



The University of Texas at Austin  
Steve Hicks School of Social Work



# Young Black Men and Their Experiences with Violent Victimization

2023 National Joint  
Training for VOCA  
Victim Assistance &  
Victim  
Compensation  
Administrators

August 15, 2023

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## **What determines whether someone is a victim?**

“I think each one of us sitting here is a victim. We each have a situation we don't want to be in. It's hard, it's rough. Some of us haven't chose that life. Life chose us, basically is what I'm saying. “

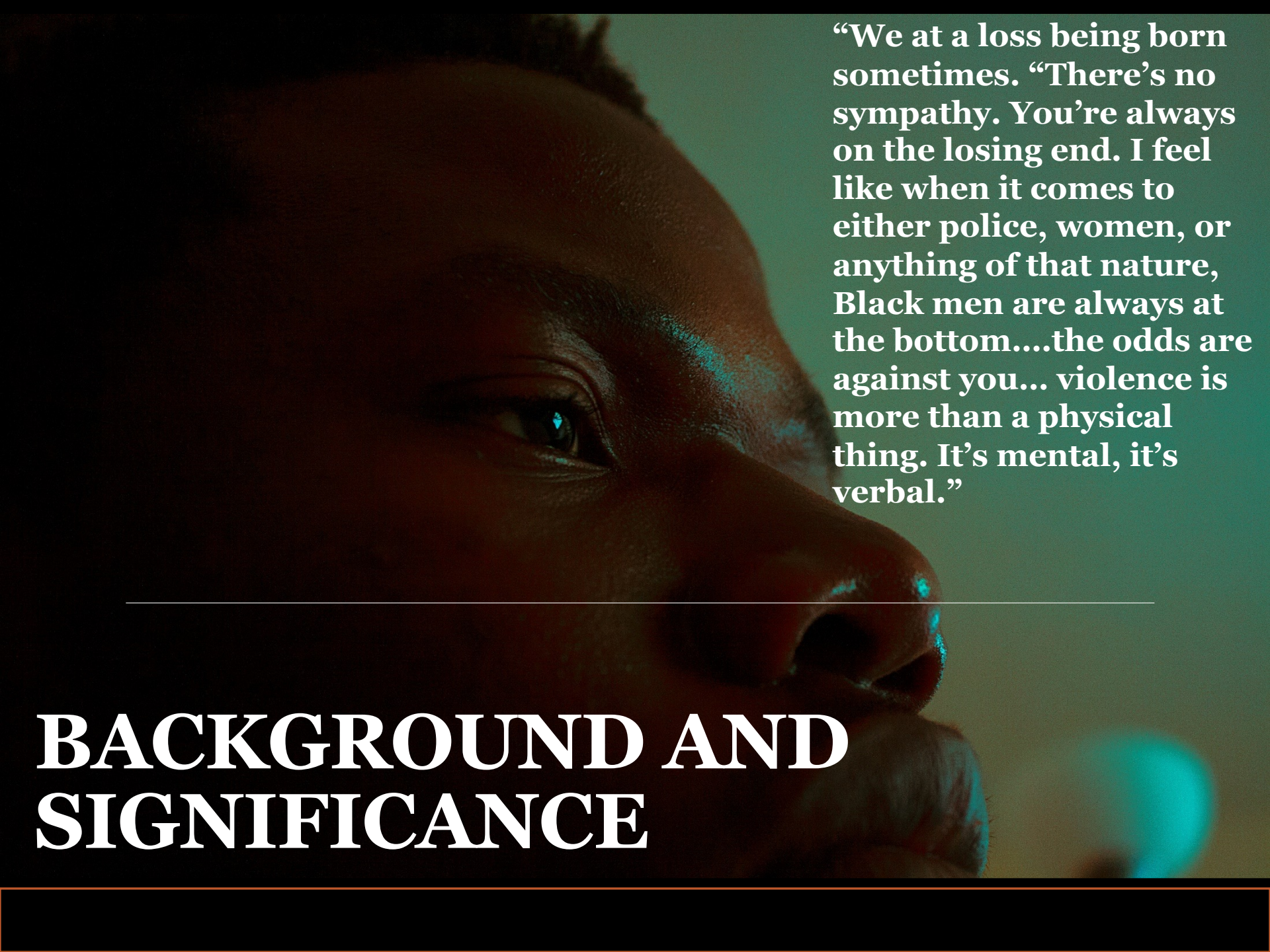


- **Session Description**
- **Background and Significance**
- **SURVIVE**
- **Final Thoughts**

# Session Description



This presentation will provide some of the initial results from **SURVIVE**, an NIJ-funded study that explored the violent victimization experiences of young Black men ages 18 to 24.



“We at a loss being born sometimes. “There’s no sympathy. You’re always on the losing end. I feel like when it comes to either police, women, or anything of that nature, Black men are always at the bottom...the odds are against you... violence is more than a physical thing. It’s mental, it’s verbal.”

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# BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

# Black Males

**Are disproportionately impacted by violence.**

**Their victimization can lead to disability or death.**

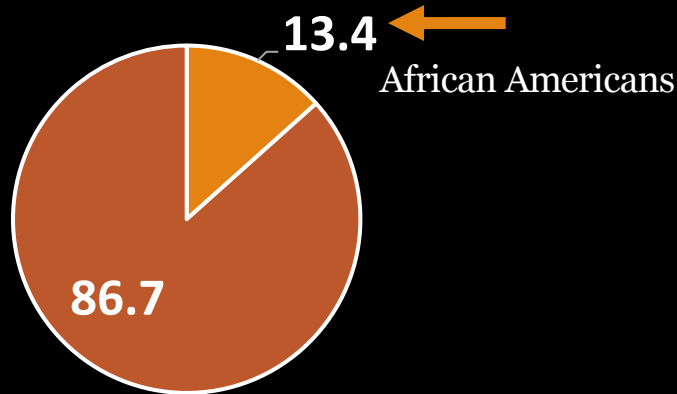
**Are more likely than other youth to endure repeated experiences of victimization including polyvictimization (i.e., multiple victimization experiences of differing kinds.**

**Victimization can occur for many reasons**

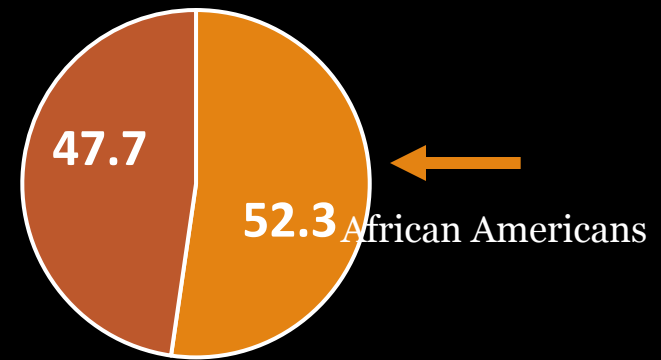


# African Americans Over-represented among Murder Victims in United States

Total US Population  
2015\*



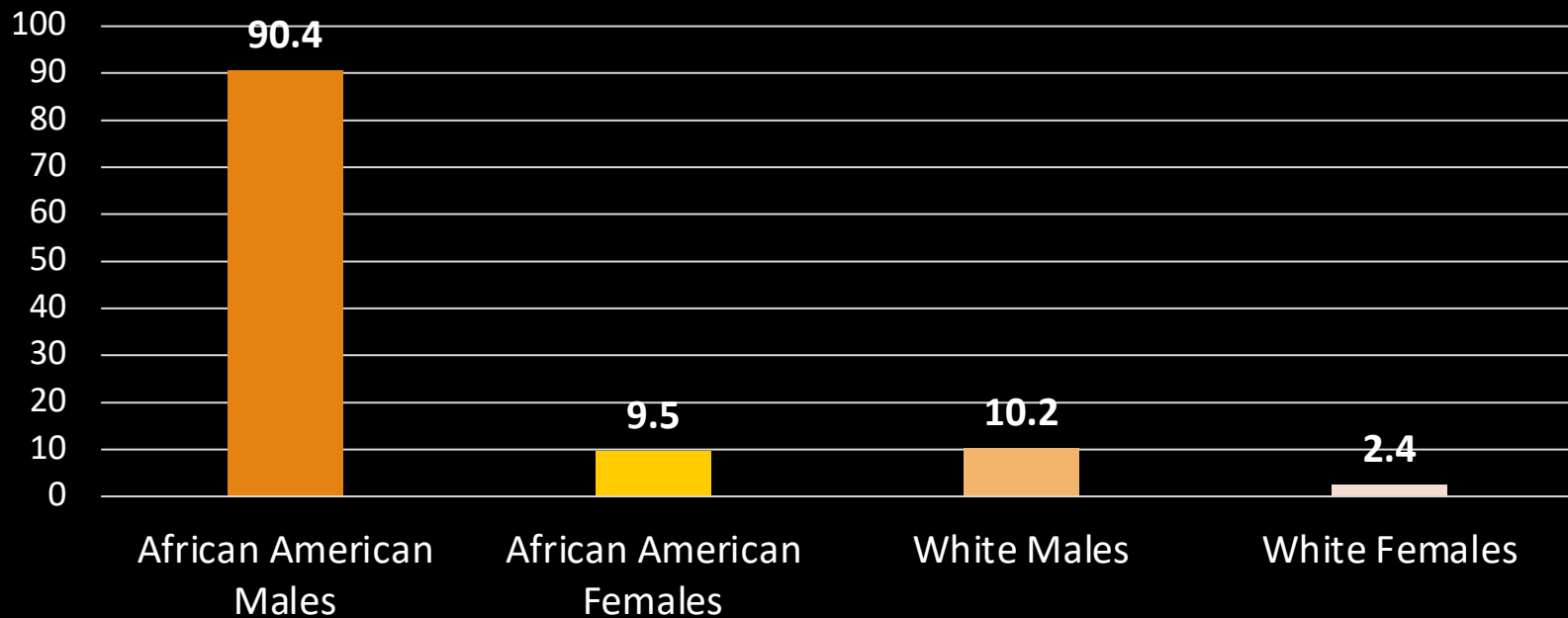
Total US Murder Victims  
2015\*\*



\*Source: <https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk>

\*\*Source: [https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2015/crime-in-the-u.s.-2015/tables/expanded\\_homicide\\_data\\_table\\_1\\_murder\\_victims\\_by\\_race\\_ethnicity\\_and\\_sex\\_2015.xls](https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2015/crime-in-the-u.s.-2015/tables/expanded_homicide_data_table_1_murder_victims_by_race_ethnicity_and_sex_2015.xls)

