GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SESSION REPORT ON BLACK WOMEN AGES 21–55

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Femmes et Égalité des genres Canada

Women and Gender Equality Canada

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Introduction

The following report provides a glimpse into the experiences that Black women who live in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) have with gender-based violence and intimate partner violence and interactions with the police. It is well known that Black and Brown women are disproportionately impacted by gender-based violence and are also least likely to call the police and engage the justice system when they are victimized. This fact however is not well documented in Canada. The lack of data on Black women's victimization prompted us to engage this community to learn more.

Who We Are

Cupid's Sting is a non-profit focused on women's safety. We teach life-saving skills such as self-defence, situational awareness, and workshops on domestic violence prevention. These initiatives ensure that women can protect themselves inside and outside the home. Our mission is to educate women and provide practical tools to reduce victimization. We believe all women and girls have the right to be safe in their homes and the communities they live in. Our vision is a world where women's bodies are valued.

Cupid's Sting was founded and is currently led by Criminologist and Women's Safety Expert, Dr. Laurie Samuel. Its creation was incited after seeing an increase in the brutal nature of domestic violence incidents involving Black women. Dr. Samuel could not stand by. As a Black woman herself, she recognizes the importance of taking proactive steps to limit, and eventually eradicate incidences of gender-based violence. Further, the importance of representation within services is paramount, as this aids in participants feeling more seen and heard. For the purposes of data collection, it is not only easier to curate appropriate responses but it simultaneously allows participants to feel more comfortable in accessing services. Thus, the Cupid's Sting team that conducted this study was composed entirely of Black women.

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Acknowledgments

Words of Appreciation to Funders and Participants

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Community Engagement

a. Literature Review

Canada has realized that there is an issue impacting the security and safety of girls and women. The second Canadian National Action Plan for the Implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security was conducted from 2017-2022 (G. A. Canada, 2022). It should be recognized that gender-based violence and even domestic violence's effects are not limited within the home. The effects are far-reaching, as they have been seen to range from the workplace to a mass casualty (*Domestic Violence in the Workplace: Breaking the Silence Version 2.0*, n.d.; Lindeman, 2023). Recently, in 2023, while the Ontario government declined to declare intimate partner violence an epidemic, 42 Ontario municipalities emphatically declared that intimate partner violence is an epidemic (Lindeman, 2023; Hayes 2023). Then, in August 2023, the federal government also declared that intimate partner violence is an epidemic (Lindeman, 2023; Hayes 2023).

Additionally, it becomes clear that gender-based violence is a wide-reaching issue, but there is a disproportionate effect on Black girls and women. On February 3, 2021, it was announced that up to $2.5 million will be allocated to fund "community-based research activities to address gaps related to GBV in the lives of Black women and girls" (WAGE Canada, 2021). There is a gap in data that describes the experience of Black women with gender-based violence. This becomes increasingly concerning, as "Black women and girls in Canada are at a greater risk of gender-based violence (GBV)" (WAGE Canada, 2021), and deaths, as a result of gender-based violence, exhibited an increase after the pandemic began (*WRITTEN BRIEF to STATUS of WOMEN COMMITTEE STUDY on INTIMATE PARTNER and DOMESTIC VIOLENCE in CANADA Background on Clinic*, n.d.). Thus, current data needs to be collected to reflect the realities faced by Black women suffering from gender-based violence; this will inform the action that needs to be taken to overcome the barriers to Black women's safety and protection.

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A 2021 Statistics Canada survey determined, "42% of Black women disclosed having experienced intimate partner violence or domestic violence. However, since Black women face racism in the criminal system, many fear reporting experiences of intimate partner violence to the police due [to the] violence and harm often done toward Black people and men" (Gomes, 2023). It becomes clear that when Black women suffer from gender-based violence, they are not confident in the police or may not even be offered recourse. In fact, in a study that examined Black women criminalized in Toronto, it was found that 93% of these women "experienced physical abuse from their partners", and 86% "were charged with IPV as the primary aggressor and their partners were not charged" (*Infographic: Black Women's Experiences of Intimate Partner Violence and Criminalization - WomanACT*, 2022). The voice of Black women is not justly heard, nor are they allowed to speak. Black women are silenced from speaking about their experience with gender-based violence. Therefore, research is crucial in efforts to understand the needs of Black women and finally allow their voices to be heard.

