCOMES



56% of respondents reported violent incidents which ranged from sexual assaults, including multiple rapes, to violence from intimate partners, family members and police. Of those reporting, 60% reported a negative outcome.

-impacted. Reporting needs to be made
eds of survivors. Over half the participants
of these reported having a negative
ice of violence against intersectionality-
report to authorities.

COMPARISONS



50% of AAGV respondents replied 'yes' to four or more of the questions in ACES in comparison to 16% who replied 'yes' to 4 or more from the general population. 99% of AAGV respondents replied 'yes' to one of the questions in ACES in comparison to 61% who responded 'yes' to one question from the general population.

³³<https://acestoohigh.com/aces-101/>, <https://nida.nih.gov/drug-topics/adolescent-brain/longitudinal-study-adolescent-brain-cognitive-development-abcd-study>, <https://stopabusecampaign.org/take-your-ace-test/what-does-your-ace-score-mean/>

Conclusion

Words are a powerful tool for advocacy. For the people being directly affected, it is the only way to get to their story. Inherently their lived experiences make them directly invested in the outcomes. This work is evidence the people closest to the issues can be the ones that care the most about sustainable empowerment. This type of data process informs what best practices can lead to the prevention of gender-based violence. We wanted to know what is the “something” creating the wedge between vital life-saving services that are in place to hypothetically protect and serve. Why are intersectionality-impacted women, girls, and non-male persons suffering and dying in silence?³⁴

“Intersectionality sheds light on the intertwined nature of different types of social inequality and power.”³⁵ Intersectionality-impacted women, girls, and non-male persons subjected to violence, especially without the necessary support to disrupt the cycles of violence can be expected to suffer cycles of intergenerational trauma.³⁶ Systemic intergenerational trauma disenfranchises victims involved, thereby impacting whole families, and consequently, entire communities.

A review of the responses indicated a need to identify “what are protective factors?” Is education a protective factor? Are assets, income, and economic equity protective factors? Our research reinforces the knowledge that low-income and no-income conditions create vulnerability to violence and discrimination.

³⁴<https://kpu.pressbooks.pub/nevr/chapter/why-do-survivors-not-report-to-police/>

³⁵<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7382787/>

³⁶<https://psycnet.apa.org/fulltext/2019-01033-001.html>

Further research is needed to understand how women can be better supported in reporting violence. How should institutions and communities respond? Who should respond?

These results indicate that police should NOT respond and that institutions representing corrections and/or policing are not conducive to responding or encouraging women to report violence. “One way to think about “Abolish the police,” then, is as an argument that, now that all of us have finally clawed our way into the polis, the police are obsolete.”³⁷ Reporting to a family member can also discourage and endanger survivors of abuse, due to the fact that most assailants are known to the family and/or community. Survivors need safe, secure places and ways to ‘report’ that can include treatment and supportive responses without retribution or necessarily any other follow-up involving police or the courts.

Police and punitive responses should be secondary to reporting. Reporting primarily should be to protect the person reporting. Reporting should be distinct and confidential. This raises the question, then, of what may happen to others who may be in harm's way from the assailant.

Alternate sources of resources for reporting might include libraries staffed by social workers and community-based resources such as Interrupting Criminalization Abolitionist Social Support Circle³⁸ and strengthening other community-based organizations that are led by impacted persons. Clearly, this research and report is the beginning of our inquiry into discovering how to protect intersectionality-impacted women from violence and how to break the cycle of intergenerational trauma.

Glossary

³⁷<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/07/20/the-invention-of-the-police>

³⁸<https://www.interruptingcriminalization.com>

ACES: “Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) can have a tremendous effect on future violence victimization and perpetration and lifelong health and opportunity. CDC works to understand ACEs and prevent them.”: www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/index.html.³⁹

Gender violence: Acts of violence suffered by women, girls, and non-male persons. disproportionately and systematically.

Violence: “Violence is often associated only with physical violence, neglecting other nonphysical forms. Violence is a complex issue and categorizing different types of violence can never be exact.”⁴⁰

Gender violence: Using the Council of Europe’s definition of gender violence as a basis, we “distinguish five interrelated types of violence: physical violence, verbal violence (including hate speech), psychological violence, sexual violence, socio-economic violence.”

“There are also two other categories of violence: domestic violence and (sexual) harassment, both of which may be a combination of all five types of violence mentioned above. In reality, some or many forms of violence can be present at the same time, particularly in abusive relationships. All forms can occur both in the private sphere (in families and intimate relationships) and in the public sphere, committed by (unknown) individuals in public space, or by organizations, institutions, and states.”

Intersectionality: “Also called **intersectionality theory**, **intersectional theory** . the theory that the overlap of various social identities, as race, gender, sexuality, and class, contributes to the specific type of systemic oppression and discrimination experienced by an individual (often used attributively):

Her paper uses a queer intersectionality approach.

the oppression and discrimination resulting from the overlap of an individual’s various social identities.”⁴¹

Intersectionality impacted: It “is the idea that all of the reasons someone might be discriminated against, including race, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, economic class, and disability, among others, overlap and intersect with each other.”⁴²

Intersectional feminism: “Put simply, intersectionality is the concept that all oppression is linked. The Oxford Dictionary defines intersectionality as “the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage”. Intersectionality is the acknowledgment that everyone has their own unique experiences of discrimination and oppression and we must

³⁹ The first section of questions of the questionnaire is the ACES, which are the 10 standard questions, (<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/index.html>). Aces were used in the longitudinal ABCD study, (<https://abcdstudy.org>)

⁴⁰ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/gender-matters/types-of-gender-based-violence>

⁴¹ <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/intersectionality>

⁴² <https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/discrimination/womens-rights/>

consider everything and anything that can marginalize people – gender, race, class, sexual orientation, physical ability, etc. First coined by Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw back in 1989, intersectionality was added to the Oxford Dictionary in 2015 with its importance increasingly being recognized in the world of women's rights.”

Report: To talk or write about violence to get help from another and to address and prevent trauma from the violence incurred, or otherwise intervene. Reporting can be to authorities including doctor, police, or religious leader; or a peer or family member.

Sex worker: Sex workers are adults who receive money or goods in exchange for consensual sexual services or erotic performances, either regularly or occasionally.⁴³

⁴³<https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/explainers/understanding-sex-work-open-society>