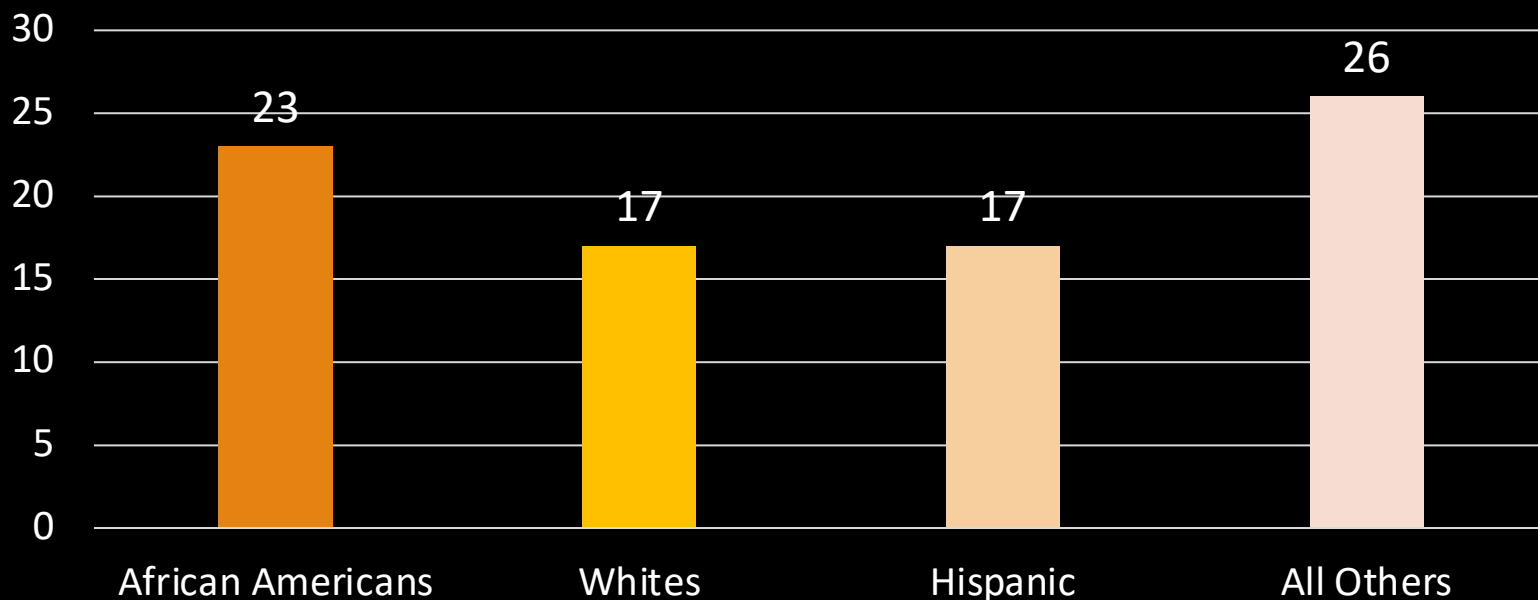
# U.S. Homicide Rates per 100,000 by Race and Gender among 18-24 year-olds, 2006-2015



DATA SOURCE: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System



# U.S. Violent Crime Victimization Rates Per 1,000 Persons Aged 12 or Older, 2015



DATA SOURCE: Bureau of Justice Statistics; <https://bjs.ojp.gov/redirect-legacy/content/pub/pdf/cv15.pdf>

Other includes American Indian and Alaska Natives; Asian, Native Hawaiian, and Other Pacific Islanders; and persons of two or more races and excludes persons of Hispanic or Latino origin

**VICTIMIZATION BY VIOLENCE**

**TRAUMA**



“Traumatic events are extraordinary, not because they occur rarely, but rather because they overwhelm the ordinary human adaptations to life”  
(Herman, 1997, p. 33).

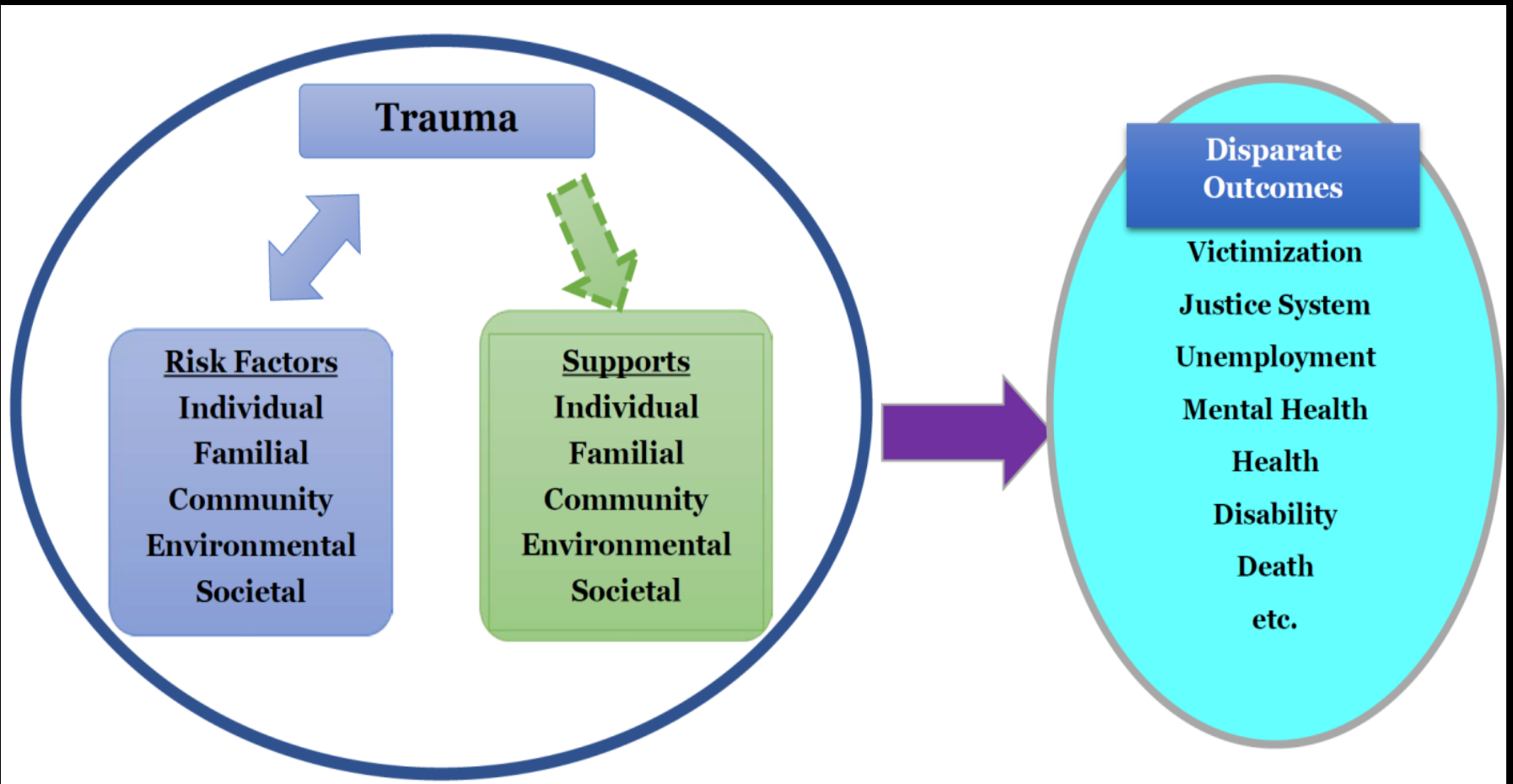
## What is Trauma?

Occurs when: someone is threatened with or experiences physical assault or sexual violence, directly encounters a dangerous or threatening event, or witnesses the endangerment or suffering of another person.

