

SAFE BLACK SISTM



**FOUNDATION
FOR BLACK
COMMUNITIES**

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Introduction

Interpersonal violence disproportionately impacts Black women. Yet, they generally do not report their victimization because of distrust of the justice system. As such, there is a gap in the Canadian data on Black women's victimization. When violence directed towards and used on Black women is not recognized, they are denied their safety, dignity, equity, and humanity (Debs, 2021). Without spaces that are led by Black women and that use the language, experiences, and approaches necessary for the healing and education of young Black women, they will continue to suffer in silence. Prevention is key to reducing the pain of violence and Cupid's Sting's approach is safety training. Self-defense can be used to disrupt violence against women and girls and prevent potential victimization. With empowerment and encouragement, young Black women will gain the confidence they need to respond to danger in their communities and their homes.

Who We Are

Cupid's Sting is a non-profit focused on women's safety (*Women's Self-Defense | Cupid's Sting Non-Profit*, n.d.). We teach life-saving skills, such as self-defense, and situational awareness, and workshops on domestic violence and violence against women (*This Non-Profit Organization Is Teaching Black Women How to Protect Themselves*, 2019). 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 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 recognized, as this aids in participants feeling more seen and heard; for the purposes of data collection, it becomes increasingly simpler to curate appropriate questions while simultaneously allowing participants to feel more comfortable in accessing services. Thus, the Cupid's Sting team that conducted this study is composed entirely of racialized women.



Acknowledgments

Words of Appreciation to Funders, Sponsors, Volunteers, and Participants

Cupid's Sting Non-Profit wants to express a deep appreciation to the Foundation for Black Communities. We were honored to connect with an organization that has similarly aligned goals as Cupid's Sting Non-Profit and sees the necessity for race-based data and protection of Black women and girls.

We would also like to thank our sponsors. The organizations that we partnered with played a significant role in the success of the Safe Black Sis™ pilot program by helping ensure these young women had a special day. Thank you to the Salvation Army for kindly providing the space for the event. Thank you to Lush for providing gift packages for all the participants and Manifest Bookstore for providing personalized book packages with Black, African Caribbean-centred authors and content. With regards to catering, thank you to Honey Soul Food for the catered lunches, Milo's Munchies for the baked cupcakes, Cheesekaekes Dessert Shop for the cheesecakes, and Longo's for providing a gift card. Cupid's Sting Non-Profit is known for curating unique, special experiences for participants, as we want them to feel seen and their efforts to feel recognized and appreciated.

Thank you to the volunteers that allowed the event to run smoothly. By setting up for the event, coordinating with sponsors, and cultivating a safe space, the volunteers' tireless efforts proved to be crucial to the success of the pilot program.

Finally, we would like to thank our participants. We acknowledge the strength and courage it took to come forward and share your experiences. As a result of your bravery, your voices will create change.

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Land Acknowledgement

Cupid's Sting Non-Profit conducts our work on the Treaty Lands and Territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit. In particular, we acknowledge the territory of the Anishinabek, Huron-Wendat, Haudenosaunee, Ojibway/Chippewa peoples, the Metis, and the territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation.

We acknowledge the ancestral and unceded territory of all the Inuit, Métis, and First Nations people that call this land home. Additionally, we acknowledge the violent atrocities of the past and the present, and we honor the lives and the souls of all the children and the Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls.

As Canada committed to the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, the issue of gender-based violence is not isolated to one community, cultural group, and/or ethnicity. Indigenous women are disproportionately impacted by gender-based violence (Government of Canada; Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, 2016). From 1980-2012, despite only 4% of the Canadian female population being comprised of Indigenous women, 16% of all women murdered in Canada during this period were Indigenous (Government of Canada; Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, 2016). Thus, while Cupid's Sting Non-Profit collects and analyzes race-based data in the pursuit of safety and equality for women, the needs of all racialized women, including Indigenous women, are heavily entwined in this research and are encouraged for broadening the scale and reach of our research.

We do this to reaffirm our commitment and responsibility to improving relationships between nations and to improving our understanding of local Indigenous peoples and their cultures. The calls to action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls inform our work as we continue to resist all forms of racism.

What is Safe Black Sis™?

Safe Black Sis™ marries movement with safety education. One in three women will be a victim of violence in her lifetime (World Health Organization, 2021). Black women and girls are disproportionately affected by gender-based violence (WAGE Canada, 2021). We believe that self-defense training is key to tackling the violence against young women and girls problem. We wanted to raise awareness and teach safety education to young, Black female-identifying women to get in front of the problem and reduce these numbers by preventing victimization. Research shows that young women involved in sports and who work out regularly are less likely to report victimization (Harder, 2007). Thus, we increased youth wellness through boxing workouts and self-defense safety training.

We introduced the youth participating in Safe Black Sis™ to new physical activities to challenge their bodies and minds to decrease stress and anxiety. This initiative gave participants confidence in their ability to trust and protect themselves. Creating a safe and inclusive environment gave participants a space to release their thoughts and emotions, knowing they were understood and supported. The self-defense training component was unique, as self-defense is not widely accessible to Black youth, especially Black female youth.

Movement is essential to positive mental health and wellness, and we aimed to foster a love of physical activity in new ways. Further, we intended to build community, create opportunities for movement, and support youth wellness in a racially equitable way.



Literature Review

Gender-based violence disproportionately affects Black women and girls, yet they generally do not report their victimization because they do not trust the justice system (WAGE Canada, 2021; Gomes, 2023). As a result, there is a gap in the Canadian data on Black women's victimization (WAGE Canada, 2021).

Despite there being a concerning gap in the knowledge of race-based research on gender-based violence in Canada, there are facts that shed light on the potential severity of the issue. As mentioned above, Black women and girls face a higher risk of gender-based violence (WAGE Canada, 2021). This risk is exacerbated by intersectionality (race, class, citizenship, etc.) (Gomes, 2023). 42% of Black women reported they are victims of intimate partner violence and domestic violence, but this does not include Black women who are experiencing violence and not reporting it (Gomes, 2023). The perpetuation of the cycle is continued as Black women are deterred from reporting incidences of gender-based violence to the police. A study on Black criminalized women in Toronto showed a clear discrepancy, "93% of women experienced physical abuse from their partners", and "86% of women 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). If survivors choose to turn to healthcare to get help, the lack of representation and help available within the healthcare industry poses further distrust of the system (Omar & Asare, 2023).

