

**FACTORS INCREASING INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE IN BLACK WOMEN**

**Factors Contributing to Elevated Rates of Intimate Partner Violence Among Black  
American Women: A Literature Review**

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**HPRB 5010 : Research Design**

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**April 22, 2025**

# FACTORS INCREASING INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE IN BLACK WOMEN

## *Research Question*

What risk factors contribute to increased rates of intimate partner violence among Black women in the United States?

## **Introduction**

Domestic violence (DV) is the economic, physical, sexual, emotional, and psychological abuse of children, adults, or elders within a household (Huecker, 2023). Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a subset of domestic violence, and specifically refers to which is abuse or aggression that occurs in a romantic relationship (CDC, n.d.). There are many forms of domestic violence, each having different effects on the wellness of the victim. Physical violence is when a person harms or attempts to harm a partner with physical force. Emotional or psychological abuse is the use of verbal or non-verbal communication with the intent to harm a partner mentally or emotionally or to exert control over a partner. 48.4% of women in the United States have reported experiencing psychological abuse by an intimate partner in their lifetime (National Domestic Violence Hotline, n.d.). Sexual violence is defined as forcing or attempting to force a partner to take part in a sex act, sexual touching, or non-physical sexual events when a partner does not or cannot consent (CDC, n.d.). 51.1% of female rape victims report being raped by an intimate partner (National Domestic Violence Hotline, n.d.). Finally, economic abuse is the forcible control of money and finances without a person's consent or knowledge.

Over 10 million people are impacted by IPV on an annual basis, and approximately one in four women will experience physical violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime (Huecker, 2023). Intimate partner violence occurs in over 10 million people per year (Huecker,

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2023). Approximately one in four women will experience physical violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime (Huecker, 2023). In the United States, domestic violence is responsible for over 1,500 deaths annually (Huecker, 2023).

Individual, relationship, community, and societal issues have an influence on the rates of domestic violence. Educational attainment has an inverse relationship with domestic violence, leaving people more vulnerable to abuse (Huecker, 2023). Meaning, those who have less access to higher education are more at risk of experiencing abuse. Experiencing abuse during childhood has been found to increase the chances of experiencing domestic violence as an adult (Huecker, 2023). The psychological wounds from childhood abuse leave people at risk of tolerating abuse later in life. People who experienced childhood abuse or neglect have a 1.6 higher odds of being harmed by their partner (Widom, 2015). Struggles with drug or alcohol abuse also leave people vulnerable to abuse or manipulation (Huecker, 2023).

Even though domestic violence affects the overall U.S. population, there is a disproportionately higher rate of domestic violence/intimate partner violence among Black women (GCADV, 2019). In cases of police-reported intimate partner violence, 29.1% of the cases were non-Hispanic Black women. This is 35% higher compared to the rate of cases for non-Hispanic white women (GCADV, 2019).

There are many potential impacts of IPV on a person, other than risk of death. Experiencing IPV increases rates of mental health issues, substance abuse issues, and hospitalization (Wessells, 2022). Survivors of domestic violence are 3 times more likely to develop a major depressive disorder and are 4 times more likely to attempt suicide (National Domestic Violence Hotline, n.d.). This abuse can cause the victim to feel fear, stress, social isolation, and loss of freedom. It not only impacts the victims individually, but also their family

FACTORS INCREASING INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE IN BLACK WOMEN and community (Wessells, 2022). IPV has an intergenerational impact, with children that witness IPV being more likely to become victims themselves in adulthood (Wessells, 2022). The impacts of IPV on an individual and community level are debilitating and can stretch through generations if not addressed. One of the other outcomes of IPV on women's health are hospitalizations. Victims of IPV have a 10 times higher injury-related hospitalization rate compared to national rates (Kothari, 2014).

Past studies have found the correlation between socioeconomic status, age, gender, and pregnancy status with IPV. However, there is room for further research on the specific factors that have disproportionately affected Black women. Understanding the underlying factors that leave Black women vulnerable is crucial in creating culturally competent and effective interventions and prevention strategies for IPV. The purpose of this literature review is to examine the factors that contribute to the increased rate of domestic violence among Black women in the United States. This review aims to highlight these risk factors and discuss potential interventions and preventions that would be tailored to this population.

## **Methods**

A comprehensive search was performed through PubMed and the University of Georgia's library database. PubMed is a free database that indexes articles across several NLM literature resources including MEDLINE, PubMed Central, and Bookshelf, and hosts more than 38 million citations of biomedical literature. University of Georgia's library database The University of Georgia's library database is a university-provided database that pulls articles from over 100 databases in full text online. Some examples of databases used by UGA Library database are Google Scholar, JSTOR, and MEDLINE. Each database was searched using the following key terms and specific inclusion and exclusion criteria.