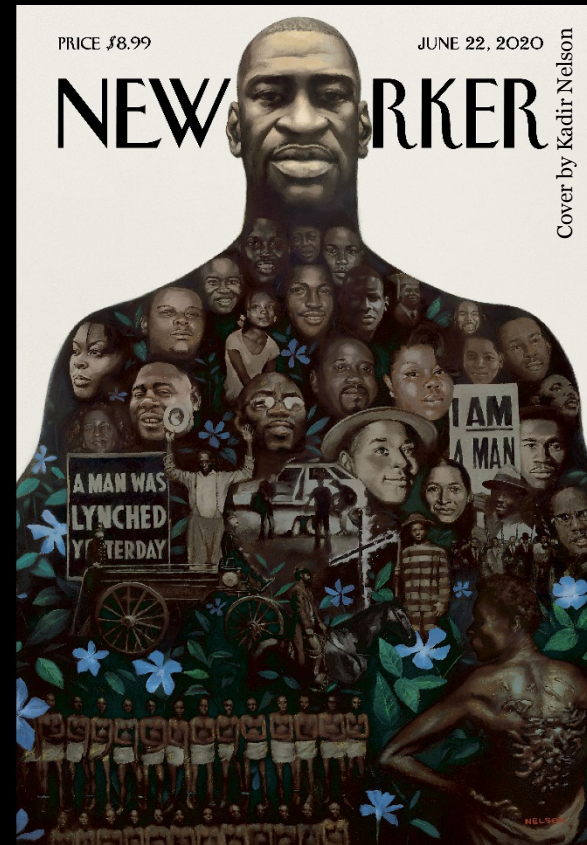
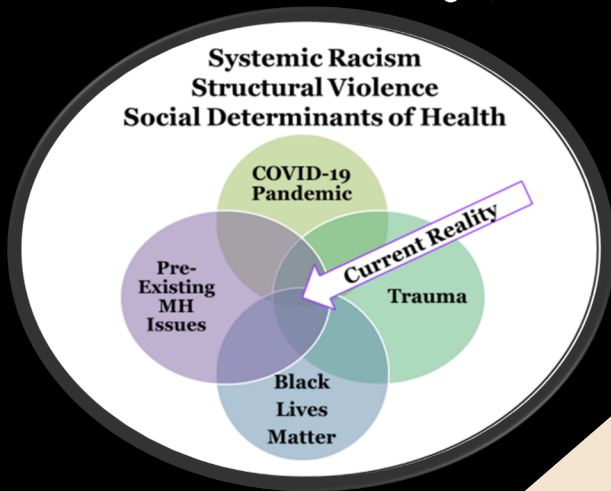
Can: range from minor to severe, last across developmental stages, be additive or independent, or occur repeatedly.

The most commonly reported include witnessing violence, such as someone being injured or killed; being physically assaulted or abused; threatened with a weapon; or being burned, beaten, raped, or sodomized.

# The Cycle



# TRAUMA: Intergenerational, Community, and Individual



*Pandemic Within a Pandemic: Coronavirus and Police Brutality Roil Black Communities*

The New York Times | <https://nyti.ms/2f8o12>



According to Dr. David R. Williams, "Every police shooting of an unarmed African American leads to worse mental health for the entire Black population in the state of which it occurred for the next three months."

# Lifetime Violent Victimization Exposure



Physical

Emotional

Financial



Need to Access Services and Supports



Race-based Barriers to Accessing Services and Supports



# Ignoring a History of Trauma Can Lead to...

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Physical aggression, risky behaviors, recklessness, and delinquency.

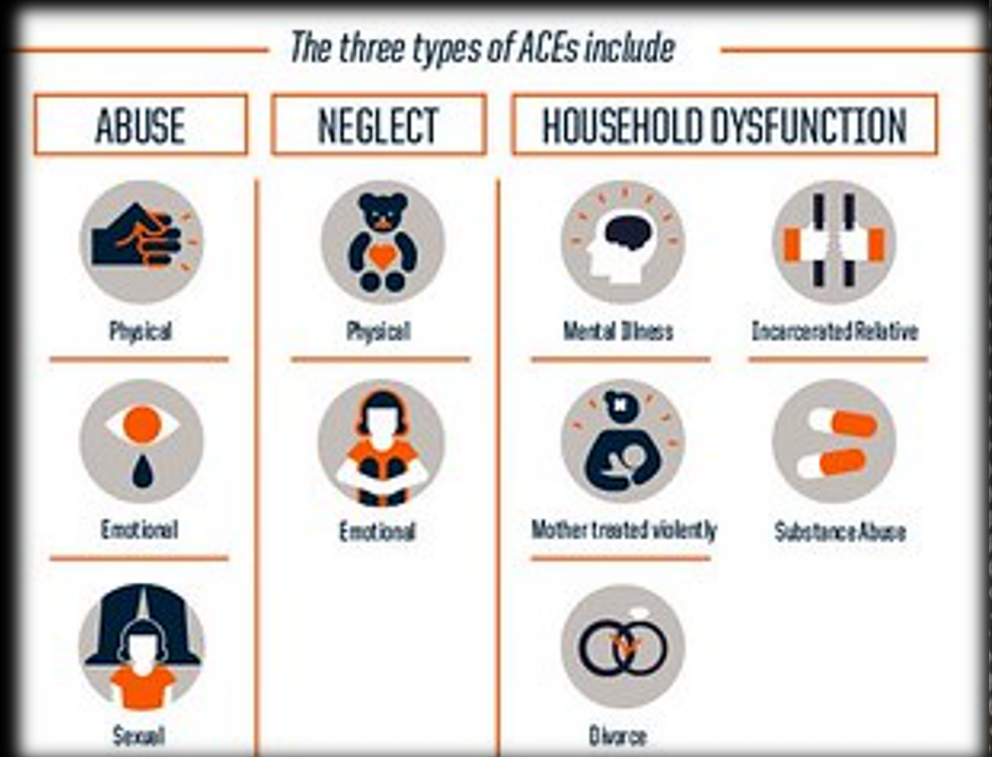
A greater risk of engaging in negative behaviors when cumulative trauma is experienced.

Recidivism.

Difficulty coping with intense feelings, poor impulse control, and feelings of anger and irritability.



- We often ascribe increased victimization to exposure in childhood to increased adversity.
- One cannot use Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) to explain the level of victimization seen in the past, the present or probable future.



**What  
determines  
whether  
someone is a  
victim?**

- **“Sometimes  
it's survival.  
Sometimes you  
have to be like  
a possum. A  
possum plays  
dead, for  
survival.”**



# The Problem

- Official rates for violence victimization are traditionally captured by federal agencies using broad categories.
- Such data collection methods can make it difficult to examine subpopulations and nuanced categories of violence.
- It also limits our ability to understand the resulting needs and strategies employed for survival.
- Those limitations particularly impact understanding the impact of violence on young Black males who are most likely to have multiple and repeated experiences of violent victimization.



# Understanding the Violent Victimization Experiences of Young Men of Color



<https://www.blackmensurvive.com/>



- Funded by the National Institute of Justice
- Collaboration between UIC Jane Addams College of Social Work and the UIC Survey Research Laboratory



➤ **Official study name**

➤ Understanding the Violent Victimization Experiences of Young Men of Color

➤ **Unofficial study name**

➤ Suburban, Urban, Rural Violence: Investigating Victim Experiences (SURVIVE)

➤ Two-phase, three-year study

➤ National Institute of Justice 2015-VF-GX-K031  
Collaboration between Jane Addams College of Social Work and the Survey Research Laboratory



# Why this Study?

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**What kind of violence do Black men your age experience or have experienced?**

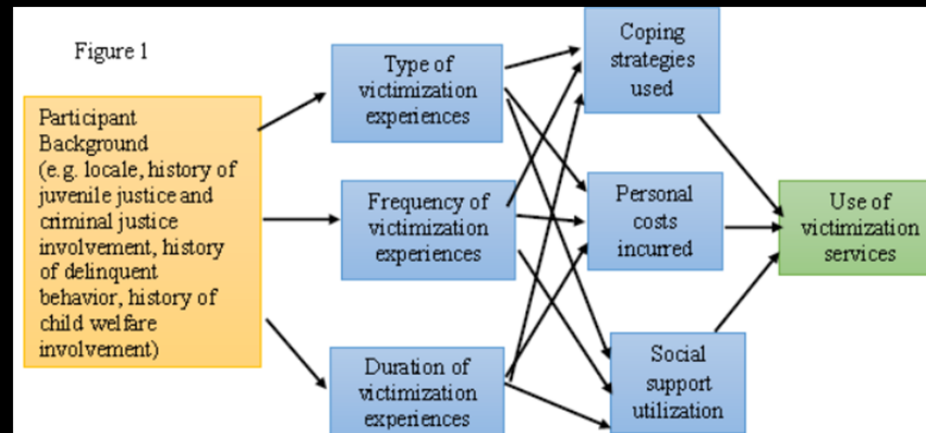
**“I was just going to say, really what kind of violence are we not experiencing? That is probably the better question.”**

# Study Goals

- To **increase our knowledge** about young Black men, ages 18 to 24, residing in urban, suburban, and rural locales regarding their experiences with being victimized by violence.
- To **develop, test, and finalize an instrument** that can be used by practitioners and researchers when seeking the aforementioned information.
- To **obtain information** that will better inform policy and practice regarding the criminal justice system's response to the violent victimization experienced by young Black men.