Evidently, the US offers more information reflecting the reality of gender-based violence committed against Black women. In the US, over 40% of Black American women will be victims of domestic violence (Blackburn Center, 2020). Over 50% of homicides of Black adult women are a result of intimate partner violence (Coburn Place, 2023). They are 2.5 times more likely than a white woman to be murdered and 35% more likely than a white woman to face domestic violence (Blackburn Center, 2020; Doorways, 2022). Devastatingly, Black American women are also 22 times more likely than other races to face intimate partner violence (Thomas

et al., 2015). The aftermath is equally disappointing, as survivors have faced criminalization for protecting themselves (Coburn Place, 2023). The United States offers more data, which forces us to question, “What is an accurate description of occurrences of gender-based violence towards Black women in Canada?”

Even more worrisome, stereotypes feed into the cycle. For instance, the “Strong Black Women” narrative contributes to the overall coping, distrust of law enforcement, and rates of intimate partner violence (Waller et al., 2022). Stereotypes that are perpetuated and are resultingly internalized result in the vicious cycle of when something isn’t seen, it isn’t addressed, and it goes unnoticed (Omar & Asare, 2023). This ultimately contributes to the erasure and lack of resolution of the issue (Omar & Asare, 2023). Additionally, the media poses as another element feeding into the cycle, as there are sexist and racist underlying sentiments when reporting on gender-based violence (Graydon et al., 2023). For instance, this is seen through the “naturalization” of racialized women’s deaths (Graydon et al., 2023).

When violence towards Black women is not recognized, they are denied their safety, dignity, equity, and humanity. We do not want Black female youth to suffer in silence, so we created a safe space, led by Black women that uses the language, experiences, and approaches necessary for the healing and education of Black women.

Pre-Event Survey

Background

To address the gap in data and literature on Black female youth’s victimization, we attempted to collect pre-event data from the participants.

The “pre-event survey” was collected through Eventbrite. As participants registered for the Safe Black Sis™ program, they were required to complete an order form, which included a waiver. There were logistical questions asked (e.g. asking whether participants accepted conditions

within the waiver), but the following questions were included in the pre-event survey to collect data:

- 1. How old are you? *Note: you must be 14-29 YOA to attend.**
- 2. Are you a student?**
- 3. If you are a student, please indicate what kind.**
- 4. As a Black female, please describe the part of the African Diaspora that you identify with. For ex., Barbados, Nigeria, etc.**
- 5. Currently, how safe do you feel in your community?**
- 6. Do you think your level of safety impacts your overall wellness? If so, please provide details on how.**
- 7. What does your knowledge of self-defense and safety skills currently consist of?**

It should be noted that a Likert scale was used to gauge attendees' responses to question 5 ("Currently, how safe do you feel in your community?"). We believed this would provide more detail regarding the degree of safety that participants experience generally and prior to attending the Safe Black Sis™ program.

Participants

In total, twenty-three (23) young Black women registered and completed the pre-event survey. Of these participants, sixteen (16) were from Brampton, two (2) were from Toronto, one (1) was from Vaughan, and four (4) were from Mississauga (Figure 1).

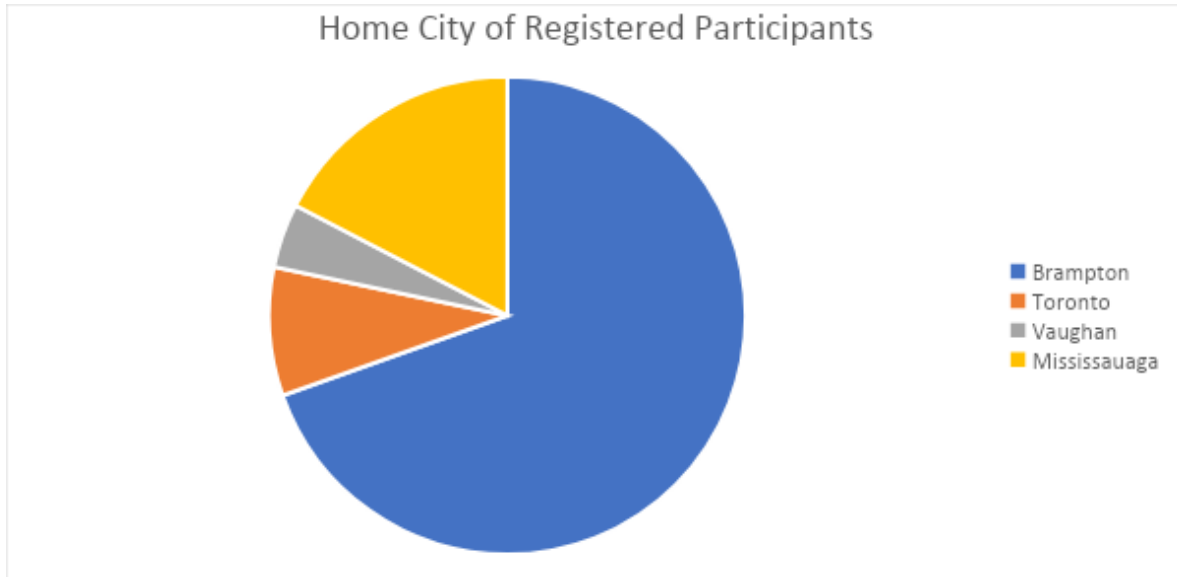


Figure 1: The pie chart illustrates the breakdown of where participants are actively living at the time of the Safe Black Sis™ event.

Twenty-two (22) participants explicitly indicated that they were within the age range of 14-29. Twenty-one (21) participants provided their ages (Figure 2). Sixteen (16) participants identified as students. Of these students, twelve (12) were in high school, three (3) were in college, and one (1) was in university (undergraduate) studies.

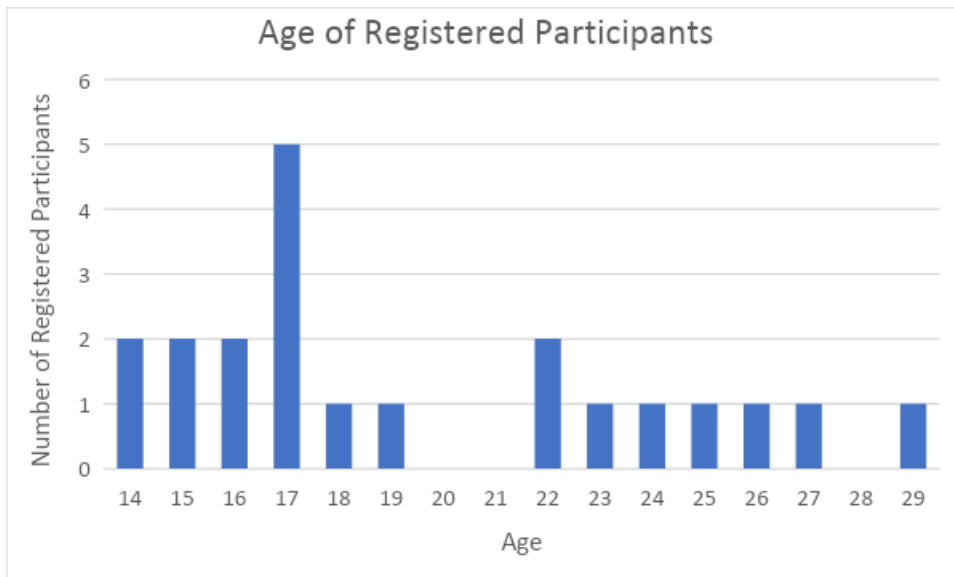


Figure 2: The graph displays the number of participants that indicated a particular age. The majority of the participants were on the lower end of the age range. However, overall, some participants fell across the age range.