The entire process proves to be a constant battle for Black survivors of gender-based violence, as they are faced with institutional biases. For instance, while it has been noted there is repeated contact with the same survivor, symptoms of IPV may go unnoticed, which could be a product of the perpetuation of stereotypes, such as the 'strong black woman' narrative; this results in Black women and girls needing to advocate for themselves, yet they, themselves, may not know the extent to their injuries (Asare & Omar, 2023). Further, the deaths of women who were victims of gender-based violence should not be diminished or forgotten. Trends in the media have shown a "commodification" or "naturalizing" of Black women's deaths (Graydon et al., 2023). Overall, every step of the way proves to have its own challenges in a Black woman or girl's encounter with gender-based violence.

b. Methodology

Invitations to our community engagement session on Wednesday March 3, 2021, at 8 PM were extended to women from the Black community. This session was hosted by Black staff, Dr. Laurie Samuel and volunteer, KD. We recruited participants from the community (Greater

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Toronto Area) via email, social media, word of mouth, and partners (women's professional groups, Canadian Women's Foundation). As a thank you for their time, participants received $25 after completing the post-event survey. To ensure participants felt safe and to maximize participation, the session was held via Zoom.

To protect their privacy and identity, participants were asked to change their names to either just their first name or initials. Participants were encouraged to share their ethnicity or cultural background. There was a total of ten (10) participants.

We moved through a series of questions allowing for comments and feedback. We maintained a safe and open space. The following questions were asked:

1. **How many of you know someone that has been abused by an intimate partner?**
2. **Why do you think that more Black women do not come forward and report their abuse to the police?**
3. **If you had the power to make some fundamental changes in the system, what would some of those changes be?**

Responses and subtopics were documented via Zoom recording, the chat was saved, and additional anecdotal notes were taken.

Results

a. Description

Cupid's Sting Non-Profit held a voluntary community engagement event. The idea of hosting community engagement sessions was borne out of a continuing need for Canadian race-based data on domestic violence. Along with other researchers and organizations, we face a roadblock when searching for evidence to support lived experiences. We need racialized data on domestic violence to understand which Canadian communities need focused attention to mitigate these

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issues. We know that women are generally the victims of domestic violence. However, we do not know how many of these women are racialized and what community they belong to.

Further, the urgency of collecting data was evident due to the isolation that resulted from the pandemic. Thus, the community engagement event occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, as rates of sexual and gender-based violence were increasing by approximately 20-30% (Murphy, 2021).

Therefore, this project came to fruition. We hosted community engagement sessions for Black women in our community (Greater Toronto Area). As part of our community engagement initiative, we welcomed women that identified as "Black" (African descent or origin; African, Black, Caribbean; African-Canadian; Canadians of African descent) and ranged from the ages of 21-55. These women kindly and bravely agreed to share their stories related to gender-based violence in their communities.

The purpose of the session was to identify the issues, summarize the unique experiences faced by Black women, and begin designing strategies to address the trauma of a community that often sits in silent pain.

The eight (8) participants that responded to a survey after the event (post-event survey) identified their cultural backgrounds as one of the following: Jamaican, African-Canadian, Black Jamaican, Black, Trinidadian and Jamaican, Afro-Canadian, Canadian, and Black and Trinidadian. Seven (7) of these participants indicated that they reside in the Region of Peel (Mississauga, Brampton, or Caledon) or Toronto. At least two (2) participants identified themselves as a service provider within the field of gender-based violence. One (1) participant identified solely as someone interested in the gender-based violence sector. Another participant (1) identified themselves as someone interested in the gender-based violence sector and a coach. One (1) participant identified as a friend of a victim and another individual (1) identified as an advocate.