SILENCE  
ALLOWS  
VIOLENCE

## Conceptual Model



# Multi-Pronged Data Collection Strategy

## Phase One and Phase Two

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Focus Groups (n=83)<sup>1</sup>

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Key Informant Meetings (n=15)<sup>1</sup>

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Content Expert Reviews (n=3)<sup>1</sup>

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Cognitive Interviews (n=6)<sup>1</sup>

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SRL Questionnaire Design Expert Review<sup>1</sup>

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Nationwide Pre-tests (n=23)<sup>2</sup>

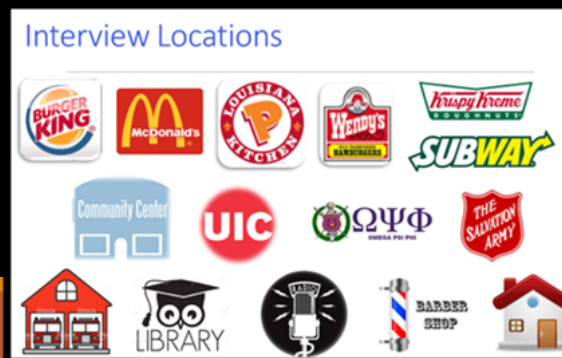
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Nationwide Individual Interviews (n=259)<sup>2</sup>

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Nationwide Re-test Interviews (n=75)<sup>2</sup>

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# Eligible Participants



- 18 to 24 years old
- Male
- Self-identify as Black or African-American
- Have experienced violence in their lifetime that fit one of our initial screening pre-determined violence categories:
  - physical assault
  - school violence
  - gang violence
  - assault by police
  - sexual assault
  - jail/prison violence
  - military violence
  - hate crimes due to race
  - hate crimes due to sexual orientation/gender identity/gender expression
  - other violence



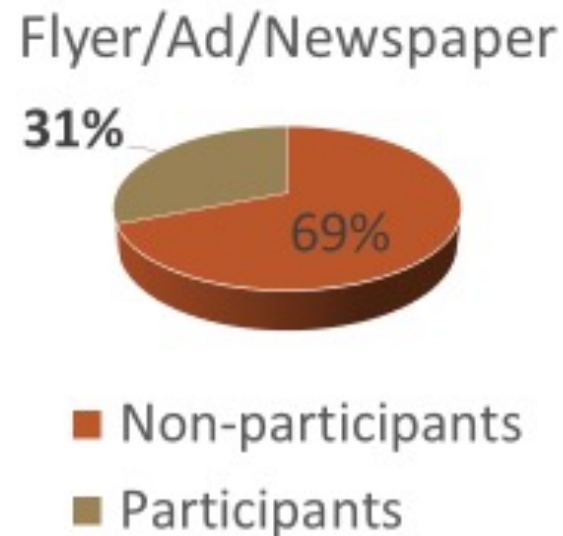
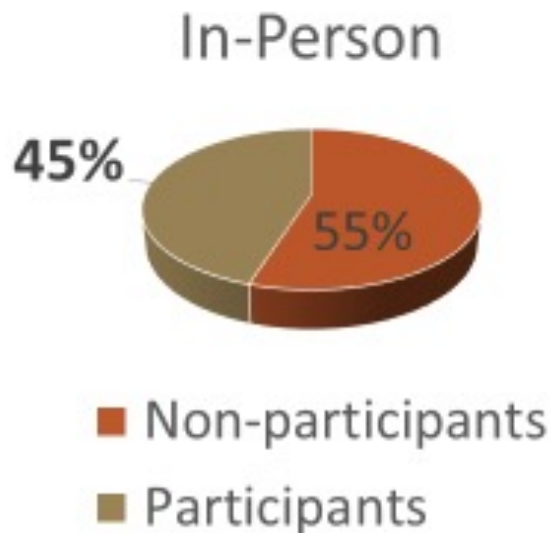
# Recruitment

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- Staffing
  - Attentive to race, gender, and age
  - Consistent staff who fulfilled multiple roles: recruiter and interviewer
  - Hired locally – even by community when possible
  - Recruiter/interviewer training at UIC
- Recruitment
  - Varied community locations
  - Groups in accessible community locations
  - Consulted with the UIC Center for Clinical Translational Services, Community Engagement and Recruitment Board
  - Expanded data collection strategy to include key informants

# Recruitment Patterns

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*\*Slightly more likely to attend if recruited in person ( $X^2 = 3.9$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p=.049$ )*

# Reasons for Attending the Focus Groups

<b>Reason</b>	<b>Number of Mentions</b>
For people to know my side / have a voice	14
\$50 incentive	13
Curious to see what the group would be like	7
Recruiters	4
Trying to make a difference / help others	4
Be with others who can relate	4
Need to talk about violence	3
Curious to see the site	2
Seeing how other people think	2