The occupations of the participants were diverse and included counselor, cashier, program assistant, chief marketing officer (CMO), registered practical nurse (RPN), social service worker, personal support worker, retail worker, and early childhood educator. Other participants were students, and one (1) was unemployed.

Participants identified from various parts of the African Diaspora (Figure 3). As this was a question that allowed for a text response, two participants identified as being “Caribbean parents but Canadian born”, which offered a unique insight into the way Black Canadian youth may choose to identify themselves.

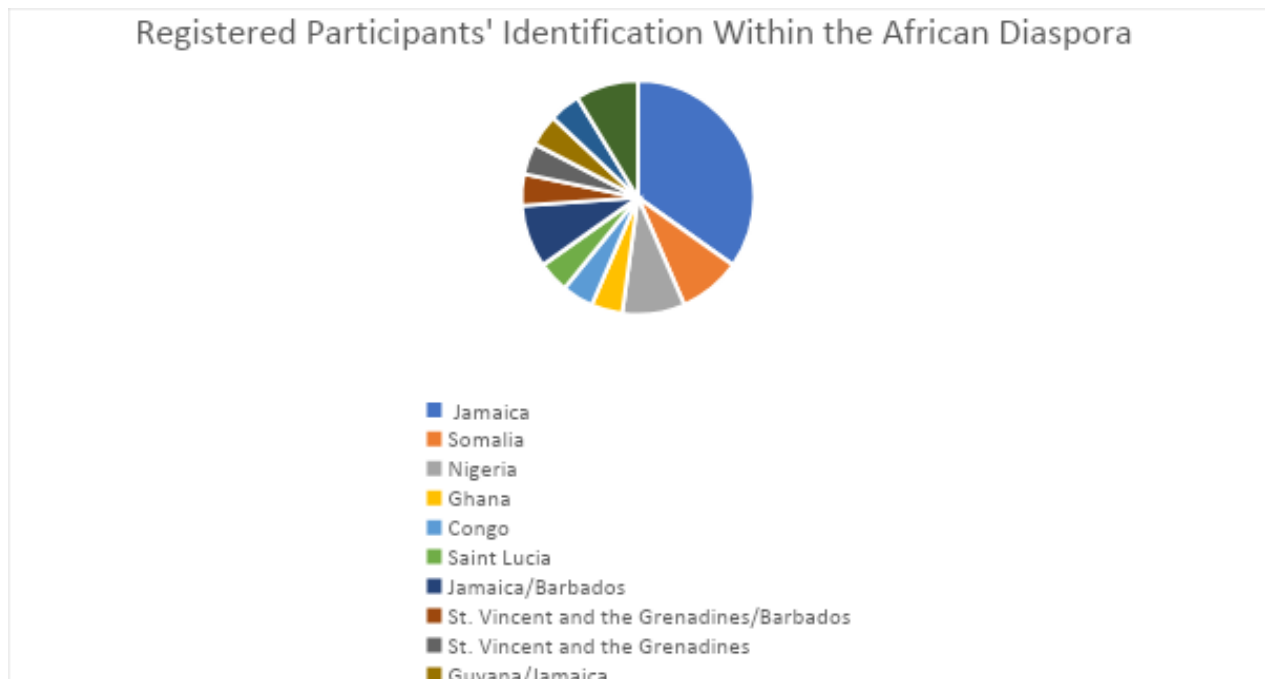


Figure 3: The above chart indicates where the participant identified as within the African Diaspora. Evidently, there is a variety of countries and combinations of countries. The most common country was Jamaica.

Data Representing Safety

Participants were asked to select the level of safety that they felt in their community. Twenty (20) participants answered the question (Figure 4). There were eleven (11) participants that selected the “Neither safe nor unsafe option”. Notably, none of the participants felt inclined to select the extremes of “Very unsafe” and “Very unsafe” options. Thus, participants maintained neutrality regarding their level of safety.

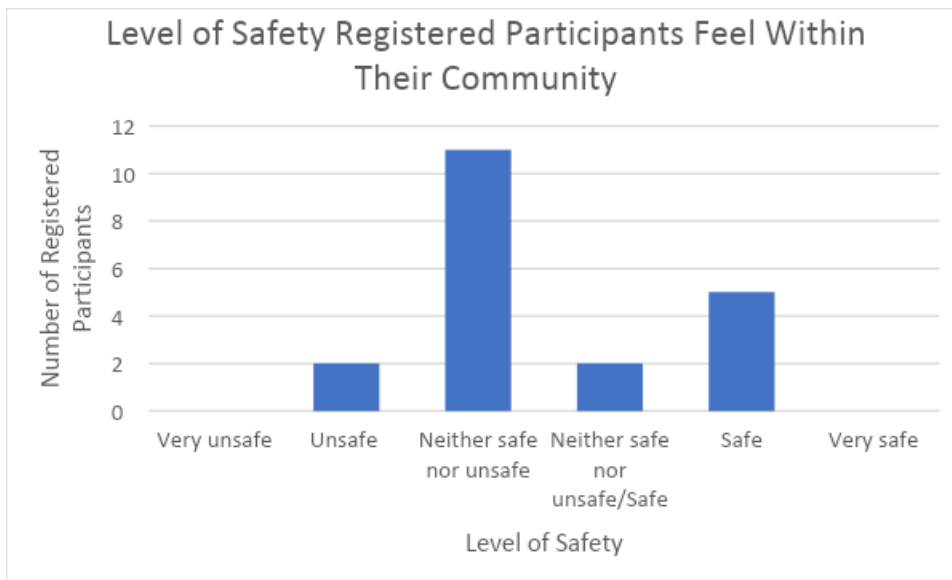


Figure 4: The graph presents the level of safety that participants feel in their community. The majority of participants selected the “Neither safe nor unsafe” option.

Then, participants were asked, “Do you think your level of safety impacts your overall wellness? If so, please provide details on how.” Sixteen (16) participants chose to respond. Twelve (12) responded in the affirmative. Only three (3) responded in the negative. One (1) reported that they were unsure.