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To begin, when asked the first question, **"How many of you know someone that has been abused by an intimate partner?"**, eight (8) participants answered "yes" (Figure 1). When asked the follow-up question of whether the people they knew went to the police, only two (2) people answered "yes" (Figure 2). Thus, while this is an issue that touches many women, only a small fraction of them seem to feel comfortable with going to the authorities.
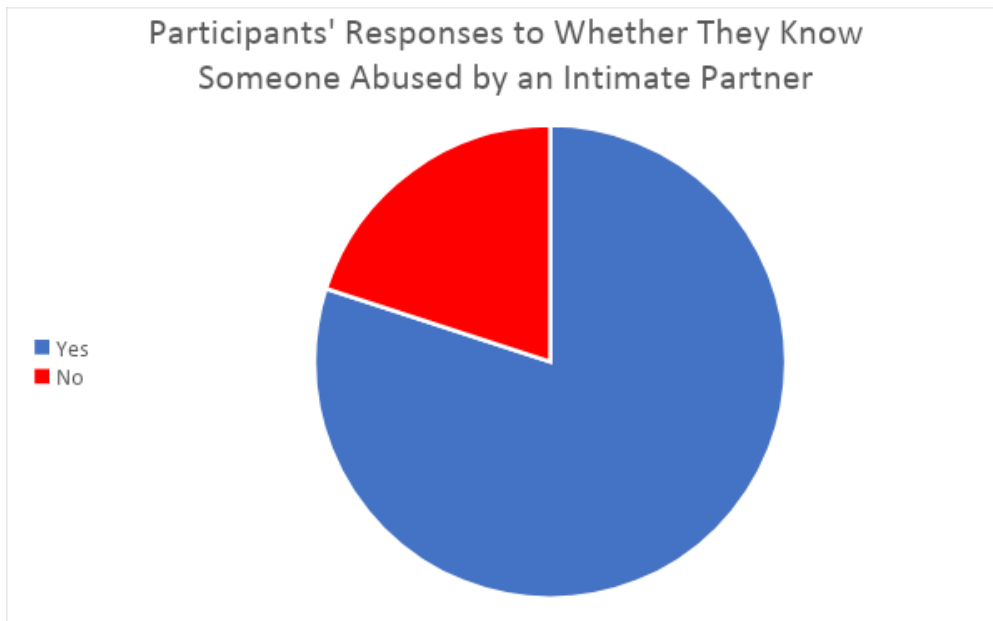
Figure 1: Participants responded to the question, "How many of you know someone that has been abused by an intimate partner?" Eight (8) participants knew someone who has been abused by an intimate partner. Two (2) participants did not know someone who has been abused by an intimate partner.

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[1] To protect the identity of participants, names have been changed to first letter of first name or initials.

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Participants' Responses to Whether the Victims Reported the Violence to the Police
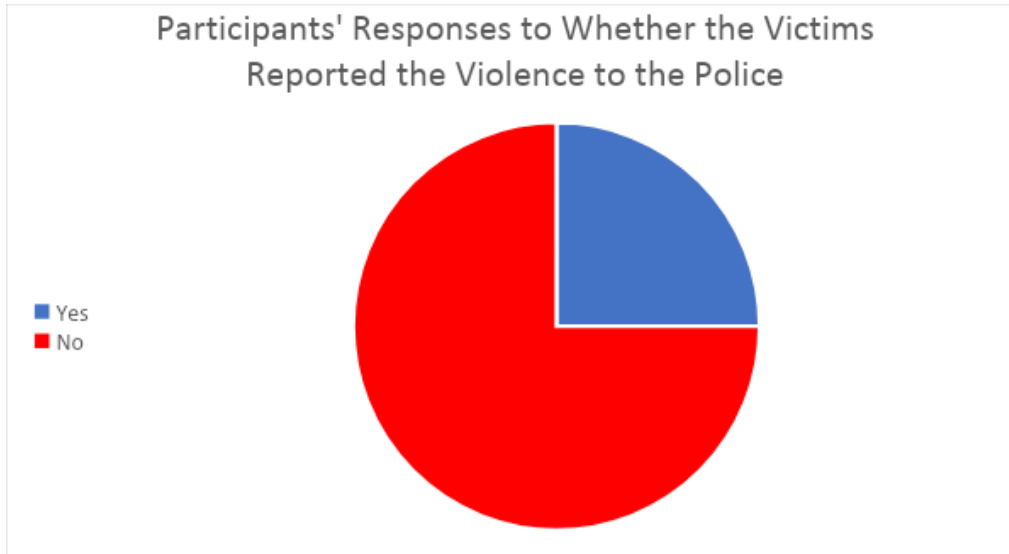
■ Yes
■ No