**MILITARY**

**GANG VIOLENCE**

# Phase One

## Phase 1: Focus Group Cities and Counties (Illinois)



★ Urban

Chicago  
Evanston  
Maywood  
Rockford

★ Suburban

Cook County  
Urbana

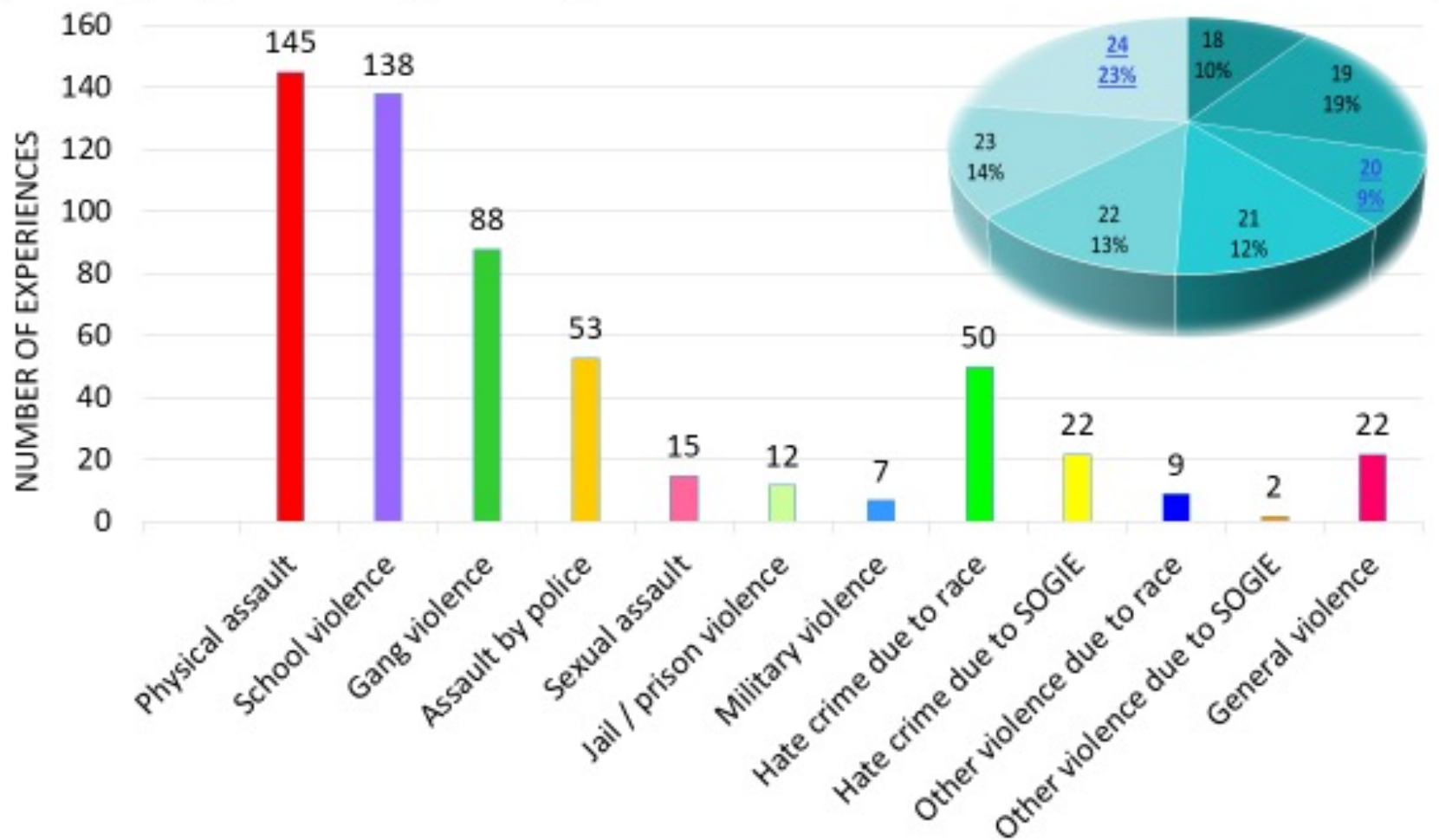
★ Rural

Edwardsville

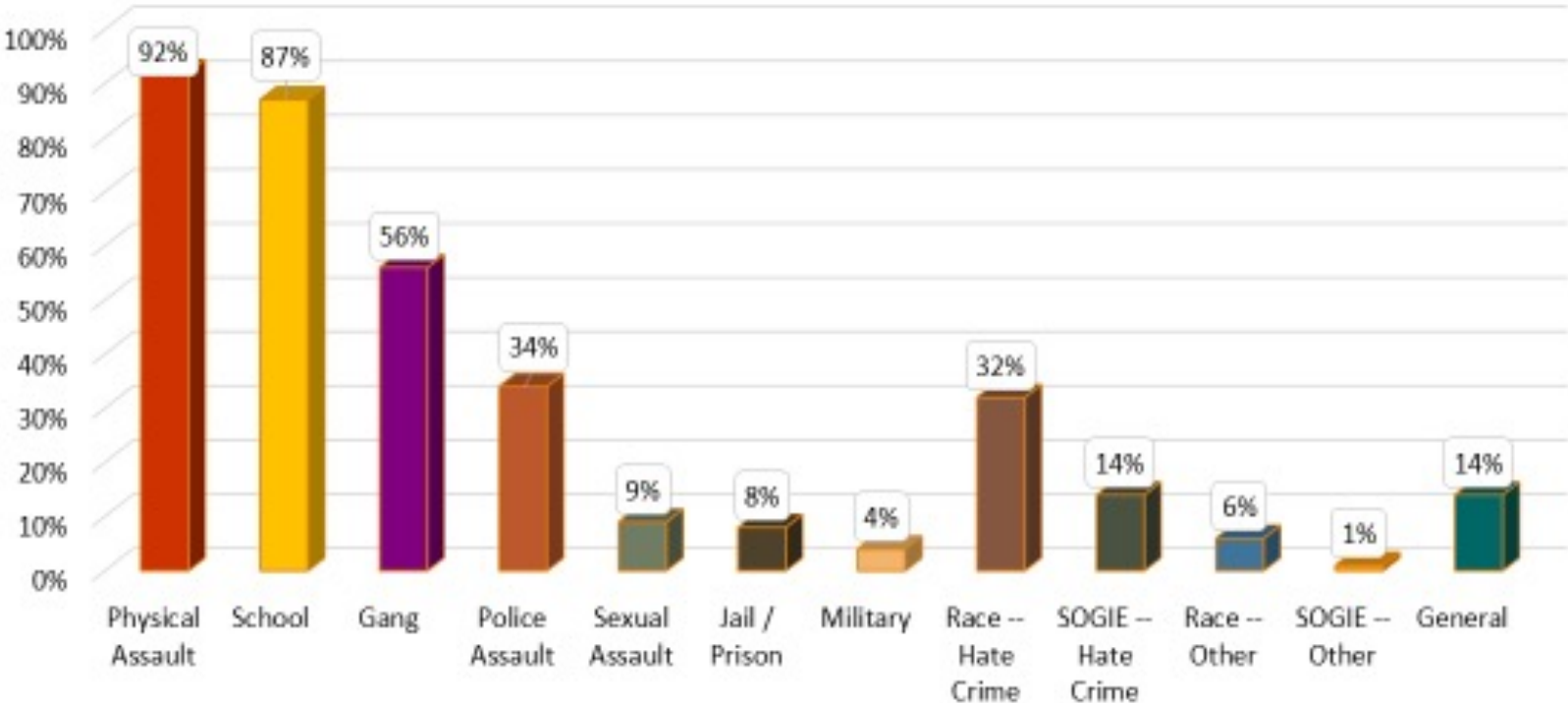
Urban, suburban, and rural are classified according to U.S. Census Bureau definitions:

- Rural = population of less than 2,500
- Suburban = population of 2,500 to 50,000
- Urban = population of more than 50,000

# Focus Group Screener Results (n=158 participants)



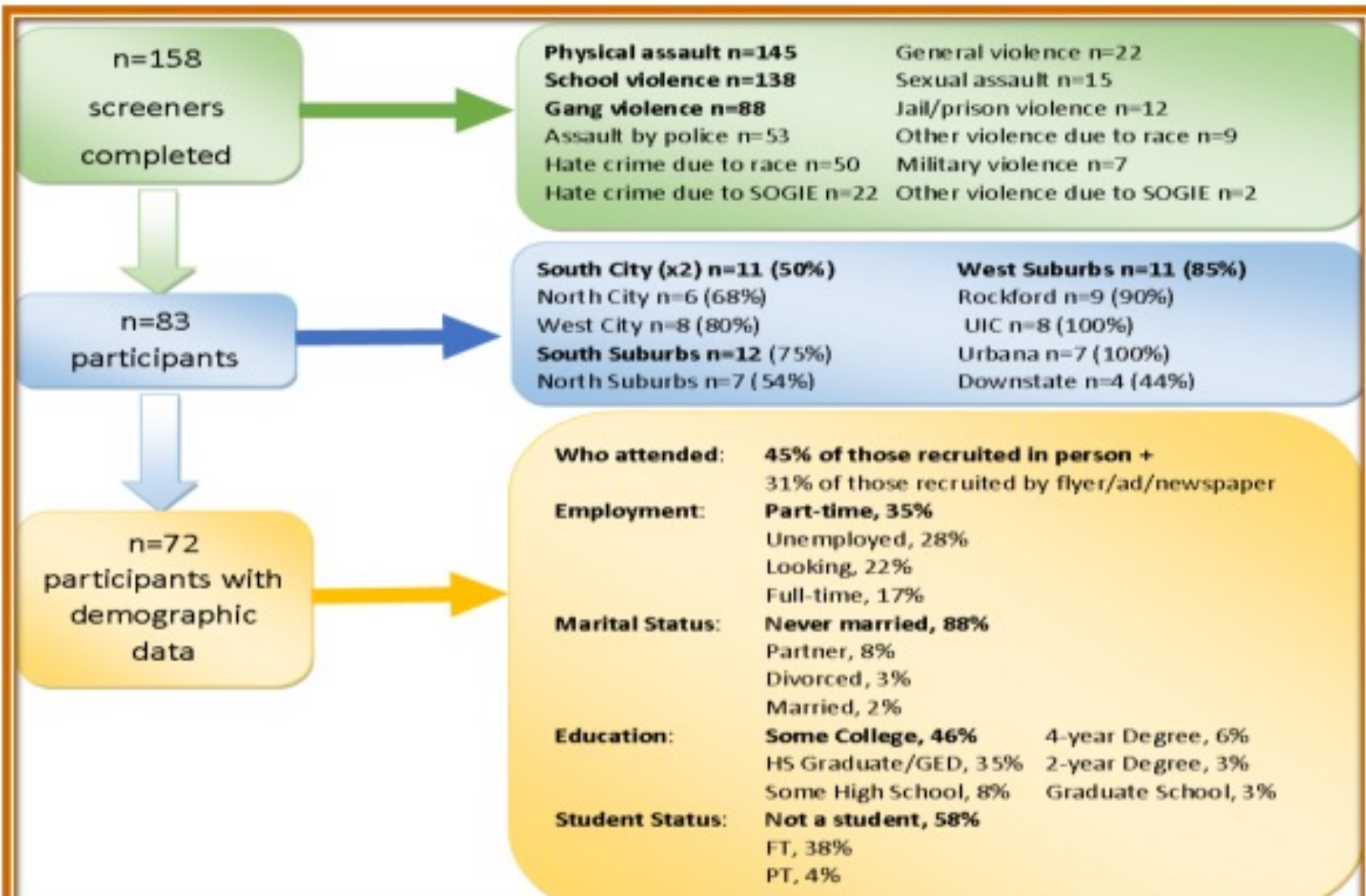
# Phase 1: Experiences with Violence



Focus Group Screeners (N=158)



# Focus Group Demographics



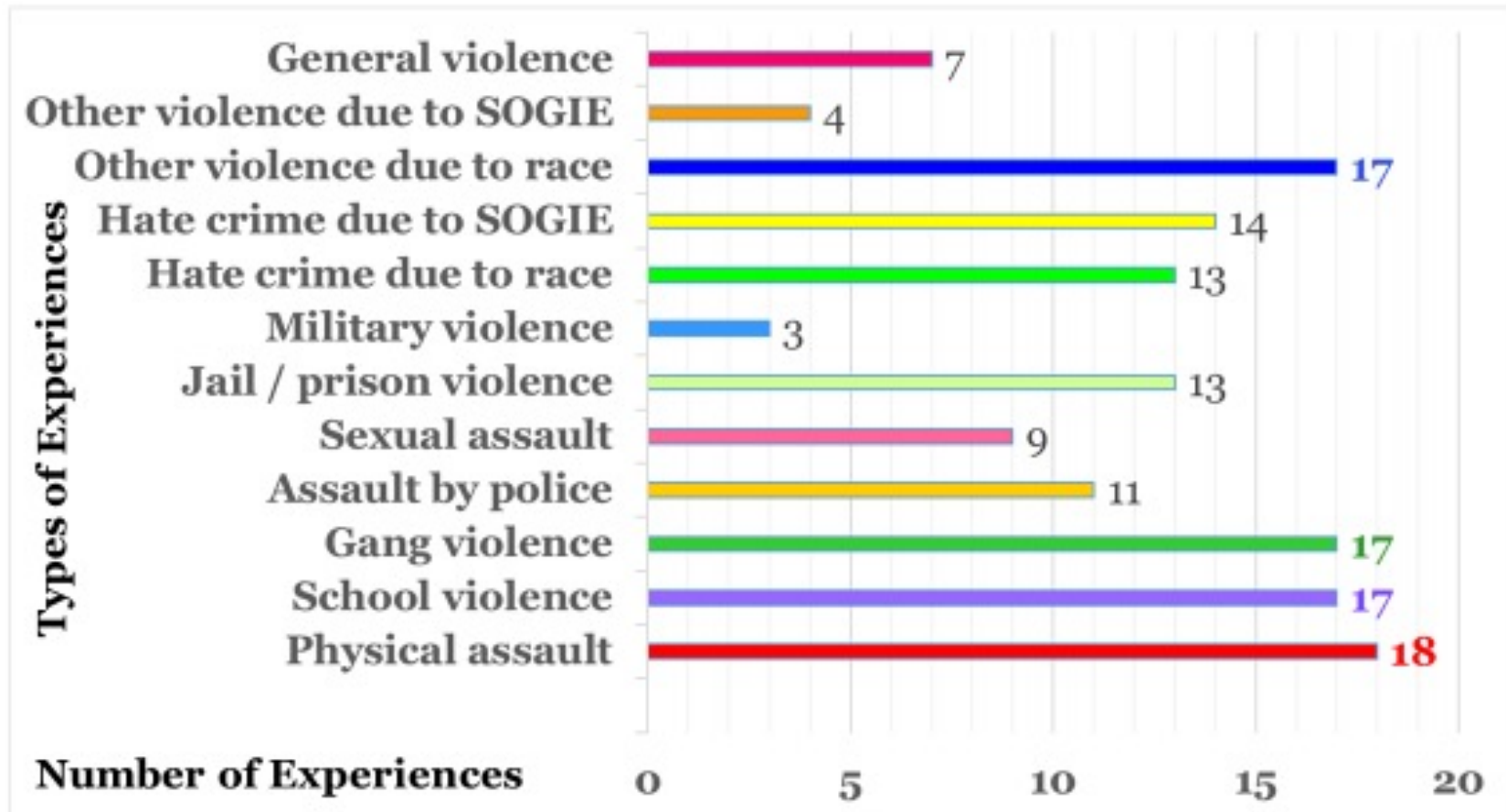
# Eligible Participants – Key Informant Meetings

