



# COVID-19 Survivor Impact Briefs Girls and Women of Color

The National Resource Center for Reaching Victims conducted a series of listening sessions to unearth the impact the COVID-19 health crisis is having on underserved victims of crime and better resource the crime victim services field to respond to those needs.

This brief summarizes the issues and strategies that emerged from listening sessions on girls and women of color survivors.

## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is having a devastating impact on historically marginalized communities and victims of domestic violence. Both populations are experiencing higher rates of death and isolation in this new era of social distancing and stay-at-home mandates. The following are key learnings from victim service providers who made a direct link between institutional racism, gaps in victim service provision and poverty to the higher death rates in historically marginalized communities and domestic violence victims. This brief explores some of those needs and creative solutions shared during listening sessions, strategy sessions, and conversations with survivors.

# Unique Impacts

## Social Inequality Compounds Impact of the Crisis

- Residential housing segregation and institutional racism has resulted in communities of color living in densely populated neighborhoods. These neighborhoods are often far from grocery stores and medical facilities inhibiting their ability to stock up on food and obtain medical care.
- An over-representation of people of color in jails, prisons, and detention centers makes social distancing next to impossible.

## Stay-at-Home Mandates are a Misnomer for Poor People and Communities of Color

- 1/3 of employed Hispanic and African American workers work in the service industry compared to 16% of non-Hispanic whites. The risk of infection is greater for these “essential workers” who continue to work in the midst of the pandemic.
- Hispanics are almost 3 times as likely and African Americans are almost 2 times as likely to be uninsured as compared to whites. Additionally, African Americans are more likely than whites to report not being able to see a doctor in the past year because of cost.

## Weakened Social Supports Put Survivors of Domestic Violence at Greater Risk

- Some victim service providers reported getting lower calls in their communities. This may be a result of survivors being quarantined with abusive partners. While others cite higher numbers of abuse and death as domestic violence and homeless shelters reach capacity.
- Domestic violence victims are at greater risks of violence as their harm doers are released on personal bonds.
- Funding allocated to victims for housing is not being adequately distributed.

- Stalled unemployment benefits is making it nearly impossible for survivors who need housing to leave dangerous situations.
- E-filing for Domestic Violence Protective Orders has been suspended and there are privacy and confidentiality issues with using web-platforms.
- Advocates reported, “Struggling to keep Police Department Victim Services connected with the DA's office.”
- Crucial housing and other public services such as food stamps are temporarily closed.
- Language access continues to be a problem for survivors of domestic violence.

## **Service Providers are Struggling**

- Service providers report that it is increasingly difficult to instill hope and encouragement with African American survivors who are being disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.
- Advocates are stressed by “much” larger workloads, while at the same time working from home without the social support of their teams.
- Small programs said the loss of interns who cannot work without supervision is making their work increasingly difficult.
- Advocates are struggling with not being able to provide in-person services as well as working to keep staff.

# Promising Strategies

- Programs have moved swiftly to adapt to the needs of survivors during this pandemic. Organizations like Native Wellness Institute created the Native Wellness Power Hour to provide Storytelling, workshops, and more. While others, have added COVID-19 into their safety planning materials, curriculums and support groups. Others are calling victims every day to maintain connection, buying burner phones and leaving them in safe no-contact locations, advocating for survivors with landlords, doing Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) via phone with hospital staff and the victims, meeting with judges via Skype, editing their support group curriculum to make them online friendly, using email to resolve the issues with police officers, and gaging survivor safety via texted safe words.
- Victim service providers referenced several online useful resources that are also HIPAA, VAWA/VOCA compliant. Apps like **Groovevideo** have been useful for support groups while **Sanvello** has been a meaningful resource for people experiencing depression and anxiety. Advocates report using Legal Server Program's intake feature, **WhatsApp Business** to contact with clients who only have WhatsApp, **Clocktree** to conduct therapy and crisis counseling sessions and **Resource Connect** to web chat with survivors.
- Providers are using platforms like **Facebook** more than ever before. Organizational therapists are placing weekly videos on Facebook that focus on mindfulness, grief, and various yoga practices. They are also emphasizing social media outreach especially with Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM) to raise awareness about available resources. Advocates also reported that Zoom has been an invaluable tool for staff meetings and maintaining organizational morale.
- Advocates are also tending to their own self-care which is critical to their ability to provide lifesaving support to survivors. They are:
  - Journaling
  - Listening to podcasts such as: [Brene Brown's - Unlocking Us](#)
  - Utilizing guided meditation Apps such as: [Headspace: Meditation and Sleep](#)
  - [Watching virtual travel cams](#)
  - [Google Duo Music](#)
  - [Arts and Education Concerts](#)

## **About the National Resource Center for Reaching Victims**

The National Resource Center for Reaching Victims (NRC) is a clearinghouse for victim service providers, culturally specific organizations, criminal justice professionals, and policymakers to get information and expert guidance to enhance their capacity to identify, reach, and serve all victims, especially those from communities that are underrepresented in healing services and avenues to justice. For more information about the NRC, visit the NRC's website at <http://reachingvictims.org>.

## **About the Women of Color Network, Inc.**

The mission of the Women of Color Network, Inc. (WOCN, Inc.) is to eliminate violence against ALL women and their communities by centralizing the voices, wellness and leadership of women of color across the Sovereign Nations, the United States and U.S. Territories. more information about WOCN, Inc., visit the WOCN, Inc. website at <https://wocninc.org>

This resource was produced by the Vera Institute of Justice under award #2016-XV-GX-K015, awarded by the Office for Victims of Crime, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this (insert type of product) are those of the contributors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.