




Missing & Murdered African American Women Task Force

Report Overview, Recommendations
and Reflection Questions





In this slide deck

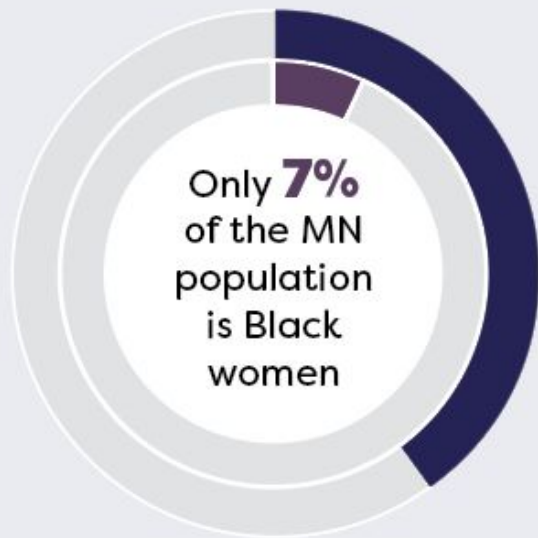
1. The What and Why of MMAAW
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The What and Why of MMAAW

Black women and girls are uniquely vulnerable and too easily erased from public discussions about missing and murdered people. Statistics paint a devastating picture of the magnitude of the issue: over 60,000 Black women and girls are missing in the United States, and Black women are more than twice as likely than their peers to be victims of homicide.



but **40%** of domestic violence victims in Minnesota are Black women



Black women are nearly **3 times** more likely to be murdered than White women in Minnesota

**“You have
to be bleeding
to be heard.”**

Lived Experience Interview
Zen Bin 1

By creating the Missing and Murdered African American Women's Task Force in 2021, the Minnesota Legislature became the first U.S. state to dedicate resources to investigate and to consider the measures necessary to reduce and prevent violence against Black women and girls.

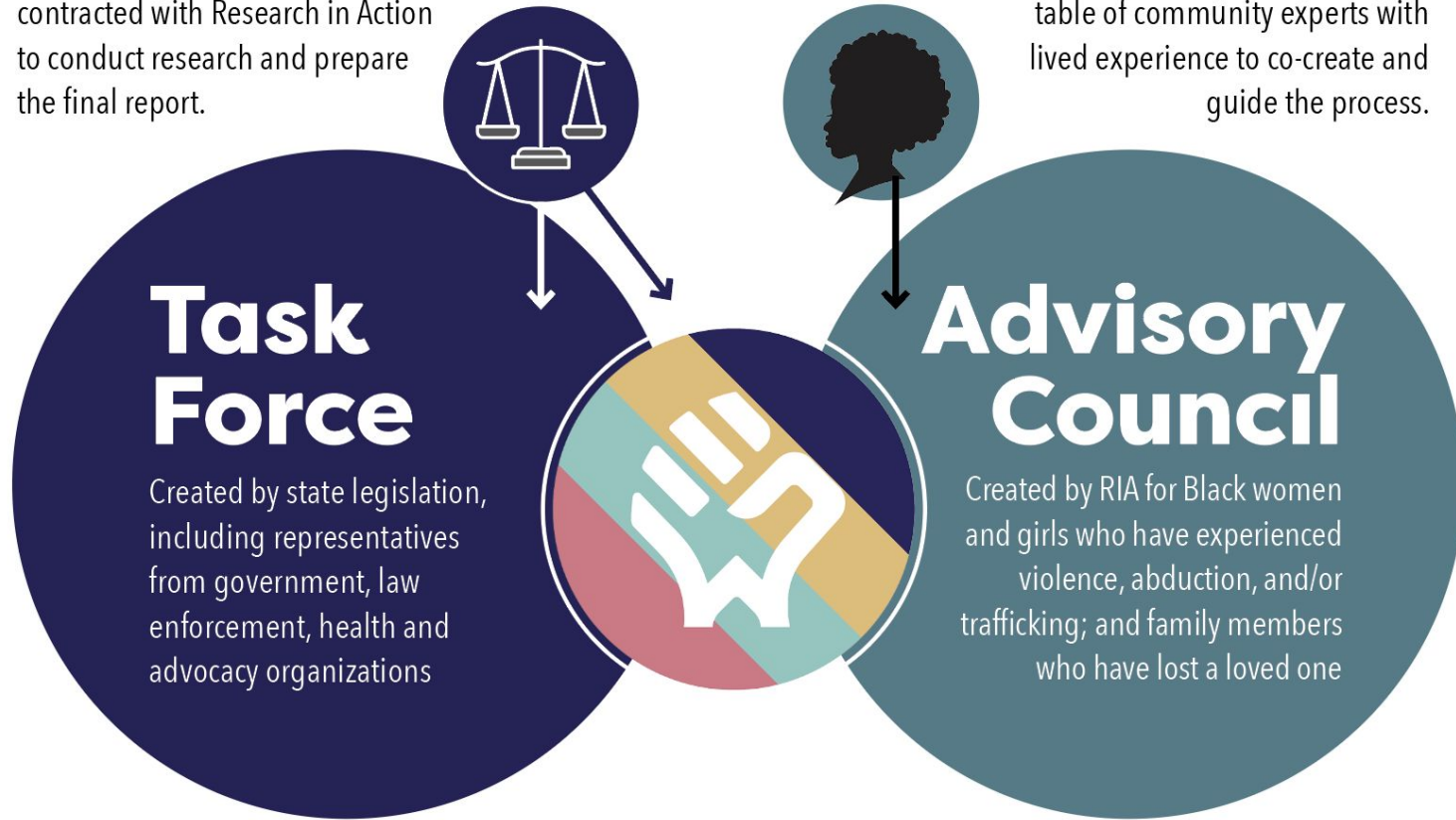
The MMAAW Task Force was charged to examine and report on:

- Systemic causes of violence against African American women and girls
- Appropriate methods of tracking and collecting data
- Policies, practices, and institutions that assist in perpetuating violence against African American women and girls
- Measures necessary to address and reduce violence against African American women and girls
- Measures necessary to help victims, their families, and their communities.



The MN Department of Public Safety convened the Task Force and contracted with Research in Action to conduct research and prepare the final report.

In contrast to top-down approaches, Research in Action convened a table of community experts with lived experience to co-create and guide the process.



Task Force

Created by state legislation, including representatives from government, law enforcement, health and advocacy organizations

Advisory Council

Created by RIA for Black women and girls who have experienced violence, abduction, and/or trafficking; and family members who have lost a loved one



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Centering Black women and girls in the research

DEFICIT FRAME

Too often, Black women and girls are seen as victims, objects of study or problems to be solved.

Root Causes of Violence Against Black Women and Girls

244 years of **slavery** * legally sanctioned sexual **violence**, forced childbirth & family separation
* 100 years of **Jim Crow** law * pervasive media and cultural **stereotypes** of Black women as lazy, dangerous, and hyper-sexual
* **lower wages** and workplace discrimination
* denied equal **housing** opportunities * highest rates of **eviction**
* biased **medical** treatment



* higher rates of mother and infant **mortality** * **adultification** of Black girls * students pushed out of school * **criminalization** of Black women *
* discrimination physical abuse from **police** * viewing victims of violence as **aggressors** * racial disparities in **criminal charges** and sentencing *
erasure of missing and murdered Black women and girls

ASSET FRAME

Black women and girls must be seen as valued members of our communities with the ability to identify solutions to their own problems.



mother * friend * survivor
writer * kind * giving
willing to help * mother
non-judgemental
Black woman * love
to cook and spend
time with my family
mother * voice for
the voiceless *
giver * the first
person to call
happy * artist
favorite aunt
survivor
Black
woman

mother * fair * trustworthy
family-oriented
mother * strong
business owner
Black woman
loving * mother
people person
care giver
travel-lover
problem solver
outgoing
child of God
leader * mother
mental health
advocate
winner

Personal Description

In many institutional reports, **quantitative** research is considered more valid than **qualitative** research.

This task force was different because it intentionally created spaces for Black women and girls and key stakeholders to share their lived experiences and direct insights.

Qualitative research: Information that can not be counted, but data that can be observed and recorded through direct observation, one on one interviews, focus groups, and other methods.

Quantitative research: Information that is counted, measured and replicated to model or predict change or impact, often through charts or graphs.