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- Females over the age of 18 with a relationship to a young man who could meet the project eligibility criteria
- Mother, sister, aunt, grandmother, significant other, girlfriend, or wife
- Self-identify as Black or African-American

March-May 2017

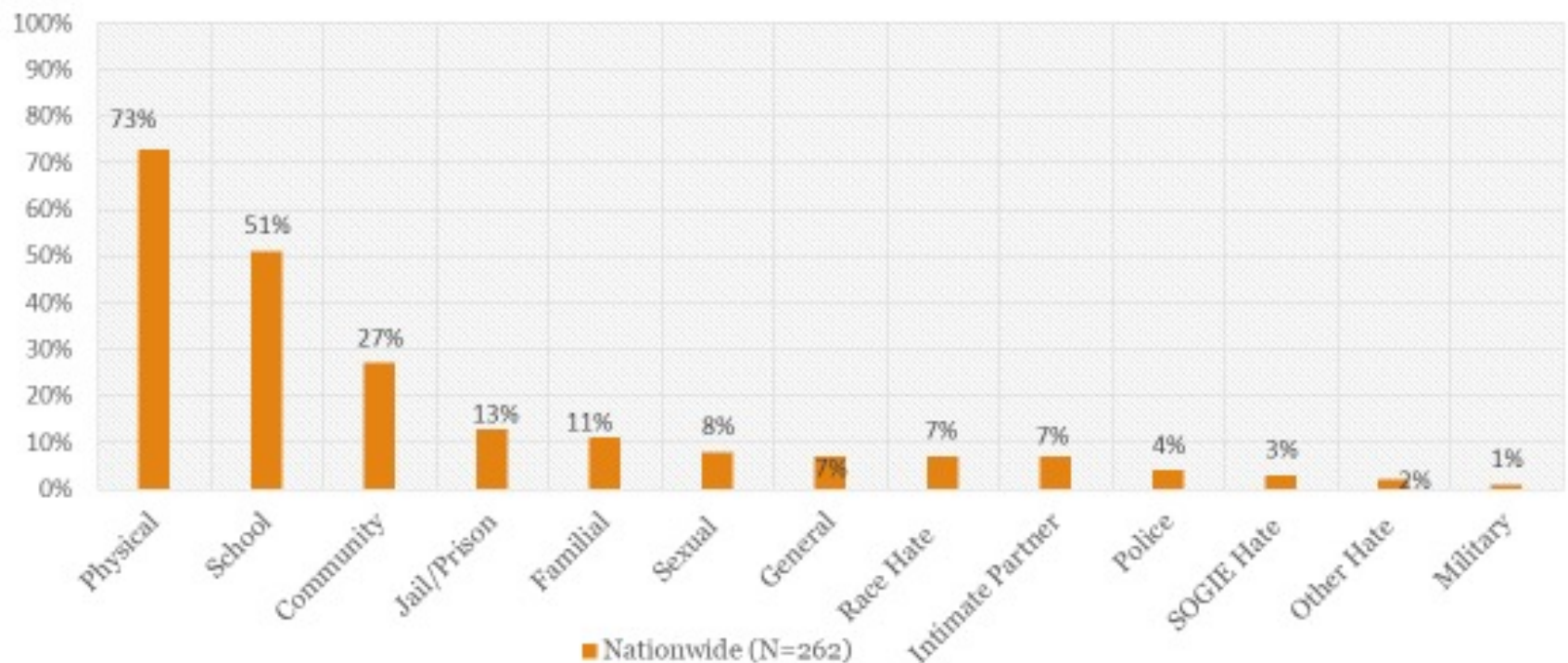
## Phase 1: Key Informant Statistics (N=21)