Some responses of the participants that answered positively included:

- “Yes, feeling safe in my community affects my overall confidence.”
- “Yes. If I don't feel safe in situations, I'll feel uncomfortable and that really affects how often I find myself going out, even if it's important.”

- “Yes, I think knowing I am pretty much always protected helps me keep my peace of mind.”
- “Yes, as I find myself always looking behind the shoulder and paranoid.”
- “It impacts my overall wellness a lot because I get stressed out thinking about the future and how housing insecurity is difficult to overcome, so I’ll likely not know where to go and might end up somewhere unsafe for me. This stress makes it hard for me to sleep or eat.”
- **“Once before on Snapchat, I was talking to strangers, and human traffickers found my location and came to my house.”**
- “Not 100%, but being safe keeps my mind at ease.”
- “Yes, it does. Being able to defend myself would make me feel better.”
- **“Yes, feeling unsafe affects my mental health. Before, I was on Snapchat talking to a stranger, and human traffickers found my location and visited my house. The Police were called.”**
- “Yes, because I have a child I worry about.”

Finally, participants were asked what their knowledge of self-defense and safety skills currently consists of. Twenty (20) participants answered the question. The responses displayed a detrimental lack of knowledge in this area. 15% (3) of participants responded with “basic”. 15% (3) of the participants responded with “very little” or “little knowledge”. 15% (3) of the participants responded with “minimal knowledge”. 5% (1) of participants reported having “limited knowledge”. 20% (4) of participants reported that they have no knowledge regarding self-defense and safety skills. Other responses included:

- “Being aware of my surroundings.”
- “Takedowns and getting out of chokeholds.”
- “Not much besides my experience in kickboxing.”
- “Kicking men’s testicles and yelling “Fire!” if I’m in trouble to get people to pay attention to me.”
- “Only how to get out of a grab.”
- “I don’t know.”

Interestingly, one participant answered the question with “I don’t know”. This can be viewed as concerning, as the reality may be that Black female youth may be unsure of what constitutes adequate self-defense and safety skills. This alludes to a lack of education in the area of self-defense and safety.

Overall, most participants had little to no knowledge of self-defense and safety skills. If they did have some knowledge, it was limited to one sport or one or two facts useful to keep them safe. These responses confirmed concerns that Black female youth were not sufficiently exposed to safety education.

While asking participants, “How did you hear about this event?”, was meant for administrative and marketing purposes, it shed light on the ability to form a stronger community. Of the twenty (20) participants who responded to the question, eleven (11) heard about the event through word of mouth. Furthermore, the community’s foundation is present, but Safe Black Sis™ has the opportunity to make it stronger, larger, and more interconnected.

Notes from Sister Circle Conversations

The “Sister Circle” consisted of attendees being seated in a circle. It offered the opportunity to have open, engaging discussions while looking at others in the circle. It solidified the concept of Safe Black Sis™ building a supportive community.

After Dr. Samuel reminded the group of the reason for being at the Safe Black Sis™ session (trying to figure out ways to ensure Black female youth have positive mental health outcomes), she briefly went over some statistics; these statistics are referenced in the literature review. However, she clarified one particular caveat: these stats are an underrepresentation of the actual numbers of affected Black female youth. She also reminded the group to “take up space” and “everything you have to say matters.”

The participation from attendees began when Dr. Samuel offered an open-ended question, “What are some things that can impact your overall wellness?” Responses included:

- Stress
 - In relationships
 - In the environment
- Not enough money
 - For healthy foods
 - Worrying all the time
- Performance
 - At work
- Family life

- Support
- Safety

Attendees were asked, “Is it hard being a Black woman in this society? Yes, or no?” Multiple stories describing personal, lived experiences arose after this question was asked. One relatively young attendee mentioned an experience in her science class where a teacher voluntarily asked about stereotypes about Jamaicans. Another experience resulted in explaining the stereotype of the “angry Black woman”, which often occurs when a Black girl or woman may simply be trying to voice their opinion and advocate for themselves. Next, a young attendee described her experience in the hospital. She noticed that the nurses treated other patients differently, relative to her. For instance, while she got one-word answers, other patients received more detailed responses. Therefore, a visible pattern emerged; the issues affecting Black female youth are systemic. Evidently, these issues expanded across education systems, workplaces, and healthcare systems.

While answering this question, attendees considered incidents they have confronted where people may incorporate hurtful undertones in their everyday language. One attendee mentioned her experience of a woman approaching and addressing her by saying, “You beautiful Black people”. While a seemingly kind comment, the attendee pondered why the woman chose to add “Black” instead of simply saying “You beautiful people”. She questioned, “Why is she putting Black into it?” Further, the word, “little”, is demeaning. For instance, an individual saying “Look at your little business degree” is belittling. Dr. Samuel kindly reminded the group that nothing they do is little and not to let these derogatory comments disparage them.

Gradually, it became clear that these experiences were not constrained to just one or two attendees. This is exemplified, as Dr. Samuel asked, “Do people try to touch your hair without asking?” The response was a resounding “yes” from every attendee. Dr. Samuel proceeded to do a demonstration (with consent) of what it looks like when someone is in your personal space. This provided clarity to the attendees in allowing them to understand what it looks like when their personal space is invaded and how to place firm boundaries to avoid this from happening.

The conversation proceeded to focus on solutions by asking, “How would you increase your wellness?” Some responses included:

- Going to the library
 - Making sure tasks that are necessary to be completed are completed
- Going for walks and being outside in nature
 - Getting air is important, as it is the #1 physiological necessity
- Cleaning
 - By cleaning and organizing, thoughts feel more organized
- Self-care
 - How one looks impacts how they feel as well
 - Skincare, spa day
- Physical exercise
 - Using a punching bag
 - Playing basketball
- Watches a movie

Furthermore, a valuable observation from the Sister Circle Conversations was that the attendees’ maturity level far surpassed their chronological age. For instance, these attendees already had a developed understanding of what healthy habits they could pursue to improve their wellness. Notably, therapy was not suggested; this is understandable, as it may not be available as an option. Often, therapy is expensive and has long waitlists. Additionally, some resources tend to be isolated and lack coordination between themselves, which results in individuals receiving the runaround.

Regarding safety in their environment, attendees were asked about what they are seeing in their schools, communities, and work. One attendee experienced an emotionally and physically abusive situation at home. Currently, she lives in a shelter. Nearby where she lives, she was almost stabbed. Thus, the area felt generally unsafe, so she was worried about her safety for those couple of weeks. She was already going into a situation that was unknown to her, yet the surrounding circumstances around her feeling unsafe made the situation more worrisome.