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### *Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria*

To ensure the relevance of the literature used, specific inclusion and exclusion criteria were used. Articles published approximately in the last 10 years were used. Only studies pertaining to risk factors that impact Black or African-American women experiencing IPV were used. Of those studies, only ones done within the United States were used. The Boolean operator “AND” was used to ensure the inclusion of studies met all of the previously mentioned criteria. The Boolean phrase “OR” was used to broaden the scope of search results. For exclusion criteria, studies pertaining to males or other racial groups were excluded. Due to repeated appearance of pregnancy and STD related studies, HIV and pregnancy were also excluded. The Boolean phrase “NOT” was used to exclude criteria that did not apply to this literature review. Details of specific searches can be seen in *Table 1*.

### *Rationale for Chosen Articles*

To select articles, the titles were analyzed to determine if the study was relevant to the chosen research question, which refined the selections greatly. After refining based on titles, the abstracts were reviewed to assess whether the results of the study addressed the research question. The articles selected must directly address risk factors for IPV among Black American women. Afterwards, the methods section of the articles was examined to ensure the population of the study was majority Black female Americans. Then, the results of the studies were examined to collect the key findings of the study and the understood risk factors that could potentially be increasing the rate of IPV among Black women. This methodology led to the selection of 20 articles that pertained to the research question and is representative of the target population.

### *Table 1. Database and Search Terms and Yielded Results*

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Database	Search Round	Search Terms	Yielded Results	Articles Selected
PubMed	1	(black or african american or african-american or black american) AND (women or female or woman or females) AND (domestic violence or domestic abuse or intimate partner violence) AND (risk factors or contributing factors or predisposing factors) NOT (men or males or man or male) NOT (hispanic or latino or latina or mexican or central american or south american or hispanics or latin) NOT (asian american or asian-american or asian immigrant or korean american or chinese american or vietnamese american) AND (united states) NOT (HIV or AIDS) NOT (pregnant or pregnancy)	85	7
University of Georgia's Library Database	2	(black or african american or african-american or black american) AND (women or female or woman or females) AND (domestic violence or domestic abuse or intimate partner violence) AND (risk factors or contributing factors or predisposing factors) NOT (men or males or man or male) NOT (hispanic or latino or latina or mexican or central american or south american or hispanics or latin) NOT (asian american or asian-american or asian immigrant or korean american or chinese american or vietnamese american) AND (united states) NOT (HIV or AIDS) NOT (pregnant or pregnancy)	145	7
PubMed	3	(black or african american or african-american or black american) AND (women or female or woman or females) AND (domestic violence or domestic abuse or intimate partner violence) AND (risk factors or contributing factors or predisposing factors) NOT (men or males or man or male) NOT (hispanic or latino or latina or mexican or central american or south american or hispanics or latin) NOT	85	6

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		(asian american or asian-american or asian immigrant or korean american or chinese american or vietnamese american) AND (united states) NOT (HIV or AIDS) NOT (pregnant or pregnancy)		
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### Results

Black women experience intimate partner violence at a disproportionately higher rate when compared to white counterparts. Factors such as race, gender, and socioeconomic factors have been found to contribute to IPV rates in the general population, but over the course of this literature review, unique contributing factors among Black women were grouped into three primary themes: socioeconomic factors, access to protection, and historical context/racism.

#### *Socioeconomic Factors*

Black women face many issues when it comes to financial hardships, educational attainment, and unemployment disparities (Mugoya et al., 2017). This is due to many factors such as racism, sexism, and historical inequality. Factors such as financial status, housing stability, environment, and educational attainment have been associated with increased vulnerability for IPV (Pu et al., 2021). These factors affect Black women at a disproportionately high rate. Black women are more likely to struggle financially due to historical factors and the cycle of poverty. In a study consisting of exclusively female IPV victims 93.8% of which were Black, approximately half (50.6%) of the population had incomes below \$25,000 (Lacey et al., 2015). In this study, there was a 1 and a half times increase in substance disorders for Black women making between \$25,000-\$34,999 per year. Substance abuse has a strong influence on risk for severe physical IPV with a 3 and half times increase in severe IPV for those with substance abuse issues (Lacey et al., 2015). In a study of 380 African-American women that

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reported physical or sexual violence in the past 2 years, the women were less likely to report employment or graduating high school compared to the control group (Anderson et al., 2015). Education has been shown to predict community resource utilization among Black women (Lacey et al., 2021). Utilization of resources and help-seeking reduces the risk of IPV and gives victims a chance to escape (Lacey et al., 2021). Due to the current statistics in this population indicating Black women struggle with educational attainment, education status also contributes to the lack of resource utilization for Black women.

