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Black women at greater risk of becoming victims of homicidal domestic violence

Domestic violence is a crime that cuts a painful swath across all races, socioeconomic levels and cultures.

But experts in the field say that one set of victims — black women — is at a far greater risk to experience the grimmest of all domestic violence statistics: They are about three times more likely to die at the hands of a partner or ex-partner than members of other racial groups. Intimate-partner homicide is also among the leading causes of death for black women ages 15 to 35.

And, the experts add, their plight may not change anytime soon because of complex underlying causes that in some cases stretch back generations: unemployment, poverty, lack of education, incarceration and violent environments.

“A lot of groups have economic issues, but a lot of groups have not had the economic issues we’ve had for as long as we’ve had, for the reasons that we’ve had,” said Dr. Gail Wyatt, a professor of psychiatry and bio-behavioral sciences at UCLA for 35 years.

“This is not just an African-American problem, but we are disproportionately affected by it.”

Domestic violence killings have become a high-profile issue in North Texas. In August 2012, authorities say, 32-year-old Deanna Cook’s ex-husband killed her in her home as she called 911 for help. Records show he had a history of abuse.

Last month, police say, Erbie Bowser shot and killed four people, including his ex-girlfriend and estranged wife, and wounded four others in a horrific domestic violence spree. Bowser also had a history of domestic abuse.

In 2012, Dallas police recorded 12 intimate partner murders, and six of the victims were black women. Overall, the department recorded 13,324 family violence offenses — 7,366 involving African-Americans.

Earlier this year, upset by a string of domestic violence attacks in the area, Dallas Mayor Mike Rawlings organized a men’s rally against domestic violence aimed at making men more accountable for their actions against women. The event had a heavy turnout of black men.

In an interview last month, Rawlings said it would be naïve of him as a mayor to opine on the reasons why black women are at such risk of being killed by their partners. He said such analysis is better left to anthropologists and social scientists. But he did say those experts should look at the role of poverty and race in studying domestic violence issues.

Several experts agreed. Dr. Jacquelyn Campbell, nursing professor at Johns Hopkins University and a leader in the field, has spent more than three decades focusing on black homicidal domestic abuse. She started at a time when she said it was the No. 1 cause of death for black women.

In 1986, she developed the danger assessment tool to help determine the likelihood that an abused woman would be killed by her
intimate partner. The tool is still in use.

**Joblessness factor**

Campbell said that while prior domestic violence is the top risk factor in determining future attacks, unemployment is “by far the most important demographic” in putting someone at risk to be killed by an intimate partner.

The latest national unemployment rate for blacks is 13 percent, more than double the 6.4 percent for whites. For black men, that figure is 13.5 percent, compared with 6.2 percent for white males.

“Unemployed white men were as likely to kill their partners as unemployed black men, but because the black unemployment rate is higher, we see more deaths of black women,” Campbell said. “In this society ... having a job is meaningful in terms of one's sense of masculinity. If they don’t have that prestige, if they can’t control anything else, at least I’m going to control my woman.”

Paige Flink, executive director of the Family Place in Dallas, said that the Dallas statistics on murder and domestic violence track with her records. She noted that blacks account for about half of all domestic violence calls to her abuse shelter.

“And we know that African-Americans aren’t anywhere near 50 percent of the population,” she said.

Flink agreed that unemployment is an overwhelming factor in domestic abuse and noted that black unemployment rates historically are the highest of any race. A lethality assessment by Dallas police for the past year showed that “40 to 50 percent of these batterers are unemployed,” she said.

Changing the thoughts and actions of men is a major focus of those attempting to reduce homicidal violence against black women.

“This won’t change unless men are engaged,” said Dr. Tricia Bent-Goodley, a professor of social work at Howard University, another top researcher. “Men must be included because they have been the missing link. Without them, we are going to have [more] women and children losing their lives.”

Dr. Gail Garfield is an associate professor in the sociology department at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice at City University of New York who also has done extensive study in the field. She said socioeconomic factors ranging from chronic employment to high rates of incarceration, combined with others, lead to a feeling of disrespect that can lead to homicidal violence.

“Poor black men ... have simply lost a lot of hope. They have nothing to lose, except for one thing, and that one thing is respect,” Garfield said. “Black people are real big on respect, especially poor black people. However that respect gets defined, once that line has been crossed, you see violence and violation.”

**Entrenched habits**

The experts also say other causes are at play that also factor into the deaths of black women at the hands of their partners. These issues go back decades and are steeped in traditions and habits that are difficult to break.

For example, domestic violence researchers say black women often remain in volatile relationships longer than abused women of other races. Bent-Goodley said some “African-American women just don’t feel safe in interacting with some of the systems” designated to help abuse victims, such as the police or even women’s shelters.

Or if they do decide to leave an abusive partner, their plans are often met with resistance by family members or religious leaders. So the violence continues to escalate and many of the women don’t even realize how dangerous their situation is.