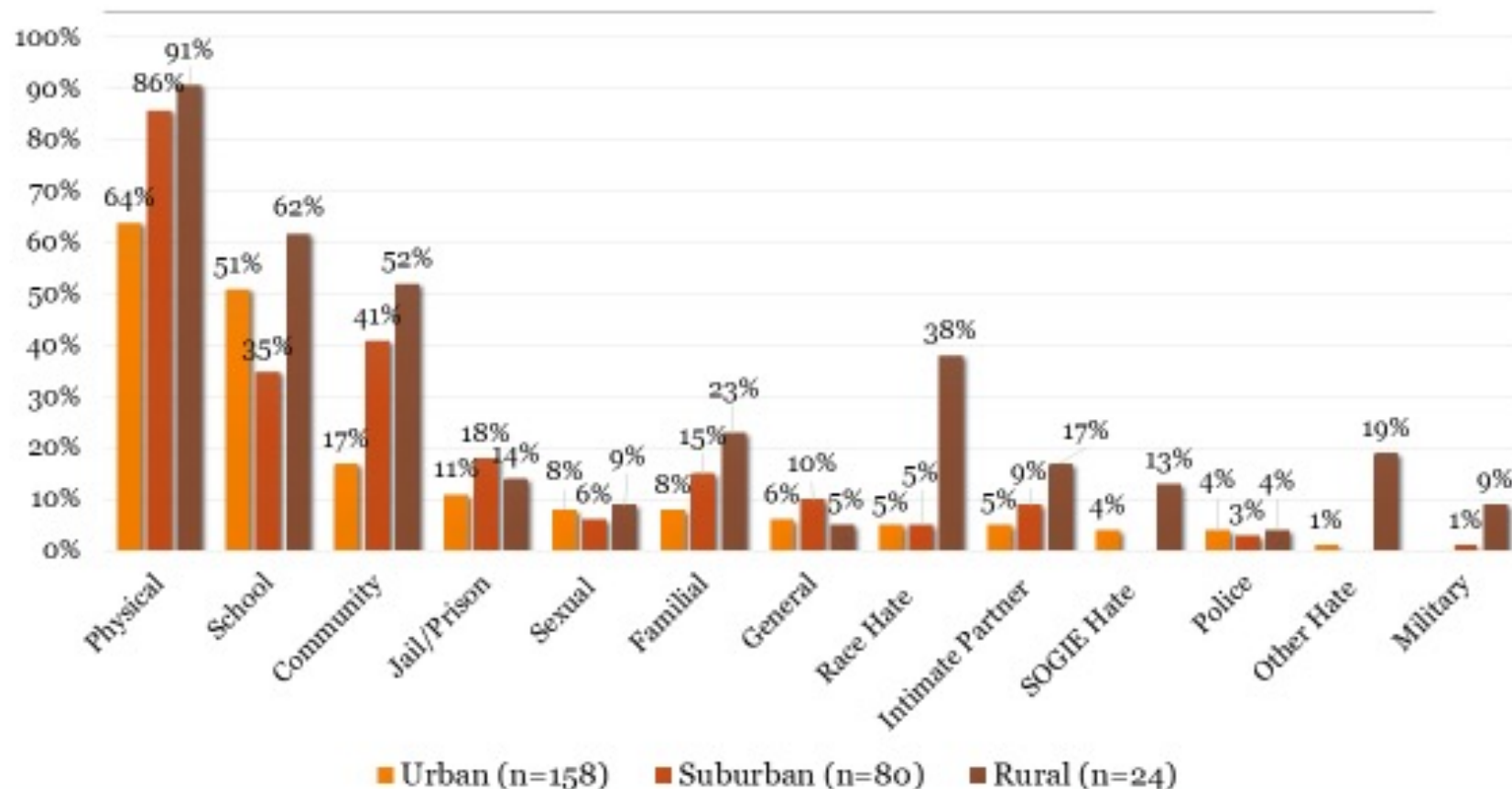
# Phase 2: Data Collection



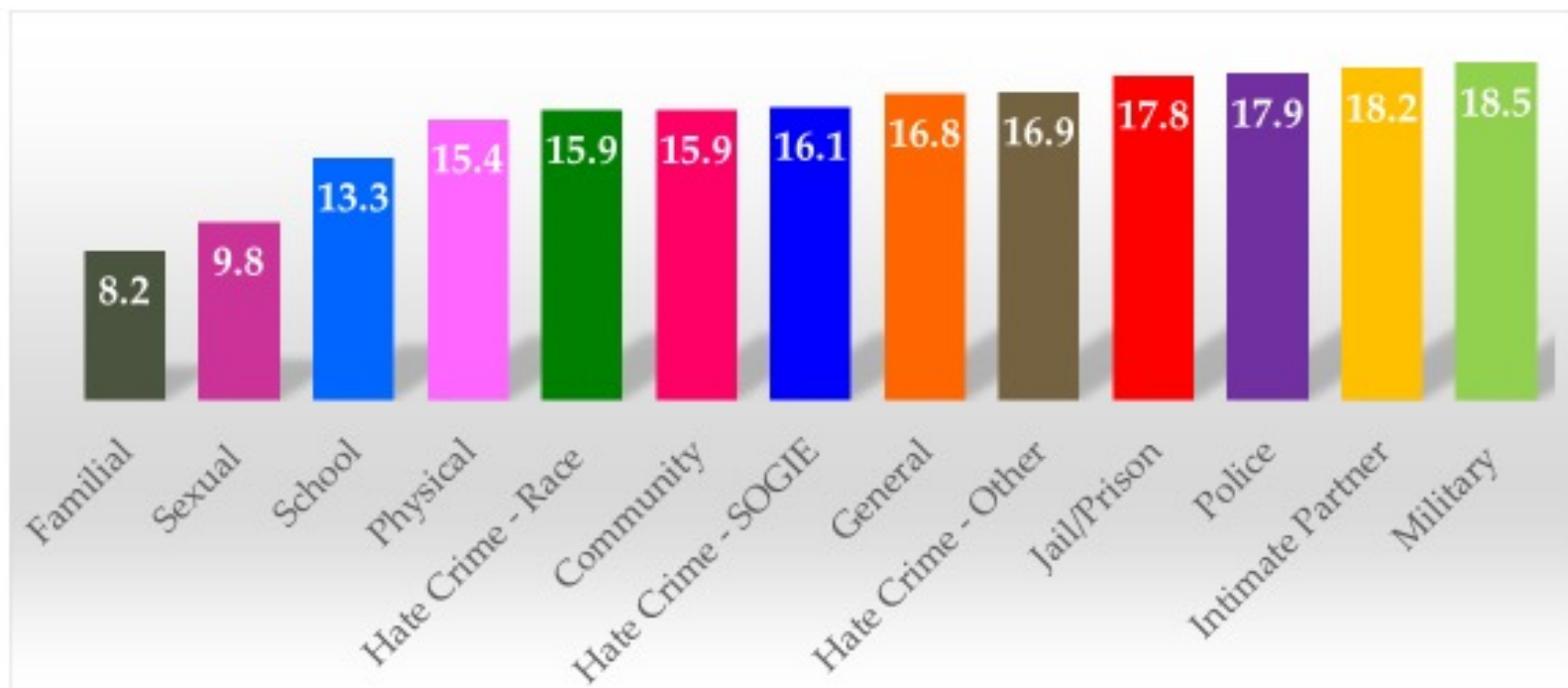
## Phase 2: Experience with Violence (Overall Nationwide)



## Phase 2: Experiences with Violence (Nationwide by Location)



## Phase 2: Average Age (in years) of First Incident Occurrence



# Life History Calendar – Questions

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## **GENERAL QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED OF ALL PARTICIPANTS**

- A. What year did you begin first grade?
- B. Did you go to high school? If so, what year did you begin?
- C. Did you go to prom? If so, which one(s)? What year(s) did you attend?
- D. Are you a parent? What year was your child (were your children) born?
- E. Are you married? If so, what year did you get married?
- F. Did you have a favorite birthday? If so, what year was it?
- G. Do you have a favorite holiday that you remember? If so, what year did it happen?
- H. Have you ever been formally employed? If so, what year did you get your first job?
- I. This next question might be difficult, but I want to ask whether someone close to you died? If so, what year (years) did that happen?

## **QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED OF PARTICIPANTS ONLY IF THEY SAID THEY HAD BEEN IN THE SITUATION BEING ASKED ABOUT**

- J. What year did you enter the military?
- K. What year did you go to jail (or prison) for the first time?



# Life History Calendar –Questions

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INTERVIEWER: Ask the participant other questions about other “memorable events” that can also be used as anchors: death of a friend, learning to drive, first girlfriend, running away from home, involvement in activities like church or sports, etc. Make sure to write what the item number matching the event on the calendar in the box matching the appropriate year. The participant may be able to identify their own “memorable events”.

- L.      Event 1 \_\_\_\_\_
- M.      Event 2 \_\_\_\_\_
- N.      Event 3 \_\_\_\_\_
- O.      Event 4 \_\_\_\_\_
- P.      Event 5 \_\_\_\_\_

**How do you  
define  
violence?**



**“I define it as an overload of passion and raw shame aimed at a target to control your environment and law.”**

**“Madness. Violence is violence, you can't stop it. It's going to happen to you. It's going to happen everyday.”**



**What kind of violence do  
Black men your age  
experience or have they  
experienced?**

**“I was just going to say,  
really what kind of violence  
are we not experiencing?  
That is probably the better  
question.”**

# Examples of Violence Experienced

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**Phase 1:  
Examples of  
Most  
Impactful  
Experiences**

molested by a friend

race wars

raped by uncle

robbed

raped by an adult woman as a child

shot in the face

beaten by a drunk parent

threatened with a knife

abused by father

shot at by gang members

girlfriend burned him with a skillet because she thought he was cheating

car shot up

shot in the head

house shot up

## **Phase 1: Examples of 2<sup>nd</sup> Most Impactful Experiences**

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abused by father

---

beaten by mother

---

jumped by family members

---

raped by uncle

---

assaulted by a woman

---

abused by girlfriend

---

fights

---

bullied

---

being choked

---

beaten by the cops

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shoved into a car and beaten

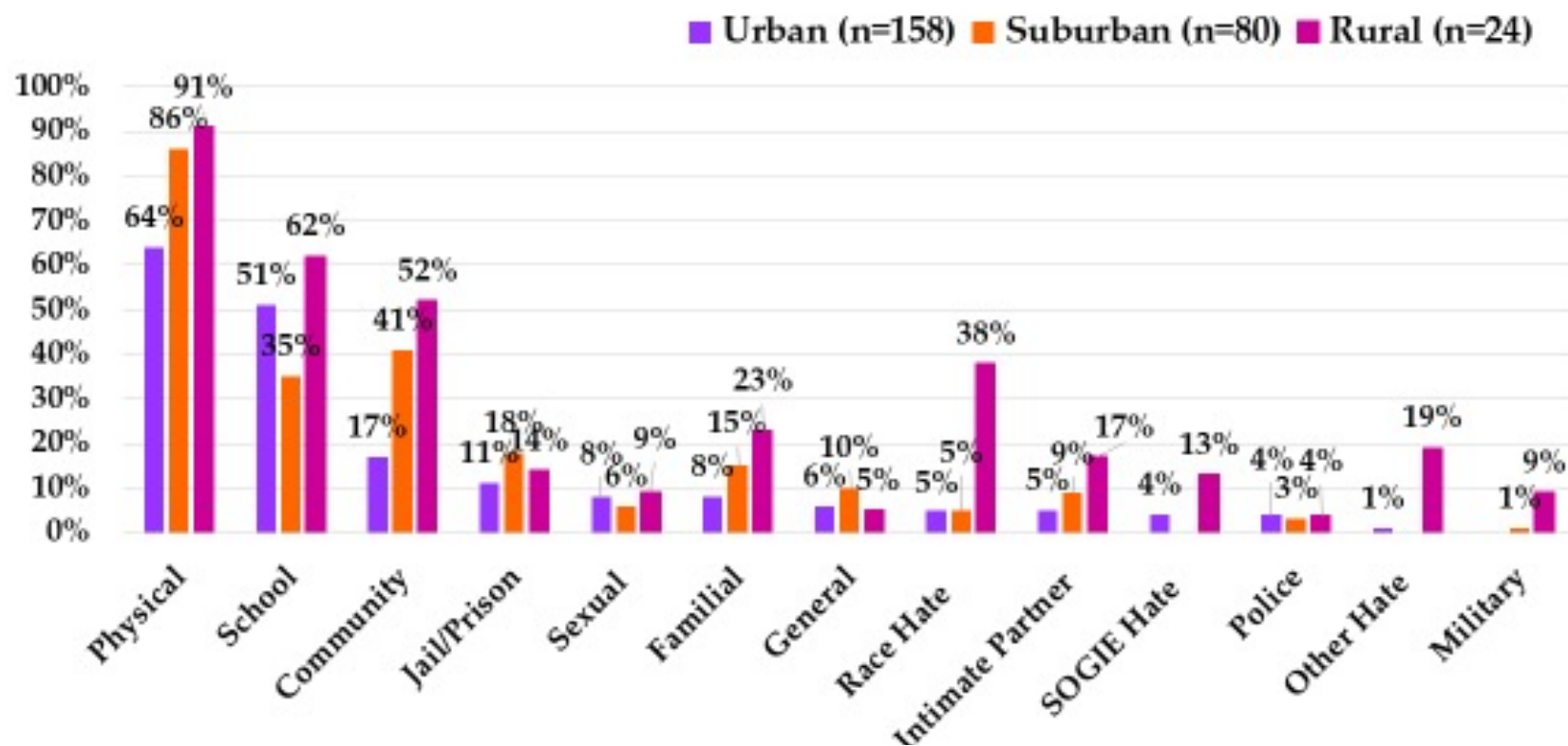
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racist statements that led to fights