Figure 2: Participants who answered, "How many of you know someone that has been abused by an intimate partner?" in the affirmative, were asked whether the people they knew reported the violence to the police. Only two (2) out of the eight (8) participants knew a victim that reported the violence to the police.

The discussion continued, as participants were asked, "Why do you think so much violence is directed towards black women specifically?" Participants' replies primarily resonated with the following themes: cultural and generational norms and societal pressures to stay silent. For instance, S explained, "…a lot of it is cultural and generational, it becomes a form of acceptance that this is the norm and it just continues, that's one of my biggest observations. It becomes generational to the point we accept it, we say, that's just the way it is, deal with it." Further, MA revealed, "… unfortunately, society sees black women as the lowest common denominator… to go to police and say someone hit me, it becomes 'what did you do', or even if you tell your mother or your friend, 'girl what did you do, it's that mouth'… societal factors, partners not having coping mechanisms… you don't hit your friend like that whose 6'5 but why would you hit your partner who you have three children with?" Thus, the participants feel that the abuse has been normalized to the extent that no one takes their concerns seriously. They are conditioned to blame themselves for domestic violence. They feel that they are not a priority in society. Overall, it seems that Black women are forced to take responsibility for violent acts committed against them and remain silent.

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Next, the participants were asked, "How do you think, as Black women, when we are talking about violence in our communities, how do you think we can get our voices heard?" The responses largely emphasized the importance of healthy relationships, open conversations, safe spaces, and building trust. Overall, relationships between Black women need to be strengthened; the trend towards individualistic culture seems to be working against women in the Black community.

MB stated, "Black women don't feel worthy enough. We have not been taught to love ourselves enough… trope that we are supposed to be strong black women all the time, every time… we can have open honest conversations like what we are having now. We need to learn… not feeling worthy enough, loved enough, even by other black women, you know we don't support each other enough, because we haven't really been taught we are that valuable… uniting and being okay and knowing we have safe spaces that we can have these conversations is important… learn to love ourselves so we can learn to love people that look like us…" Thus, building relationships between Black women through open conversations and safe spaces can allow a dialogue to ensue.

P continued, "The relationship amongst women is core and is very important because I often find that, whether it is our intention or not, we push the certain narratives for women and those behind us that reinforce the negative… having some grace with each other and I think also if you are in a position where you have not received the better end of the stick, going to therapy and working through that. And it's hard finding the grace within yourself to extend it to someone else… sometimes, the truth of the matter is, you might not get that grace we wish we had and you know it is a bit of a burden and responsibility on us to stop that cycle and extend it on others so they can also receive that love… Because of what I experience with someone else being kind to me, you know I am more open to extending that and I can see myself because I can see myself in them and how they are showing up." It became clear that seeing yourself in others, or in other words, seeing others with humanity is an impactful way to get Black women's voices heard.