Experiencing financial insecurity increases the likelihood of being victimized by IPV (Pu et al., 2021). Black communities have the lowest levels of financial security when compared to other racial groups. In a study of 433 Black men and women measuring racial discrimination and IPV perpetration, higher levels of racial discrimination were associated with households below the poverty line (Maldonado et al., 2023). Racial discrimination creates a power dynamic that leaves Black women vulnerable for abuse. There is also a positive association between racial discrimination and IPV perpetration (Maldonado et al., 2023). Limited education and employment opportunities for Black women result in them being reliant on their partners for finances. In this population, Black women who live with their abuser and are financially dependent on them feel they cannot terminate the relationship (Waller et al., 2022). Reliance on a partner creates a power dynamic that leaves Black women at greater risk for abuse (Sabri et al., 2014). With the limited employment opportunities and education for Black women, their dependence on their partner increases (Sabri et al., 2014). Limited employment opportunities and reliance on abuser increase risk of lethal IPV (Sabri et al., 2014).

Black women experience a disparity in employment, education, and access to community resources. Research shows that Black women have lower average educational attainment than their counterparts of other races, which is associated with higher risk of IPV in this population



FACTORS INCREASING INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE IN BLACK WOMEN (Stockman et al., 2014). The lower levels of educational attainment impact their ability to secure employment with a living wage. Due to the limited opportunities for Black communities in terms of education, job opportunities are also limited. 40.7% of the sample population of Black women completed high school as their highest form of education (Stockman et al., 2014). Unlike in the past, the attainment of a high school diploma does not lead to economic security. In many cases, this only makes one able to obtain employment with poverty level wages. The majority of the women in this population were also unemployed (52.5%). In a study on the association of racial and gender inequalities and the impact on IPV, Black women were the most at risk of experiencing economic, food, and housing insecurity (Fedina et al., 2022). All of this factors of which increased the odds of experiencing IPV, with housing insecurity alone being connected to a 1.94 times greater likelihood of IPV victimization in this sample (Fedina et al., 2022).

In a study of 6249 women stratified by race, Black women were significantly lower in income (close to \$25,000) than White women (close to \$30,000) (Kaufman, 2024). They found a difference in educational attainment with Black women having a lower average compared to White women. In the same study, Black women were 4% more likely than White women to have experienced abuse from a partner and 4% more likely to experience sexual coercion (Kaufman, 2024). These factors increase the rates of IPV in Black communities and put Black women at higher risk.

#### *Access to Protection*

In the United States, many Black women feel unsafe to seek protection from law enforcement (Dinwiddie et al., 2019). The U.S. relies primarily on the justice system and accountability for response to IPV. Funding for social services for individuals suffering from IPV are lacking. This system has been proven ineffective at preventing violence toward Black women. In a qualitative study of 15 Black women who had experiences with IPV and

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interactions with police, many law enforcement officers exhibited discriminatory behavior based on racist stereotypes of Black women (Sharpless et al., 2024). In these cases, Black women did not receive legal protection and sometimes even faced criminalization for self-defense against their abusers (Sharpless et al., 2024). Their previous experiences with police influenced their willingness to reach out for legal services for help. In numerous of these women's account their perpetrator faced little to no consequences for their actions or they were reprimanded instead of helped (Sharpless et al., 2024). This discourages victims from reporting out of fear of being ignored or chastised.

Based on this study, Black women's fear of police seems to stem from anticipated discrimination due to previous negative interactions or discriminatory interactions with police (Sharpless et al., 2024). Black women voiced distrust of law enforcement because of previous incidents where they failed to prevent abuse or took the side of their abuser. In some cases, prior racist experiences with police officers in situations that were not related to IPV led to anticipated being punished and devalued by police due to their race if they sought help with IPV (Sharpless et al., 2024). Black women in cases of IPV experience a sense of distrust and fear toward police, which creates a barrier to reporting and escaping their abusers (Sharpless et al., 2024).

IPV rates are closely associated with drug abuse rates (Goddard-Eckrich et al., 2022). American overrepresentation of Black women in the criminal system due to radicalized drug laws and policing only increases rates of domestic violence in this population (Goddard-Eckrich et al., 2022). Combined with distrust of police and over-policing of Black communities, access to protection is limited for Black women experiencing IPV. This decreases the chances of Black women reporting IPV out of fear of being arrested.