“We don’t really talk about domestic violence,” Bent-Goodley said. “African-American women turn to either their friends or their faith-based community. Unfortunately, many of our faith-based communities tell them that divorce is a sin and that they should stay in the relationship. Some of the messages that we get can stop us from reaching out for help.”

Bishop T.D. Jakes, senior pastor of The Potter’s House in Dallas, said faith plays a major role in the issue. But he, too, stressed the other factors that lead to abuse.

“Statistics prove that during the recession, domestic violence increased drastically,” Jakes said. “Anger and rage are building up in the hearts of men who feel helpless and hopeless. And more and more, men have rage that is suppressed. We have got to find a
And in many other instances, black women who are abuse victims, instead of reporting the assaults or leaving, choose to fight back physically. The experts say it’s a cultural standard that is often applauded and admired by those close to the women. But they also note that willingness to “take a punch if they have to” and then give one back can lead to even more intense abuse from an angry spouse or partner.

“One of the things that it means to be a man is to not be beaten up by a woman,” Garfield said. “So it can take one of these things from a woman who is talking back to a man, to a woman who is hit defending herself, to escalating the violence.”

Tonya Lovelace, director of the Women of Color Network in Harrisburg, Pa., said that because they are defending themselves, some women may mistakenly believe that they aren’t really in an abusive relationship.

“We still may be willing to fight back and defend ourselves, where ultimately what we’re trying to do is defend our relationship,” Lovelace said. “By the time we come to the conclusion that we need outside help ... something really severe has already happened. A lot of times we don’t even see these women until they have been killed.”

Lovelace said she believes she knows what drives that thinking by some abused black women to “stick in it longer.”

“Some of that has to do with the idea that black men are scarce. We are at greater risk because of that and that belief that a little bit of violence in our relationship is nothing that can’t be handled.”

Declining cases

There is some good news, however. Overall domestic violence cases, including those involving blacks, have dropped dramatically for more than a decade. This trend is expected to continue as domestic violence laws are improved and applied more equitably.

Also, the experts said it is important to note that although studies prove black women are at much greater risk to become victims of intimate partner violence, the vast majority are not abused. And, they add, black men are not naturally inclined to abuse their partners.

But that is not to say that Bent-Goodley and others in her field are trying to play down the problem.

“Yes, it’s gotten better since 1976, but it’s still going on,” said Campbell of Johns Hopkins, adding that both victims and abusers need help. “We need to make sure they get the kind of counseling they need. It can’t be a family secret. They have to get professional help so that they don’t continue the cycle.

“I firmly believe we can get better at this and decrease the number of homicides,” Campbell added. “If I didn’t, I wouldn’t stay in the business.”

BY THE NUMBERS

The Violence Policy Center in Washington, D.C., found these facts in its 2012 report of 2010 domestic violence statistics for black women:

- **94 percent** of black women killed by men in single victim/single offender incidents knew their killers.
- **Nearly 15 times** as many black women were murdered by a man they knew than were killed by a stranger.
- **64 percent** of black victims who knew their offenders were wives, ex-wives or girlfriends of the offenders.
- **The number** of black women shot and killed by their husband or intimate partner was nearly five times as high as the total number murdered by strangers using all weapons combined.

GETTING HELP
Genesis Women's Shelter 24-hour hotline, 214-946-4357

The Family Place crisis hotline, 214-941-1991

National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233

SIGNS OF ABUSE

Your partner gets extremely angry at the slightest provocation and blames you for everything.

Your partner seeks to control every aspect of your life.

Your partner hits, slaps, punches, kicks or strangles you.

Your partner threatens to harm you or your children.

Your partner threatens to commit suicide if you end the relationship.

SOURCE: *Dallas Morning News* research

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Karen Henderson Meachem

My many years of studying this phenomenon proves that there are only two types of people in this planet and that is male and female because that is where the real war lies.

Reply Share

Frank Eveans

312 days ago
The Great Dr Nice Okse Who Brought My Husband Back To Me In Just One Day. My name is Nancy Frank from UK. I got married 1 year ago. My husband and I have been living a very happy and lovely life. So as time went on, I began to notice this strange attitude that he was possessing. He was now going out with other girls, to the extent that he was no longer picking up my calls, and he was not even sleeping in the house anymore. I became confused and didn’t know what to do anymore. So I became worried and stranded, that brought so many thoughts into my mind, because I have never experienced a thing like this in my life. So I decided to visit a spell caster, to see if he can help me out. So immediately I went to the internet, where I saw an amazing testimony of a spell caster who brought someone’s ex lover back, “Dr Nice Okse” so I contacted him immediately and I explained to him all my problems and he told me that it will be very easy for him to solve, compare to the ones that he has done before. And he also gave me some proof to be really sure of his work, and he assured me that my husband will come back to me as soon as he is through with the spell casting. And also he told me to put all my trust in him, and I really obeyed him. So it was 8:00 am on the next morning, when I was about going to work, when I received my husband call, and he told me that he was coming back home, and he was apologizing to me telling me that he is very sorry for the pain that he has cost me. And after some hours later, he really came back home, and that was how we continued our marriage with lot of love and happiness, and our love was now stronger than how it were before. Dr Nice Okse also told me that once my heart desire has been granted unto me that I should go and testify of his work right here on the internet. Right now I am the happiest woman on earth today as I am writing this testimony, and I want to really thank “Dr Nice Okse for bringing back my husband, and for bringing joy and love to my family. So my greatest advice for you out there who your husband or your wife is acting strange, or you have any problem with your relationship or anything that has to do with spell casting. He is capable of solving any problems. All you need do is for you to contact this man anytime, and I assure you that he will be of help to you, I am 100% sure that he will solve it out.
(professionallovespell@hotmail.com), THANK YOU DR NICE OKSE