Lived experience: First-hand, everyday experience living a particular reality; someone with lived experience is thus determined to be the expert, and as those closest to the problem, they are the closest to the solution.



Women with lived experience on the Advisory Council created their **definition of violence** to frame the research.

Violence: Encompasses and includes physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, and monetary violence. Our definition of “violence” goes beyond the physical aspect of violence, to the adverse conditions that inflict harm on individuals and groups. Economic, social, and psychological violence undermine wellbeing and reduce access to resources that help people recover from physically violent incidents. This broader definition of violence also illuminates the importance of acknowledging the roles that systems play in generating disparities in violence and healing.



The Task Force and Advisory Council also co-created the **research questions and process** for collecting information.

What institutions track and dehumanize Black women and girls and make them more susceptible to violence?



What needs to change to ensure Black women and girls are treated with dignity and respect?



Research in Action convened and connected the Task Force and Advisory Council to create shared understanding and co-develop the research approach



20 Key Informant Interviews

Literature review

15 Lived Experience Interviews

Findings & Report

This process **centered Black women and girls** in both defining what questions were asked and how — and the recommendations put forward in the final report.



“When I finally was able to get on the phone with someone who was able to make record of this I was asked, “Well, what took you so long?” I didn't wait a week. I waited until the next business day, and you guys gave me the runaround for a week. I felt unheard in that moment and then was told, ‘Well, actually, we can't do this for you over the phone.’” (Lived experience interview)

Drivers of disparities and excessive vulnerability



Slavery &
Jim Crow



Work



Housing



Health



Education



Criminal
justice



Stereotypes

Understanding the **roots** of how and why Black women and girls are not as protected from violence as white women and girls requires attention to both **historical and current manifestations of interlocking systems of oppression.**



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Findings: What Black women and girls said



“Instead of shunning me, offer me help. But you tell me I better do this or do that, and I have 2 days, you know? And then I get everything done and you still won’t get off my back. I’m already broken. It’s traumatic.”



Hire people who care about & reflect the community

Key Finding #1



"Unfortunately, Caucasian women need to be educated on Black women and Black society, and the things that we go through, because it's not the same thing they go through."

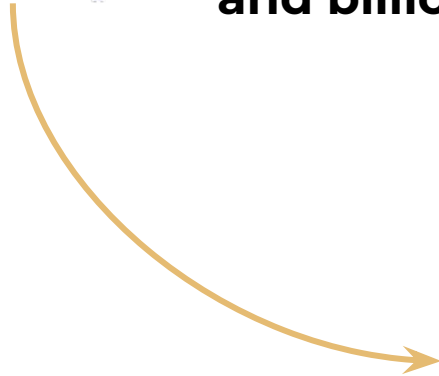


Require training for professionals working in MMAAW-related domains

Key Finding #2



“A lot of these [advocacy and domestic violence] groups barely have the funding but they're more effective than the police stations that have billions and billions of dollars.”



Key Finding #3



Increase resources for the work, especially specific support for Black women & girls



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Recommendations: How Black women & girls want change

RECOMMENDATIONS

The task force, advisory council and interviews pointed to six concrete recommendations.



Establish a Missing and Murdered African American Women (MMAAW) Office



Create and fund specific spaces and resources to serve Black women and girls



Develop effective, culturally appropriate, anti-racist trainings and professional education for systems professionals



Hire more African American staff and create incentives for current Black and people of color staff to stay and grow in the profession



Implement better coordination across agencies to increase accessibility of services and responsiveness



Identify and implement better pathways to both emergency and long-term housing



ESTABLISH A MISSING AND MURDERED AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN OFFICE

Possible functions/scope of an MMAAW Office could include but aren't limited to:

- Searching for and partnering with grantmaking organizations willing to create grant opportunities to distribute funds to Black women-led community organizations and new initiatives
- Developing and monitoring effective training and protocols co-designed by Black women and girls to be later mandated for use by local counties, law enforcement, public health professionals, shelters, human service providers, and affordable housing administrators.
- Working with Safe Harbor, the Bureau of Criminal Apprehensive, local law enforcement, and shelters to develop coordination strategies
- Monitor and evaluate efforts to improve coordination of services across agencies



CREATE AND FUND SPECIFIC SPACES AND RESOURCES TO SERVE BLACK WOMEN AND

Black women and girls have ideas, based on lived experience and intergenerational knowledge, that, if applied with sufficient resources, could generate better outcomes for victims of violence or those who seek support to reduce their exposure to violence.