The question led to a discussion around when it is appropriate to hold your ground or stick to your boundaries. An attendee mentioned an incident where she remembers someone was running towards her with a weapon and she ran into a grocery store. However, her mom later questioned her, “Why did you run? You should hold your ground.” Dr. Samuel proceeded to cover the importance of holding your ground but also holding firm to your boundaries. If an incident makes one feel unsafe, it is important to stick to your boundaries and act accordingly, so running is the appropriate thing to do. Moreover, when faced with the decision of when it is appropriate to hold their ground or set boundaries, the attendees were reminded that it is going to take practice. Also, the body crying is not a sign of weakness. Rather, it is the body’s way of releasing and defending you. Finally, it is completely understandable that one may need to redraw the line that defines one’s boundaries as one sees fit.

Post-Event Survey

Background

To understand the impact of the Safe Black Sis™ event on the participants, we collected post-event data from participants to inform future programming.

The “post-event survey” was used to collect information from the attendees after the event. The term, “attendees”, refers to the participants that completed the post-event survey. The survey was collected through TypeForm. There were logistical questions asked, but the following questions were included in the post-event survey to collect data:

- 1. How would you rate the Safe Black Sis™ session?**
 - a. 1 star reflects a poor experience in the Safe Black Sis™ session.
 - b. 5 stars reflect an excellent experience in the Safe Black Sis™ session.
2. How did you hear about this event?
- 3. Before today, have you ever learned about safety or self-defense?**
- 4. What did you find helpful in today’s session?**
- 5. How safe do you feel after participating in this session?**
 - a. Selecting 1 reflects feeling extremely unsafe.
 - b. Selecting 10 reflects feeling extremely safe.
- 6. How do you think safety and self-defense contribute to Black female youth’s overall wellness?**
- 7. We have found that Black female youth often do not seek help when they are victimized. Why do you think that is and what changes need to be made so Black female youth feel safe and supported?**

- 8. How old are you?**
- 9. As a Black female, please describe the part of the African Diaspora that you identify with. For ex., Barbados, Nigeria, etc.**
- 10. Please share the city or region where you currently reside.**
- 11. Are you a student or working?**
 - a. What level of study are you in?**
 - b. What are you studying?**
 - c. What do you do for work? In addition, please indicate whether you are employed full-time, employed part-time, or unemployed.**
- 12. Did you feel comfortable and supported in the space that was provided for you today? If not, do you have any recommendations on how we can help participants feel more comfortable and supported?**
- 13. Would you recommend the Safe Black Sis™ program to other Black female youth?**
- 14. As a women's safety non-profit, feedback and testimonials are incredibly important. We would appreciate it if you could write a testimonial below and let us know if you have any suggestions for future sessions.**

It should be noted that a Likert scale was used to gauge attendees' responses to question 1 ("How would you rate the Safe Black Sis™ session?") and question 5 ("How safe do you feel after participating in this session?"). We believed this would provide more detail regarding the extent of the Safe Black Sis™ program's impact on attendees.

Attendees

Thirteen (13) attendees completed the post-event survey. Of these attendees, three (3) were from Mississauga, one (1) was from Toronto, one (1) was from Vaughan, and seven (7) were from Brampton (Figure 5).

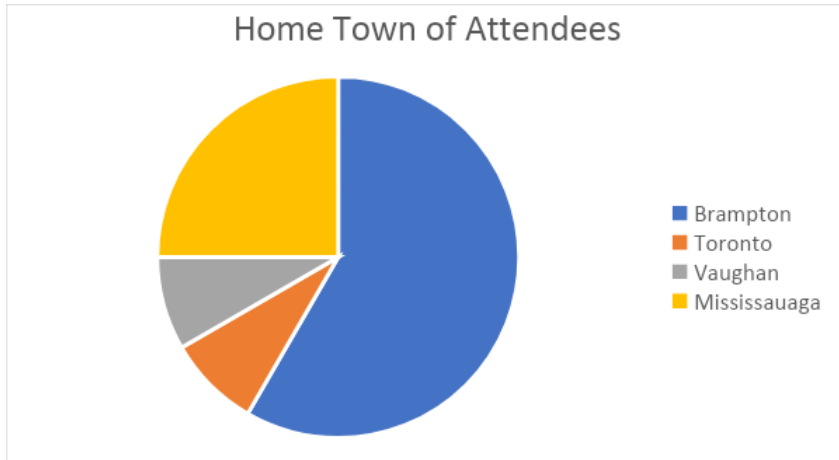


Figure 5: The pie chart illustrates the breakdown of where participants were actively living at the time of the Safe Black Sis™ event.

The attendees explicitly indicated that they were within the age range of 13-27. Of the attendees who reported they were students, six (6) were in high school, two (2) were in college, and one (1) was in university (undergraduate) studies. Attendees reported that they were studying the following: Biology, Environmental Management, Science, and Social Support Work.

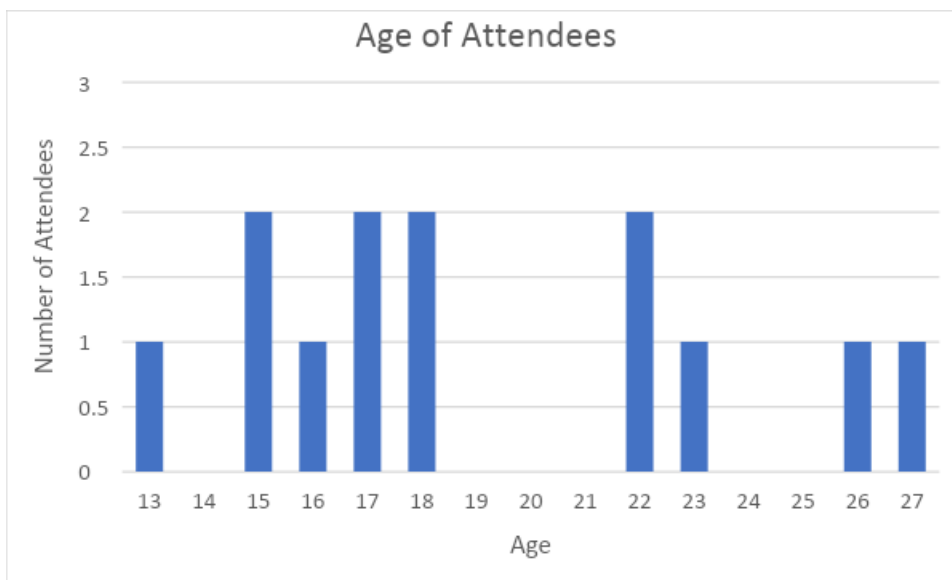


Figure 6: The graph displays the number of attendees that indicated a particular age. The majority of the participants were on the lower end of the age range. However, overall, there were attendees that fell across the age range.