N explained, "I think it is a trust issue. Some people don't trust anybody because they believe they tell someone else, it will go out. Don't know who to talk to and I think that's where it starts… but if you build that trust in someone and let them see that you are trustworthy, I think they will open up more to you… as a coach I deal with a lot of women… because I keep whatever I know confidential and they know they can trust me, they come to me with issues. So then I am able to say you can do this or this is the best way to do this. If they see that in a person they will come to you but if they feel that as soon as I tell you, another ten is going to hear about this and then the shame is on me, then that's the barrier that some of them don't open up at all… big key to it is getting people to open up and trusting others." When these women open up, it also allows the issue to be put on the table and identified for what it is. Once these intimate spaces become more open and understanding, it will become easier to denounce the toxic behaviours and start making changes.

S added, "… comes back to this cultural thing and owning. We have to speak the truth and own the truth. The men in the Caribbean community I've known, yes they've done some bad stuff, but we have to call it out, but we have to know the truth within our own culture and we have to also frame what are the behaviours that we want to emulate… these could be behaviours that we could all adopt… what kind of behaviours do we want to emulate for our daughters and sons… set a standard of what the behaviour should look like… as for the women, we need to embrace one another a little bit more… all comes down to owning the truth and speak the truth." Many participants agreed that while Black women need to build stronger interpersonal relationships with one another, discussions and learning need to start with the men (brothers, sons, uncles).

When asked the second question, "**Why do you think that more Black women do not come forward and report their abuse to the police?**", some common answers included the Black community's poor relationship with the police, seemingly inadequate police training, fear of being publicly shamed, fear stemming from the lack of knowledge of one's rights, not believing victims, lack of support for victims, and general societal biases.

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A participant said, "Black communities don't have the best relationship with the justice system and police… mistrust, abuse that we have experienced or loved ones have experienced… financial dependency, if this individual is removed from that house, then that income is removed from that house. There is also the shame, the public shame, in terms of neighbours seeing the police car, what happened, what is going on over there, drawing attention to your situation… are the police equipped to make that genuine connection, acting from trauma-informed, being trauma-informed, and being culturally competent when they are in a situation where they're dealing with a woman who is experiencing abuse, even if she doesn't call the police. Even if the police come and she is saying no it's okay, it was my fault, them understanding that self-blame… … very multi-layered… You can't cookie-cutter the solution. Calling the police may not actually work, it may actually escalate the situation… I can speak as a professional. If you are a woman who is here, who is a newcomer, and you are living in your in-laws' home and it is like you follow by their rules. That is an added layer of fear that if he gets taken away, now you are to blame and now you become targeted." Furthermore, not only do the concerns surround the police's inadequacies in dealing with the Black community, but there is also the fear of "unnecessarily" escalating the situation and facing public shame. Overall, there is a fear of being re-victimized. The issue is not solved when the police are called, victims are forced to confront a plethora of additional issues. Some women fear even losing their family's immigration status if required to report their partner.

Another participant continued, "Automatically you are conditioned to believe they're not going to believe me anyway so why put myself through that…" K added, "There have been reports made… restrictions where the boyfriend is not to come in contact… the female unfortunately ends up being killed by that significant other so I mean yes we would love to call the police but yes there is a fear of us not being believed. There are the reports that are made, and absolutely nothing is done about it so as much as I would like to believe the police are in some way, shape or form going to help us, I don't think they are… the issue needs to be resolved within the community itself… and us women speaking to our black men… letting them know we are no longer going to accept it regardless of what culture of abuse they have and what they have seen from their fathers and grandfathers or uncles, it is a new time and things have changed and

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we need to change them, we need to enforce those changes, embrace and accept them as well." Some participants have completely discarded the potential of the police being a potential avenue. For fear of not being believed or lack of resources to adequately protect, some Black women's solution is looking towards fixing the issue internally, within their community.

N continued, "… sometimes a lot of these people come and are sheltered, so they don't know what their rights are... If they are going to call the police, some of them have to have a plan. They have to know where to go once they do that. They have to give up certain things, move, be ready to move on the spur of the moment, change their number, do all these kind of things, are they willing and ready to do that?... the fear of what will happen… but if they are educated in advance, that is a big piece of it." The impact of educating Black women on their rights and options should not be underestimated. It can significantly decrease the fear of the unknown that results from calling the police. Further, this becomes increasingly important when considering immigrant communities and where they come from, as their relationship with the police may be one of distrust.