Direct funds should be allocated to efforts created by and for Black women and girls to address disparities and create new intervention and support models.



DEVELOP EFFECTIVE, CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE, ANTI-RACIST TRAININGS &

Better, consistent training is needed for professionals who work with Black women and girls to build trust and repair historical harms.

Training should be relevant to the specific area of service or professional field, and periodic to build skills and respond to emergent issues.



HIRE AND RETAIN AFRICAN AMERICAN STAFF

Hire more people who reflect the community experiences and cultural backgrounds, as well as the retain existing Black staff to avoid a “revolving door” where burnout leads to departures.

Relevant state agencies should eliminate unnecessary barriers to Black applicants; create pathways for African American applicants with lived experience to gain necessary credentials, and; provide professional development resources to retain and support for Black, Indigenous and POC staff.



DESIGN AND SUPPORT BETTER COORDINATION ACROSS AGENCIES

Coordinating across the many agencies and offices that relate to issues of MMAAW is key to reducing the frustrations, fears, and roadblocks Black women and girls experience, as well as increasing effectiveness of professionals.

This includes providing a range of services in spaces that serve survivors of violence, such as shelters and health clinics; coordinating referrals to other services to reduce the burden on survivors or victims' families; and creating a new statewide missing persons database.



ENACT POLICIES / REFORMS TO MAKE EMERGENCY AND LONG-TERM HOUSING

Black women and girls are the most severely impacted by the housing crisis.

Increased efforts to create short term and permanent affordable housing options is urgently needed, including funding for Black- or BIPOC-specific shelters and emergency safe houses; eliminating prohibitory eligibility restrictions for existing shelters; housing policies that recognize family structures beyond the “nuclear family;” and shelter spaces where older children or vulnerable family members of any gender identity can stay with their parent.



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Reflecting on YOUR role

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

“You have to be bleeding to be heard.”

Lived Experience interview

What would it look like if Black women knew that they could seek support when they are in crisis without having to already be bleeding to prove they're in danger?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

“I have to take off from work to go downtown to this precinct and make this report. Then, while I’m down there I’m asked ‘Why did you wait so long to do this?’ And then I have to explain everything while also remembering that I am in a police station, so I can’t get angry.”

Lived Experience interview

What would we need to change about the culture of our local precincts in order for families to feel they will be heard and not misunderstood when they try to report a loved one missing?

What if they were greeted by a counselor on staff to support families who report a missing person?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

“My stomach hurt a lot when I was a kid but was told it was ‘attention seeking behavior.’ My case manager, when I was briefly in foster care, took me to the doctor... I lived with this pain for decades until doctors discovered parts of my intestine were dying. I had the whole thing removed. I had to advocate for myself.”

Lived Experience interview

What would a healthcare system that validated the experiences Black women and girls share about their health look and feel like? How might racial health disparities decrease as a result?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

“Get off my back, I’m trying. Instead of shunning me, offer me help. You tell me I better go do this, or do that and I have 2 days to do that, you know? And then I get everything done and you still won’t get off my back. I’m already broken. It was traumatic.”

Lived Experience interview

How can professionals hold space for and give grace to Black women and girls who are experiencing trauma, even if they do not share the same cultural background or life experiences?

How might they grow as individual leaders in their field if they had the skills to comprehend the experiences of people who are not like them?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

“You gotta go to 15 places to get help. Well, by the time you get to your fifth place to get some help, you’re exhausted, you have nothing else to gain.”

Lived Experience interview

What would it look like if our human service systems were created and designed by people with lived experience? How might the processes and the types of support offered to community members look and feel different?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

“For me, it’s all about accessibility and availability. Programs are full, resources are used and exhausted. Don’t reinvent the wheel, just recreate programs that work, particularly for families.”

Lived Experience interview

How might our social service systems, shelters, and law enforcement agencies invest in equitable evaluation and community centered annual reporting that is inclusive and reflective of the community’s definition of success?

How might our institutions show up differently if they believed they were beholden to impacted communities, not the board, the elected official, or the agency leadership?



Learn more

Read the full reports

Access the action toolkit

researchinaction.com/mmaaw