Four (4) attendees reported that they were working. Reported occupations included the following: healthcare, marketing director, and personal support worker.

Attendees were identified from various parts of the African Diaspora (Figure 7).

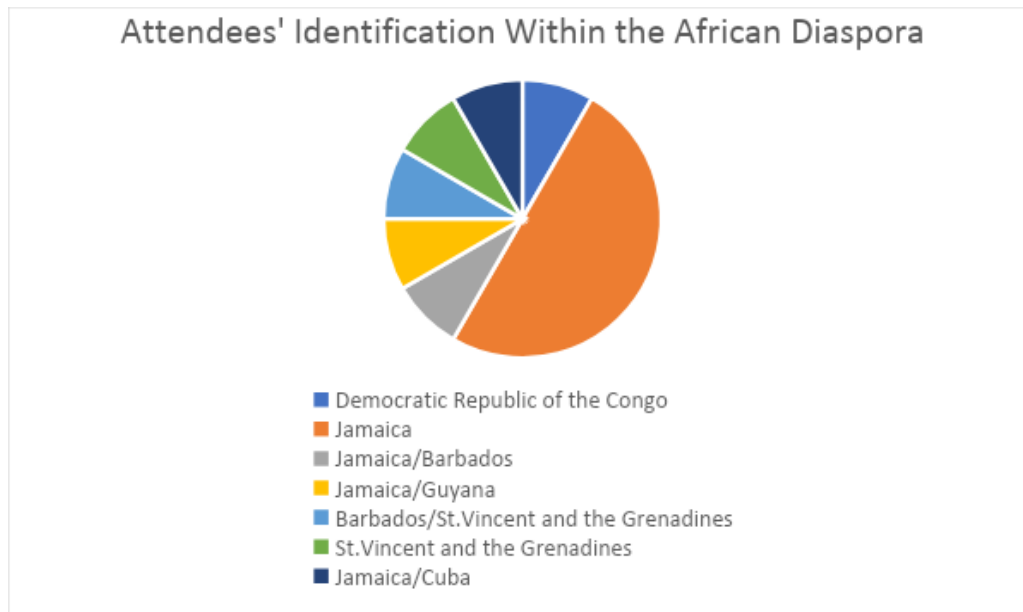


Figure 7: The above chart indicates where the attendees identified as within the African Diaspora. Evidently, there is a variety of countries and combinations of countries. The most common country was Jamaica.

Data Representing Safety

When completing the post-survey event, attendees were asked to select the level of safety that they felt after participating in this session. The question provided a scale; selecting 1 reflects feeling extremely unsafe and selecting 10 reflects feeling extremely safe. All answers ranged on the higher end of the scale, which indicates that participants felt safe after participating in the session.

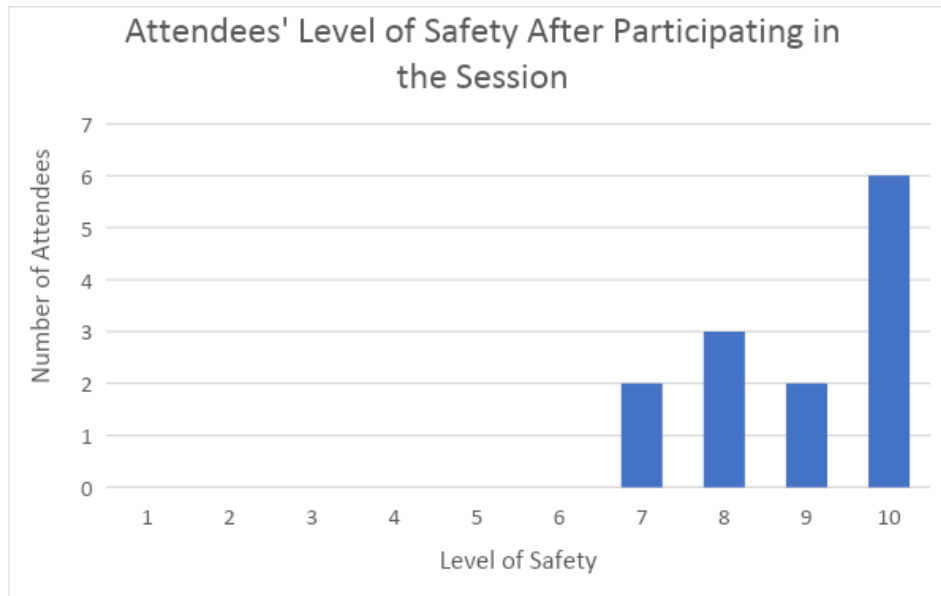


Figure 8: The graph displays the level of safety that attendees felt after participating in the Safe Black Sis™ session. All responses were on the upper end of the scale, which reflects that attendees felt more safe than unsafe after the session. In fact, the most commonly reported answer was 10, which means many attendees felt extremely safe after the session.

Attendees were asked whether they had ever learned about safety or self-defense prior to the session. The vast majority of attendees reported their answers in the negative, which shows an evident lack of knowledge of safety and self-defense among the Black female youth. Eight (8) attendees responded with “no”. One (1) attendee reported that her knowledge of the subject ranged from never learning about it or learning very little. Two (2) attendees reported they learned about safety and self-defense in their physical education class at school. Interestingly, these two attendees were on the lower end of the age range; one was 15 years old while the other was 18 years old. This could point towards a recent, yet underdeveloped initiative to incorporate safety and self-defense training in school. Only one (1) attendee answered in the affirmative.

Attendees were asked what they found helpful in today’s session. Twelve (12) of the thirteen (13) responses mentioned the self-defense and/or sister circle portions of the session being helpful. Overall, attendees felt that everything covered in the program was helpful. Here are some specific comments that they shared with us:

- **“The self-defense tips were simple enough to remember but seemed highly effective, and the sharing circle made me feel very welcomed and included.”**
- “To control your breathing and get big.”
- “Statistics and the explanation of the self-defense methods.”
- “The self defense.”
- **“All aspects of the session were helpful but especially the self-defense portion. It has helped me realize a lot of things, especially about staying fit.”**
- “I found it helpful to learn new ways to defend myself and ensure my safety in my community.”
- “Active conversations that are relevant and relatable. As well as self-defense tactics.”
- **“Standing up for yourself, in a verbal and physical way. But more in the verbal department.”**
- **“Learning how it’s important to be physically active! Also, how it is important to learn how to defend yourself mentally, physically, and emotionally.”**
- “I found it helpful to learn how to properly defend yourself and think about what you are doing before you act.”
- “When the group was talking about their own experience I was able to learn from it.”