Anticipating racism and discrimination from law enforcement is a large barrier preventing Black women from reporting cases of IPV. In a study of 185 female AfricanAmerican IPV

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survivors hopelessness was found as a significant mediator for legal system involvement in cases of low-income Black women (Gutowski et al., 2023). Hopelessness has a magnifying effect on Black women with previous involvement with law enforcement. Escaping cases of IPV are prevented by sense of fear and distrust of law enforcement and previous experiences of racism or mistreatment by police. Black women at risk for severe risk for lethal domestic violence do not use community resources such as women's shelters and domestic violence hotlines out of fear of their partner. Black women who report using legal assistance, such as restraining orders, are at higher risk for lethal violence (Sabri et al., 2014).

### *Historical and Social-Cultural Context*

In the United States, racism has created a power dynamic that has left Black women vulnerable to IPV. Stereotypes associated with Black women have reinforced this dynamic and prevented them from seeking community and legal support. Aspects of cultural significance such as racial loyalty, gender entrapment, and religious social support may prevent Black women from seeking support in fear of community backlash (Dinwiddie et al., 2019). The cultural norm of “tolerating” abuse as a sign of strength or resilience prevents victims from reporting abuse. This shames victims from reporting abuse and protects the abusers. Racial discrimination is associated with higher odds of anxiety and substance disorders, which studies have shown are predictors of experiencing IPV (Lacey et al., 2021). In a study of 105 Black women and 21 Black men public violence, repeated violence, and lack of accountability were community-identified as high-risk indicators of intimate partner violence (Bent-Goodly et al., 2023). In a study of 22,590 women, 14.8% of the Black participants were victims of reproductive coercion in their lifetime compared 8.4% of all women in their lifetime (Basile et al., 2019). Black women experienced a disproportionately higher rate of this type of IPV compared to all other races (Basile et al., 2019). Cultural norms such as sacrificing individual desires for familial integration, which is associated

FACTORS INCREASING INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE IN BLACK WOMEN with African-American cultures, could explain why Black communities are more tolerant of IPV (Stockman et al., 2014). Black women experiencing IPV who feel that their communities are more permissive of IPV are 48% less likely to access legal resources (Lucea et al., 2013). Community acceptance of IPV is associated with 3-4 times higher odds of experiencing IPV throughout their lifetime (Stockman et al., 2014). Black women with access to community resources have more self-efficacy to get help and support to escape an abusive situation (Burse et al., 2022).

In a study of pregnant Black women in an urban area, 39.8% of participants experienced childhood physical abuse (Huibregtse et al., 2024). Experience of childhood abuse has been shown to have an increase in adulthood domestic violence and intimate partner violence (Huibregtse et al., 2024). This study found 10% increased risk of IPV based on childhood maltreatment. This study found that these factors in combination with socioeconomic vulnerabilities increases risk for violence by intimate partners (Huibregtse et al., 2024). Experiencing IPV in childhood also has the potential to impact women in their exposure to violence and their amount of violent partners (Napier et al., 2023). The damage of experiencing abuse during youth normalizes this behavior in adulthood. Experiencing childhood abuse has a drastic impact on adulthood revictimization.

## **Discussion**

Black women are placed at a greater risk of experiencing intimate partner violence due to a combination of factors including socioeconomic factors, limited access to resources and low confidence in law enforcement, and historical contexts that reinforce a culture of IPV and make help-seeking for IPV considerably harder for black women than their counterparts.

Socioeconomic factors such as financial hardship and struggles with educational attainment leave

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Black women vulnerable to abuse and mistreatment. Negative experiences with law enforcement and discrimination in the justice system has dissuaded them from seeking help or reporting their abuser. A history of racism and imbalanced power in the United States has created a power dynamic that supports abusers and silences Black women. Creating interventions or programs that address these risk factors is key to lowering the rate of IPV among Black women. These programs must be culturally competent, address certain stereotypes and societal norms Black women experience, and reduce the barriers preventing them from seeking help.