W summarized the societal reasons that may deter Black women from calling the police, "Because [of] patriarchy, sexism, and racism. The reasons we (Black women) do not report to the police is because the system is NOT set up to support and/or protect us. Often times it makes matte[r]s even worse. It is definitely nuanced and layered." After this was seen in the chat box, all the participants agreed.

MA concluded, "The Black community needs to build the capacity to address intimate partner violence. However, we still need the legal system and the police to play their role, be educated and trained on how to support victims. Allow the victims to be the experts." An interesting, powerful take on the issue was that Black women's voices should be heard to encourage reporting to the police. By having Black women inform the process, it is believed that this would encourage other Black women to feel comfortable coming forward. By allowing Black women to be the experts, police-related processes become more informed of the Black women's experiences, and it potentially creates more accessible options for Black women facing gender-based violence.

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The participants were asked a follow-up question, "What is the solution so we are not suffering in silence?" In addition to educating the men within the community and not accepting abusive behaviour, a participant suggested that all communities, especially specific communities that may not be initially considered, should be examined for these concerns. Another participant also encouraged her fellow Black women to not completely disregard the police, "For me, my concern is when there's no police present and depending on the type of person there is, and I'm not saying police are perfect, but I also understand that when there is absolutely no order, some men… they take advantage of that, and take advantage of there not being any authority figure there to restrain them and they take advantage of Black women specifically… I look at it from all sides and I think to myself like I would want to continue more relationships with authority figures and try to find ways to bridge that gap…I feel like we should look at it holistically… not close that door as a way to create safety and safeguard ourselves." Thus, another important solution involves rebuilding a relationship with the authorities.

In addition, as mentioned, eight (8) participants filled out the post-event survey. When the same question was asked, answers remained the same. Common answers included mistrust of the police and system. The answers largely touched upon fear. There is a fear of shame, fear of not being believed, fear of the perpetrator not being held accountable, fear of being re-traumatized, and fear of not being protected. Further, two (2) women explicitly brought up cultural upbringings; they mentioned that Black people "aren't raised to really trust the police or believe that they will receive the right help from them" and abuse may be "taught to women as not a big deal".

When asked the third question, **"If you had the power to make some fundamental changes in the system, what would some of those changes be?"** The suggestions for fundamental changes in the system included (common responses are quoted below):

1. **A safe place for women to go to; community-building, solidarity and support from other women**

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"A place to retreat like a real safe space. If a woman does find herself in the predicament where she doesn't have a place to go, is there a place she can go maybe for a week…"

2. Allocate funding to culturally specific initiatives and training for outreach workers

MA: "Let's look at it from an economic lens, where women earn less than men, so let's start investing in girls… so that they can grow up and be strong women. Let's look at the housing issue. You talked about Peel. The waitlist for housing is 11 years… Let's look at funding programs, not just piecemeal funding, funding programs that are culturally specific and not just for activities but for staff who are trained clinicians, trained outreach workers who reflect their clients and understand their lived experiences…"

3. Introduction of diversity in first responders

"… you were saying that police can't be everywhere and you are right, they can't be everywhere, but what about outsourcing, what about not necessarily having the police respond to DV case[s] because they are coming in with police training, why not have a department that understands the mental problems that surround this and will go in maybe with a different mentality and not maybe so hostile and could possibly escalate those situations so not necessarily all the time run to the police for everything… there are other better-trained individuals that can help out in these situations."

"… there was a person who was missing and I had contact and good relations with the police and I called them and said I want to do a search party, what can we do? And they said well we usually discourage civilians get involved… Why would you discourage lay people [and] community members to be involved? I know at Peel there is a response team for people who experience mental health issues that are trained and I remember seeing a few members on the news last week and none of them looked like people of colour… we are trainable and I think if I was in a situation and saw another black woman come, my first thing would be ok she looks like

me and my intensity level and anxiety level will go down a bit… there's going to be that push back but we need to keep pushing forward."