Attendees were asked how they think safety and self-defense contribute to Black female youth's overall wellness? All of the twelve (12) responses highlighted the importance of safety and self-defense contributing to Black female youth's overall wellness. Their responses included:

- **“Significantly. Safety is one of the basic needs that humans need and Black women are overly-victimized so it impacts their wellness significantly.”**
- “It’s important to learn how to protect ourselves and gain knowledge on how to protect our wellbeing.”
- **“Having a sense of control and trust in your ability to protect yourself is a big protective factor of Black female youth's wellness.”**
- “It's important, as it has shown me that you don't need to be the biggest/strongest in the room.”
- “Very well.”

- **“Safety and self-defence help female youth to feel safe which is a big part of wellness. Eliminating or reducing the feeling of being unsafe is one less thing to worry about.”**
- **“I believe that it contributes a lot to Black female youth’s wellness because they are more likely to experience DV, and to have this type of knowledge, it helps them because it provides knowledge of what to do in situations where they are being threatened or hurt in any type of way.”**
- “Very important especially to know how to defend yourself physically and emotionally.”
- “More people would opt to speak up for themselves.”
- “It can affect your day-to-day life.”
- “I think it helps them to feel more safe and not worry too much if someone approaches.”
- “Self-defense is very important to Black female youth wellness because it is important to be aware.”

The attendees were asked “We have found that Black female youth often do not seek help when they are victimized. Why do you think that is and what changes need to be made so Black female youth feel safe and supported?” Four (4) responses mentioned the apprehensions about the justice system and fear of facing discrimination, criminalization, and blame; two (2) of these responses recommended having diversity in the justice system, especially for the cases that impact Black females. One (1) response shared concern about being retraumatized. Four (4) responses discussed cultural stigmas, feelings of shame and fear, and being taught that their feelings are invalid and should be minimized. The most common suggestions for changes that would help Black female youth feel safe and supported were overall providing support and offering a safe environment to share; five (5) responses mentioned these suggestions.

The responses were:

- **“I think because they don’t know the ins and outs of the justice system and don’t want to be in a worse situation by seeking help (like the police not doing anything and having to live with the man you just reported) and also because of cultural stigmas.”**

- “I found that Black women don’t seek help when victimized because it’s difficult going through that trauma twice.”
- “A lot of the time Black female youth do seek help, they are blamed for what happened. I think having more Black females working these cases could help with this.”
- “Due to shame and fear. Allow for safe environments where black women can openly share/communicate their feelings.”
- “Changes that need to be made are to not criminalize Black female youth for coming forward so that it doesn’t happen to them or others again.”
- **“I believe that Black females are looked at in negative ways in our society, so they are uncomfortable sharing things with people because they are afraid of being discriminated against. To fix this we need to make places more welcoming. In the different systems, we need to see more diversity so that people are comfortable with sharing their stories and different experiences.”**
- “We are usually taught that there are bigger problems in the world than our safety. Changes would include teaching women that no matter how small the problem is it is valid.”
- “Support within their own communities.”
- “Black youth in society already face difficult challenges in their life from childhood to growing up to be young individuals in society. It’s a stigma that most face and it needs to be addressed. What needs to be changed is that there need to be more services for youth who need support in areas they struggle with. More B3 organizations.”
- “I think this needs to be changed because without getting help, the person can do it again.”
- **“Black females to be supported and feel like their voices are being heard.”**
- “We as Black women need as much support as possible.”

The Safe Black Sis™ Experience

Cupid's Sting Non-Profit wanted to ensure that attendees were receiving the best experience possible. We understand that while Black female youth are required to fill the gap in research, they also need to be prioritized and made comfortable when sharing their experiences. We were careful to avoid traumatization and wanted all attendees to feel comfortable. To ensure we accomplished our goal, we requested feedback from the attendees. Once again, we assured attendees that all feedback collected is anonymous.

When attendees were asked whether they felt comfortable and supported in the space that was provided for them, 100% of the responses were "yes". When attendees were asked whether they would recommend the Safe Black Sis™ program to other Black female youth, 100% of the responses were "yes". This outcome was crucial, as Cupid's Sting Non-Profit hopes to provide future opportunities to collect more research and educate Black female youth on safety and self-defense. Nevertheless, while we were already expecting to have the majority of attendees answer in the affirmative, we were grateful to confirm this and see a resounding "yes" to these questions. The nature of the conversations tends to teeter on uncomfortable at times. However, these conversations are important to have and proved to be beneficial to Black female youth who participated in the Safe Black Sis™ session.

Testimonials and Suggestions for Improvement

To gauge attendees' experience, we requested testimonials and suggestions for improvement. This provided more detail on areas to focus on. Their responses included:

- "I would suggest that they be a bit longer as I feel that there is much more we could've gone over and that I would've loved to learn. Also, the facilitator was very charismatic and good at making people feel welcome."
- "I enjoyed it. I would recommend this program to more women."
- "Longer self-defense time."

- “I love the program and would recommend it to others. I've learned new things about self-defense.”
- “I think every Black kid should know about this, so they can also know how to help themselves.”
- “Dr. Samuel was very informative, passionate, and created a very safe feeling environment.”
- “I thoroughly enjoyed myself at today’s event. There were many lessons to learn to prepare for your safety physically and emotionally.”
- “Longer time to practice self-defense skills. And maybe, put the chairs closer together so we’re not so far apart.”
- “I feel like programs like this should continue to happen to help young Black seniors [high school] feel like they have a safe space to meet other people going through what they’re going through.”

Attendees were asked how they would rate the Safe Black Sis™ session. 1 star reflects a poor experience in the Safe Black Sis™ session. 5 stars reflect an excellent experience in the Safe Black Sis™ session.

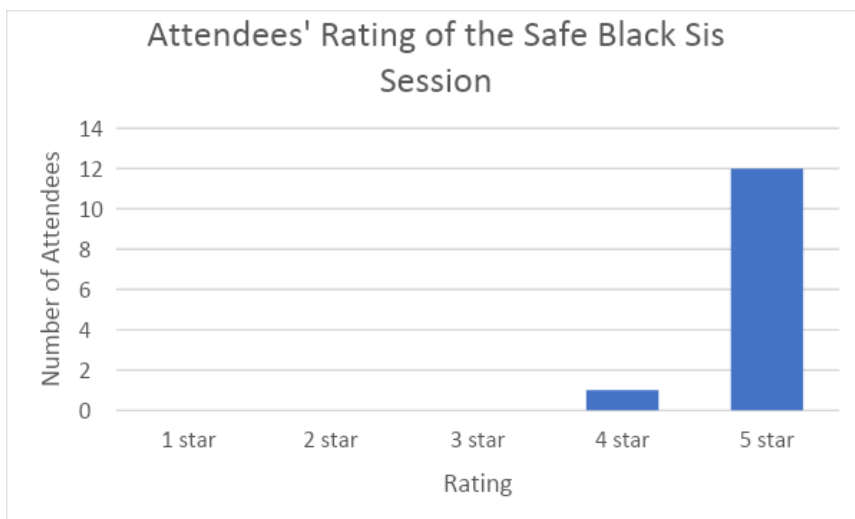


Figure 9: Attendees’ experience of the Safe Black Session was on the positive end of the scale. The vast majority of the attendees selected the option for an excellent experience. Only one (1) participant selected a 4-star rating, which was the lowest rating selected.