I would love to see the domestic violence statistics among Black families during depression of the 1930's; or the Jim Crow era. I would like to know how many Black husbands/partners killed their partners when opportunities were even more scarce for us. I am not saying that economics is not a factor - clearly it is. But my question remains: How did our people emerge from slavery, lynchings, segregation and federally enforced racism and still produce resilient children who not only sustained our community, but changed the world?

Bishop Jakes has it right. Domestic violence has escalated in any community during difficult economic times. When you can't pay your bills and such, having a minor argument can seem like one more major thing. Or a wife and children or girlfriend can seem like more financial burdens. Family is also the near, so they can easily become the outlet for anger. This is true for WOMEN as well. But truthfully, many of the men who have murdered people have had other major issues to contend with that seemingly would have been shown themselves to someone, somewhere, anyway.

Isn't it a mistake to look at the unemployment rate, since that only includes those actively looking for a job? Wouldn't the labor participation rate be a better measure of the percentage of men in these racial groups who are actually working?

Unemployment rate excludes huge chunks of non-working people and skews the view considerably in my opinion.
Lee B
The truth hurts...
Reply Share
Anonymous
Huh?...i totally disagree with this propaganda...white men are the most Evil species that has ever existed....who would kill their spouse for insurance money? Listening?....They will kill they're whole family for an extra dollar or to be with their mystery woman....you can miss me with this BS article...white men are the Devil's by far of any creed or color!!!!
Reply Share
Anonymous
Because the live with black men, duhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh.
Reply Share
Anonymous
Should not the President get more involved in this?
Reply Share 1 reply
Anonymous
In modern political correctness speak, this sounds racist. One is not able to criticize minorities based on their being a minority. Everything is just fine so to speak.
Reply Share 1 reply
Anonymous

Dumisani Washington
Your question is legitimate in that the president:
1. is a Black man
2. has inserted himself in to other race issues (see Trayvon Martin, Henry Louis Gates), and
3. would be blamed for the 13%+ unemployment rate among Black men if he were White (especially if he were a Republican).
Reply Share
Delli Mathews

Isn't that a racist statement?
True, but racist.
Reply Share
Anonymous

Should not the President get more involved in this?
Reply Share 1 reply
Nikki Roberts

If race alone had to do with problems then EVERY problem would only have problem people in only one race. Even if something is a larger problem with one group of people over another, there are still representatives of ANY PROBLEM in EVERY RACE. People like YOU anonymous just like to use personal problems as an excuse to be racist. If I personally have issues, it is not the fault of the ENTIRE BLACK RACE or ALL AMERICANS or any other such stupid thing.
Reply Share
Jonathan Green
I strongly disagree with this statistic. This statistic is composed from data specifically targeting Black women and not a median populous of Anglo, Latino, and Asian. In addition, what geographical location were these numbers composed? These numbers have to be scientifically validate over a period of time and not within a time frame that does not examine empirical data from a sustainable period. Also, Deanna Cook death was preventable. Chief Brown and the Dallas Police Dept. botched a 911 call and made excuses to cover up the departments deficiency. Also, the cases in DeSoto where the Mavs ex dancer went on a rage are isolated incidents in a time frame that does not compare with the overall deaths of Anglo’s and Latino’s in time frame compiling data from 2010 to 2013.
Reply Share 3 replies
Dan
Wait, was this the time when the police failed to show up until hours after she placed the 911 call? That was extremely pathetic on the part of DPD.
Reply Share
Jonathan, the trouble with domestic violence (even if it is perpetrated by women toward men or men toward other men) is that there is often a silence that surrounds it. I know that it even happens in quiet immigrant communities, but they don't go to the police or it doesn't escalate to being an "outside" problem because relatives in families equally threaten the perpetrator. (More to come)

Also, Jonathan, it is just rising in our community recently. Unemployment and family dynamics issues that have changed from the past are big issues. I think the biggest problem is that in the past (even in the recent past) it did not escalate into murders. A man might beat a woman or vice versa, but there it would end. Now with the comfort with guns and such, the finality is more definite.

If you kill your spouse or girlfriend then you are evil. I don't care what race you are. I don't care if you have a job, and live in poverty. People that make excuses for murder are helping to destroy our fine country.