4. Parents advocating for children in school

N: "This all starts with school. They are a big setup for our men to fail. Any black person to fail… as soon as they go into the school and a black kid is hyper, you hear that they can't deal with the kid, train the kid, they can't do this for the kid they can't do that, but another kid will go in there and do the same thing and nothing happens to that kid but that black kid gets suspended three for times from different schools, they got labelled, so there's no system to educate these guys, they've got hostility from the start to the finish so guess what? That's all they know now and they [are] already set up for failure and that's where it has to start: in the school…"

J: "I have 2 boys, 17 and 7, and one of the first things that came to mind when you asked that question was parent advocacy. one of the things I do for my boys when we were in the urban school system, I was there every second that I can in the school advocating for him because there's a stigma when you go to an urban school, the school is bad, the kids are bad, everybody is bad. I remember him saying to me 'Mom why are there always suspension forms?' The first thing you see in the principal's office is suspension forms on the wall… why do they have a metal detector? This is him processing that. They are prepared for the bad thing. Not even giving kids a chance to be good at something… most of the schoolteachers are women, one of the things for my boys is I want to see male figures. I think society has done a really great disservice to women where they expect women to raise and rear all the children, but you didn't get pregnant by yourself… Where's the mom? No, but where's the dad? Let daddy show up for some time… if you are not a parent advocating… your child can literally be the brightest kid ever and he can go through the pipeline and not go to his full potential if you are not advocating for him."

5. Programs focused on rehabilitating and educating perpetrators

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W: "One of the things I am thinking while we're talking and while we're thinking about systems is the current state of the black family. When we are talking about IPV, a lot of the community-based programs or even legal programs are woman-centred… I don't know if there are any other programs for men, perpetrators. So I think one of the approaches is that perhaps we need a program for men that is culturally specific. We know the ways in which the system has criminalized our black men… if we help the man, we are in turn, helping the woman and the children… specifically black families. A program that is focused on restorative justice as opposed to being punitive…"

6. Restrict media (television, movies, music) that suggest misogyny

MB: "In our homes, I know culturally, I am Jamaican, the music, the misogyny in dance hall music, the promotion and denigration of women in the music. It's a combination. And again if we go back to 'takes a village', we need to really support our young boys. Not just your kids, but as a village. We have to lead by example and a lot of our cultural misgivings unfortunately are really to blame for some of this. This male power and dominance and teaching our young boys to respect women. It is a lot of work, but it is doable. I think we can only do it as a community and do it together as a village… start them when they are young."

7. Not only educate young girls but also educate young boys early as well

P: "… I have a nephew who's like 15. I thought to myself I would love to educate young girls but while we're doing that why don't we start incorporating young boys as well in those discussions so that they can hear and understand the other side? Start to expose them as well, so they can start to get some insight and perspective outside of themselves because they're also learning and they don't know. And they're discovering and testing things and also learning how to interact with women. So why not start that early on in educating them as well… I noticed, and I think this speaks to more as our mindsets too as a woman, in Nigerian media Nollywood, I noticed recently that there started to be some actresses that take on untraditional roles… woman was having an affair with a man who was married and she wound up being fired from the role

and she was suing him because she spent a lot of time to build up the company.. she won the case and won the financial currency… I was thinking to myself this is an interesting narrative. Because the focus is always that if you are that woman who comes in and destroys, you get cast aside and left with nothing. But initially, I had a fight with it in terms of accepting this should be the end. Then there was a second movie, I watched in Nollywood, there was a couple fighting trying to have a baby, but they couldn't have the baby. It turned out it was the man who was impotent and typically the narrative is that often they assume it was the woman and the man or the mothers would encourage the son to step out of the marriage and get a baby and bring the baby back home. When the mother found out they were having the issue, she slightly suggested it but the couple found out it was the man's issue. So he got upset because he understand it was him that was the issue. Now he was looking at it from her vantage point. So I started to think that you know what there was a little resistance in me seeing this woman play these types of roles, and I thought to myself that is also mental conditioning within myself. We need to, like my sister said in the prior comment, to start consuming more media that is affirming women and not just pushing a patriarchal, sexist agenda. We need to be really cognizant of it and be open to it and even realize our own internal bias against women."