### *Implications for Practice*

The findings of this literature review display the complex combination of social, economic, and cultural factors that leave black American women vulnerable to domestic violence and intimate partner violence. These findings have many implications for current policy and interventions designed to reduce domestic violence for black women. Culturally competent programs are important to effective prevention and/or support for Black women experiencing IPV. These programs seek to reduce “implicit bias” or the automatic association or stereotypes of groups of people (NIBC, n.d.). This will involve creating programs that address the previously stated barriers and training law enforcement to identify signs of IPV. Implicit bias has influence on the outcomes of interactions with police, especially in cases of domestic violence (NIBC, n.d.). The National Initiative for Building Community’s program suggests changing the context in which an interaction takes place through policy and training (NIBC, n.d.). This training would seek to reduce implicit bias among law enforcement and reduce racism and discrimination. Black women do not seek legal resources out of anticipation of racism. Ideally, strategies should aim to reduce feelings of hopelessness due to experiencing trauma, racism, and negative experiences with law enforcement.

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These programs should empower Black women and increase their self-efficacy and capacity for self-advocacy to encourage help-seeking behaviors. Interventions that empower women and promote self-efficacy create a safer environment that will promote more open communication between Black women and support systems for IPV. Ujima, The National Center on Violence Against Women in the Black Community is a program that strives to use research, policy, and engagement to mobilize Black communities for change (Ujima, n.d.). This program focuses on collective responsibility, increasing resources, and capacity building for Black women experiencing IPV to build brighter futures. They provide resources for survivors of violence and communities (Ujima, n.d.). The resources this organization provides Black women struggling with IPV resources to seek safety, healing, and guidance to escape a dangerous situation (Ujima, n.d.). This includes local and online resources. Some examples of these resources include the National Domestic Violence Hotline, the Ujima Resource Directory, and Ujima's technical assistance. The Ujima Resource Directory provides local resources and safe houses to help survivors create a safety plan. The Ujima technical assistance provides resources, tools, and support for in-depth program assistance and capacity building. This resource is made for domestic violence coalitions, programs, networks, federal government agencies, community-based programs, practitioners, and policy-makers (Ujima, n.d.). They strive to provide solutions and resources that are culturally competent for Black communities. Creation of programs similar to Ujima for Black communities could help expand their resources to Black women experiencing IPV.

Due to the influence of racism experienced by law enforcement by Black women experiencing IPV, there is a need to educate police on the signs of IPV when handling cases. Disproportionate incarceration, racial profiling, and perceived lack of care from police all impact racial barriers to police engagement (Decker et al., 2019). These inequities in safety have a

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powerful influence on IPV outcomes (Decker et al., 2019). Due to the current literature on racial bias among law enforcement, police training or reform may be necessary. Literature has supported that reforming the justice system to be more sensitive to Black voices reporting violence would greatly impact the rate of IPV. Programs should be implemented to train police to notice signs of their own implicit bias and avoid racial bias when handling cases of intimate partner violence.

### *Limitations*

The primary limitation of this literature review is that only twenty articles were included in this review. Due to the complexity of this topic and the multitude of potential factors that may influence the findings of this study, twenty articles cannot completely cover this topic and include all potential factors. An additional limitation of this literature review is the use of crosssectional approaches to data collection, and the risk of biased response data due to the sensitive nature of this topic. When taking data, it is possible the participants could have interpreted the questions in a way the researchers did not intend. Further limitations to this literature review include that the majority of these studies drew their participants from urban areas, which may have omitted the discussion of specific risk factors that impact IPV among rural-dwelling Black women, a subset of Black women that are under-researched in this regard. Finally, many studies had small sample sizes, further limiting their generalizability.

### *Conclusion*

Predisposing factors that affect the risk of domestic abuse for black women in the United States encompass many socioeconomic and racial influences. Further research should be done to fully understand how these factors influence risk of domestic violence and how interventions could potentially reduce risk. There should also be more research done to find interventions that

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can successfully help Black women escape their IPV situations safely. These interventions need to be culturally sensitive and target risk factors that majorly affect black women such as gender roles and stereotypes.

Organizations such as Ujima work to reduce the disparity of IPV among black women through providing resources and education. Legal systems may need to be modified to decrease feelings of fear and hopelessness when black women seek help with domestic abuse. Some organizations such as the National Initiative for Building Community work to reduce implicit bias among law enforcement to hopefully increase reporting for IPV cases. Increasing the outreach of these programs could help give Black women experiencing IPV access to resources that can help them, and help train law enforcement to treat these women fairly.

Financial disparities, struggles with educational attainment, access to protection, childhood abuse history, and racism all have influence on the characteristics that leave black women vulnerable to domestic violence. These interrelated factors have built up for generations without intervention. By confronting the underlying causes, interventions have help increase help-seeking behaviors, increase self-efficacy, and reduce the rate of IPV among Black women in the United States.



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