While asking attendees, “How did you hear about this event?”, was meant for administrative and marketing purposes, it shed light on the ability to form a stronger community. Of the twelve (12) attendees who responded to the question, ten (10) heard about the event through word of mouth. One (1) heard about the event through Instagram as well. Another one (1) heard about the event solely through Eventbrite. Furthermore, as seen through the prevalence of word of mouth as a response, it is clear that the community’s foundation is present, but Safe Black Sis™ has the opportunity to make it stronger and larger.

Comparison of pre-event survey and post-event survey responses

The surveys offered a unique opportunity. The data gathered included the participant’s emails, which we assured was solely for the purpose of organizing data. The benefit of doing this was that it allowed us to collect and compare information from the pre-event survey and post-event survey. In the pre-event survey, participants were asked to select the level of safety that they felt in their community. There were 5 options: Very unsafe, Unsafe, Neither safe nor unsafe, Safe, and Very safe. In the post-event survey, attendees were asked to select the level of safety that they felt after participating in this session. Selecting 1 reflects feeling extremely unsafe and selecting 10 reflects feeling extremely safe.

Participant	Currently, how safe do you feel in your community?	How safe do you feel after participating in this session?
A	Neither safe nor unsafe	7/10
B	Neither safe nor unsafe	7/10
C	Safe	10/10
D	Neither safe nor unsafe/Safe	9/10
E	Safe	10/10
F	Safe	8/10
G	Neither safe nor unsafe/Safe	9/10
H	Neither safe nor unsafe	10/10
I	Neither safe nor unsafe	8/10
J	Safe	8/10
K	Neither safe nor unsafe	10/10
L	Neither safe nor unsafe	10/10

Table 1: The table outlines the responses of participants that completed both, the pre-event survey and post-event survey. It shows the comparison of the level of safety they felt in their community prior to participating in the Safe Black Sis™ event and the level of safety they felt after participating in the Safe Black Sis™ session.

It should be noted that none of the participants selected that they felt “Very safe” prior to the Safe Black Sis™ session. However, participants did select the 10/10 option after participating in the session, which reflects feeling “extremely safe”. In fact, in the pre-event survey, many participants selected neutral responses, “Neither safe nor unsafe”. Few reported that they felt “Safe”. After the session, all participants confidently selected the higher end of the scale. The lowest response was 7/10. Thus, the data reflects that the Safe Black Sis™ session allowed participants to feel safer in their communities.

Limitations

As the data was collated, it became evident that there were some limitations due to the nature of the research. For instance, since the information was sensitive, it was necessary to ensure that participants felt comfortable sharing their information. We did this by assuring participants that no identifiable information would be collected unless it was for the purpose of organizing data. This proved to be a limitation. We were unable to ask for further clarification or follow-up interviews, as the data was anonymous. Nevertheless, this proved to be the best way to maximize participation from Black female youth.

Another limitation was the inability to record the Sister Circle session and provide a complete, accurate transcription. Due to the sensitive nature of the conversations and encouraging attendees to share their experiences, it was necessary. However, when the attendees were reassured that the session was not recorded, there was relief, so this was the best course of action to ultimately collect data.

The unique opportunity provided by the surveys allowed for the comparison of one section of the pre-event survey and the post-event survey. It would have been a clearer comparison if the scales were the same. The pre-event survey asked, “Currently, how safe do you feel in your community?” Participants were required to answer using a 5-point scale. The post-event survey asked, “How safe do you feel after participating in this session?” Attendees were required to answer using a 10-point scale. While there was a noticeable increase in the level of safety, it would be easier and clearer to have the same scale. On the other hand, the benefit of using two different scales avoided bias from the participants, as they would be more inclined to show an increase in the level of safety after attending the session.

Continuing, it would be beneficial to ask more questions that can be used to compare how participants feel before and after the session. Nevertheless, it is important not to forego the qualitative nature of the research for the quantitative comparison, as this provided detailed insight.

Conclusion

Cupid's Sting Non-Profit endeavored to determine whether this type of programming is beneficial to Black female youth. While this was a pilot program, it is clear that this program works and accomplishes the goal of marrying wellness and safety for a population that is disproportionately affected by gender-based violence.

Safe Black Sis™ is bigger than youth mental health and wellness. Our driving mission is safety, and the fact that two separate people had experiences with a potential human trafficker speaks volumes about the issues that these young people are dealing with. This is a method to assist them and disrupt the violence and potential violence they could be experiencing, so they avoid this trauma and live fruitful lives. This program is the intervention to disrupt the harmful cycle, and we know it should be the intervention, as the pilot confirmed the program's benefits. Thus, to sustain this program and help more Black female youth, funding is a requirement.

Cupid's Sting Non-Profit's self-defense training gives young women an understanding of their own value and self-worth by seeing that their community values their safety. After all, young women cannot thrive in a community if they do not feel safe. Ultimately, self-defense training promotes physical health through movement, but it also requires strategic thinking for safe and smart execution. For self-defense to be effective, it requires an understanding of movement, the ability to recognize the time for action, and awareness of one's surroundings; these additional components stimulate the mind by engaging in active creative thinking.

Overall, through the Safe Black Sis™ program, Cupid's Sting Non-Profit offers a unique opportunity for Black female youth to learn about wellness while ensuring they are safe in their own communities. Not only is a supportive community being cultivated, but Cupid's Sting Non-Profit is also continuously building an inventory of race-based data to fill in the gaping holes in present research (Samuel and Patel, 2023).

Once again, we would like to emphasize that the pilot program would have never been possible without the participants. We appreciate the openness, candidness, trust, and bravery of the

participants in informing this topic. Evidently, the survey data displays a need for culturally specific safety and wellness programming for Black female youth. We are encouraged by the young girls and women who participated; not only are they thinking about their own mental health and safety, but they are being productive and proactive about addressing the needs of the community. In turn, they and others can live safer and healthier lives.

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