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being called racist names while pelted with rocks

## Phase 2: Nationwide Experiences with Violence



## Phase 2: Examples of Most Impactful Experiences

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- molested by a friend
- raped by uncle
- raped by an adult woman as a child
- beaten by a drunk parent
- abused by father
- girlfriend burned him with a skillet because she thought he was cheating
- race wars
- robbed
- shot in the face
- threatened with a knife
- shot at by gang members
- car shot up
- shot in the head
- house shot up



## Phase 2: Examples of 2<sup>nd</sup> Most Impactful Experiences

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- abused by father
- beaten by mother
- jumped by family members
- raped by uncle
- assaulted by a woman
- abused by girlfriend
- fights
- bullied
- being choked
- beaten by the cops
- shoved into a car and beaten
- racist statements that led to fights
- being called racist names while pelted with rocks

# YBM: SURVIVE

## Instrument Overview

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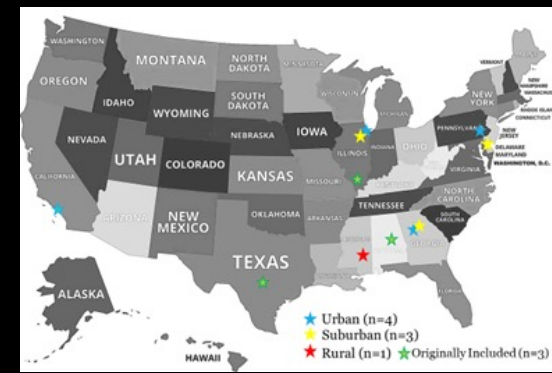
# Final Instrument

## Step 1: Life History Calendar

## Step 2: Instrument Sections

- 1) Bias Crime Violence:** hate crime or other violence due to due to a disability, mental illness, race/ethnicity, SOGIE
- 2) Community Violence:** gang or neighborhood violence
- 3) Familial Child Maltreatment or Sibling Violence:** physical or sexual assault or abuse by a parent, guardian, foster parent, a romantic partner of one of the aforementioned, sibling, or other family member with or without a weapon
- 4) General Violence:** another type not previously mentioned with or without a weapon
- 5) Institutional Violence:** school, jail or prison, or police
- 6) Intimate Partner Violence:** romantic partner physical or sexual assault or abuse with or without a weapon
- 7) Physical Violence:** stranger or known person, but non-family member
- 8) Sexual Violence:** known person (non-romantic partner or non-family member) or stranger
- 9) Situational Violence:** military service related or sexual violence by a fellow serviceman, supervisor, enemy combatant

## Step 3: Demographic Questionnaire



# Violence Sections Content

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- Relationship with the perpetrator, perpetrator demographics, incident details
- Impact of the experience (e.g. physical, relationships, school/work, emotional, psychological, etc.)
- Reporting behavior and support usage – formal, and informal (e.g. to whom, when, response, usefulness, etc.)
- Prescriptions, health insurance, and medical expenses

# Demographics Questionnaire

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- Marital status
- Parental status
- Highest level of education
- Current student status
- Current employment status
- History and current involvement with the child welfare system
- History and current involvement with the juvenile justice system
- History and current involvement with the criminal justice system
- History of military involvement



# Examples of Questions

IMPACT, NEEDS, SUPPORTS

## Physical Violence (non-romantic partner)

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- (Known person) non-family member physical assault or physical abuse, including experiencing bodily injury with a weapon (for example with a stick, bat, rock, gun, knife, fire, a dog, or car) either in public or in private.
- (Known person) non-family member physical assault or physical abuse, including experiencing bodily injury without a weapon or object (for example shoving, slapping, biting, smothering, or pushing) either in public or in private.

## Physical Violence (non-romantic partner)

---

- (Stranger) non-family member physical assault or physical abuse, including experiencing bodily injury with a weapon (for example with a stick, bat, rock, gun, knife, fire, a dog, or car) either in public or in private.
- (Stranger) non-family member physical assault or physical abuse, including experiencing bodily injury without a weapon or object (for example for example shoving, slapping, biting, smothering, or pushing) either in public or in private.



## Perpetrator and Incident

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- Perpetrator(s): race, ethnicity, age, frequency, if known – how long?
- The incident: when, where, doing what at time of occurrence, # of perpetrators, relationship with, witness(es)?

# Result and Reporting

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- Result: physical injury, type of feelings, level of fear during the incident(s), impact of familial and friend relationships, impact on school and/or work, psychological or emotional impact?
- Reporting: if reported how long following the incident, formal to an authority or institution, informal to , what did they do, if they followed up how long did it take, if you did not report why not?

## Support and Financial Impact

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- Support: how do you define it, did you receive any, from who (professional or non-professional), how did the person respond, did you seek professions?
- Financial Impact: insurance (e.g., self, parents, spouse, employer, etc.), other benefits (e.g., VA, public assistance, etc.), cost to self?



# Our Challenges



# Our Lessons Learned

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# Methodology

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- Recruitment was not as challenging as anticipated
- We had to rethink our violence classification
- We had to be flexible in our data collection
- Attention to race, gender, and age in staffing
- Consistent staff who fulfilled multiple roles
- Varied community locations
- Groups in accessible locations
- Local hires were essential

# Young Black Men...

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- Are open to sharing in person and on the phone
- Have a strong desire to build relationships
- Want to keep sharing
- Have a wide range and variety of experiences – some that are surprising to other Black men

# The Expected and Unexpected

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- Our team members repeatedly committed to the project, even when barriers surfaced and the project's plans changed.
- Our participants confirmed the value of us having Black men, from their own communities, work on the project.
- Some participants expressed they needed to talk about the violence they had experienced and participation provided that opportunity.
- The study had a psychological and emotional impact on our team members.





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# Final Thoughts

# Systemic and Societal Failures

**Underfunded, unavailable, inadequate, or inaccessible publicly funded health and mental health services**

**Continued inappropriate referrals due to structural violence, poor training, stereotypes, and racism**

**Poor, lacking, or non-existent cross-system relationships**

- Education, health, mental health child welfare, juvenile and criminal justice

**Unmet, undiagnosed, and undertreated mental health needs, including those related to trauma**

**Negative messaging**

- Value of a young Black man's life
- Potential for contribution beyond sports, music, trades, etc.

**Residential segregation**

- Education, employment, health, housing quality, policing practices, SES, lack of access to opportunities

**Safety**

# Experiences with Disclosure

## Invalidation

They experience invalidation and require proof when they share their experiences with violence and victimization.

## Belief

They are often not believed or thought to have been “doing something wrong” to be victimized by violence.

## Ignored

It is ignored that their experiences with violence are traumatic and can be additive to pre-existing intergenerational and community trauma.

# How do you define being a victim?

**“Have you ever been to a circus? You know how you’ll be watching the people on the tight rope? ... You know how you get that feeling in your stomach because you think they’re going to fall? Just imagine that feeling never going away in every aspect of your life. To me, that’s what being a victim is. That feeling that you can’t exhale, you can’t defend, you can’t grow...”**





**“...Every time I see somebody angry, I don’t ever just jump to conclusions like, “He’s just angry because he just wants to be tough.” When I see it, I think about that gasp of air and he’s just trying to exhale. He’s sick of holding. He’s just trying to exhale, and he’s going to try to get his exhale anyway. If he can’t get it with the in dudes, he’s going to get it with the little dude. He just needs to feel that breath. That’s what being a victim is. That feeling.”**



# Acknowledgements

## **Understanding the Violent Victimization Experiences of Young Men of Color**

- **Unofficial study name: Suburban, Urban, Rural Violence: Investigating Victim Experiences (SURVIVE)**
- **Funded by the National Institute of Justice #2015-VF-GX-K031**
- **Co-Investigator Timothy P. Johnson, PhD**
- **Project Coordinator Isabel Farrar, MA**
- **Research Assistant Emalee Pearson, MSW, MPH**
- **Jane Addams College of Social Work & Survey Research Laboratory**



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  - Key Informant Meeting Notetaker
    - Jantel Hines, MSW
  - Content Experts
    - Rod Brunson, PhD
    - Joseph Day, DrPH
    - Anthony Peguero, PhD
- Phase 1 Recruiters/Interviewers
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  - Willie Brown, BS
  - Robert Chaney, MS
  - Dominic Combs, MEd
  - Amandilo Cuzan, BA
  - Aaron Dunlap, BA
  - Marlon Mitchell, MEd
  - Robert Motley, MSW
  - Chauncey Nelson, MSW
  - Marcelis Posey, MA, MSW
  - Zachary Stewart, MSW
- Phase 2 Recruiters/Interviewers
  - Artis Burney, BA
  - Amandilo Cuzan, BA
  - Lemarcus Douglas, MA
  - Aaron Dunlap, BA
  - Forrest Marberry
  - Cary Oakley, BA
  - Marvin Neely, MA
  - Mack Taylor, BS
  - De'Sean Townsend, BA
  - Zachary Stewart, MSW
- Research Assistants
  - Jantel Hines, MSW
  - Kadima Palles, BA



**Thank You**

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