8. More Black people in leadership positions

N: "We don't have enough black business or people in leadership. Or if they are there… we are suppressed… If you speak up, you become the person that is the troublemaker… black people tend not to support each other… we also as black people are failing our own people because we don't support our own… Until that support and building is there, we are not going anywhere."

9. Break the generational cycle

S: "The culture is generational… we know justice is slow but I have seen some significant strides for women."

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Participants of the post-event survey echoed the same sentiments when asked, "What changes need to be made to the system so that women can feel safe and supported?" Thus, the answers touched on a broad range of aspects. Interestingly, when asked, "How do you think we can prevent violence against women in your community?", participants' post-event answers were principally focused on breaking the generational cycle through education. For instance, one participant explained, "Men don't know how to be men because they don't see it and women are not spending the time to teach their sons how to be good men because they don't know what good men are – how can you teach what you haven't been modelled?" Also, education was consistently recommended for both, Black men and women. These recommendations for education involved openly talking about domestic violence to reduce stigmatization.

Next Steps

a. Limitations

While the Zoom platform was necessary due to the COVID-19 pandemic and useful to improve accessibility and attendance for participants, it can be difficult to moderate Zoom calls without eliminating participants' comfort. Further, some women felt more comfortable speaking than others. As a result, more input was collected from some women, relative to others. However, this may have contributed to building community and support networks. Due to the lack of complete anonymity (for those that kept their camera on), participants may have been more hesitant to contribute more.

Another limitation is that there was no control group. Due to the data of racialized women and non-racialized women typically being amalgamated, there is no controlled data. While we now have some data on racialized women, it would be beneficial to compare it to non-racialized women's data from the same geographic area (Greater Toronto Area).

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The small sample size is a significant limitation. Nevertheless, due to the sensitive nature of the study, it is expected. Also, when conducting a study that consists of focus groups and in-depth interviews, this is not unusual. Due to the present gap in the data, even small sample sizes provide some clarity.

b. Improvements

As we continue to conduct community engagement sessions to collect data, dividing samples into their more specific geographic areas would provide details on the differences (or similarities) on how various cultural groups may face gender-based violence.

Another improvement is to have larger sample sizes and more wide-reaching recruitment. Potentially, more data could be collected from surveys (such as Google Forms), ensuring anonymity (keeping everyone's cameras off), and adding control users.

c. Future Research Opportunities

It would be interesting to follow up with the women to see if their views have changed or if they have seen any improvement over time. Cupid's Sting plans to continue the community engagement sessions by expanding audiences and inviting other minority groups into the discussion. We will continue to collect Canadian race-based data and encourage other organizations to collect this data as well.

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<u>Conclusion</u>

Black people continue to be overpoliced and Black women over victimized. The Community Engagement Session involving Black women showed that their experiences of abuse at the hands of an intimate partner, is not only normalized but indirectly promoted in the media. Furthermore, many Black women are untrusting of the police and disregard the viability of reporting their abuse to the police. The statistics seem to support their concerns, as "in instances where reports of abuse were made to police, the survivors were the ones charged with uttering threats, assault, or assault with a weapon and the perpetrator was not charged" (Gomes, 2023). The suggestions for fundamental changes in the system touched on a plethora of aspects of life.

This Community Engagement Session was a start in collecting race specific gender-based violence data and a strong indicator that more needs to be done to support Black women experiencing gender-based violence. Continual research and data collection on racialized groups will help inform practices to support communities more effectively.

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