

Seeking Safety, Equity, and Justice

2021 Ohio Statewide Survey Results: Domestic Violence Survivors' Experiences with Law Enforcement, Courts, Child Welfare and Social Services Systems

February 2022



We remain ever grateful to the 588 survivors of domestic violence, some of whom were still experiencing abuse when they completed the survey or attended focus groups, who took the time and the risk to share their experiences. We hope to honor these experiences by diligently pursuing the recommendations at the end of this report. ODVN also wishes to express our gratitude to the Office of Criminal Justice Services and the Ohio State Bar Foundation, which provided the resources for this survey and report.

ODVN holds our organization accountable to these findings and will integrate them into our own strategic planning and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion work. We stand ready to support and partner with other Ohio response systems to increase safety for survivors and their children by addressing the findings in this data.

Executive Summary

Following the murder of George Floyd, the Ohio Domestic Violence Network (ODVN) conducted a statewide survey and focus groups with 588 domestic violence survivors to deepen our understanding of their experiences when seeking help. A primary focus of the survey was to determine whether women of color specifically, along with other marginalized groups, were experiencing difficulties, and if so, where and how.

Overall, most survivors had positive experiences with law enforcement, prosecutors, courts, domestic violence organizations and other services. Twenty years ago, this would have been an unlikely finding. The many investments in advocacy and housing resources, training efforts, statutory changes, and innovative response models seem to be paying off. However, when survivors reported problems with how systems responded, significant indicators of bias emerged. Survivors of color, immigrants, and LGBTQ+ survivors were over-represented at high rates among those who experienced problems getting help.

Regardless of race, about two-thirds of the survey participants said they were likely to call the police again. All survivors feared, at similar rates, abuser retaliation, having their children removed, and losing housing as a result of calling 911. With some variance, all survivors feared being arrested. These findings on their own are very troubling. But when survivors said they were fearful about calling 911, troubling themes emerged. Black/African American women and LGBTQ+ survivors feared violence from the police most often, about one-third of the time. Victims who felt disrespected by law enforcement, that their concerns were not taken seriously or who experienced blame were much more likely to come from marginalized communities. Police officers interviewed children of marginalized survivors at the scene far more often.

Generally, survivors felt courts took their concerns seriously. However, again, Black/African American women were over-represented among the participants who felt their concerns were not taken seriously by courts. Further, women of color were 21% more likely to have child protective services (CPS) involvement than white women. LGBTQ+ parents reported 15% higher CPS involvement than heterosexual parent survivors. Deaf/Hard of Hearing (Deaf+) survivors consistently reported problems accessing language interpreters with police, courts, and social services providers.

Gaps in services emerged as an issue for all survivors. Just over half of all participants (59%) had an advocate during prosecution, and many said they learned about advocacy services too late in the process. They also reported barriers to access including not having a phone, not understanding what services were available to them, transportation or financial barriers, shame, getting time off work, and privacy concerns. The good news was that when survivors did have advocates, they overwhelmingly (92%) found them helpful to their efforts to get safe.

Black/African American women, other women of color, immigrants, and LGBTQ+ survivors were over-represented among the participants who said they had difficulty getting help from the police, courts, and social services. This finding bears further examination by all concerned about the safety of families experiencing domestic violence. Black/African American women experience the highest rates of domestic violence homicide compared to other racial groups, so their frustrations with our systems' responses are a compelling call to action.

A number of recommendations conclude this report, including changes in the response from law enforcement, expanded advocacy services, addressing poverty-related barriers, and integration of anti-bias work into all systems discussed herein. Further, it is urgent that outreach strategies be employed to ensure that the most marginalized survivors — who experience the greatest barriers to safety — can access services safely.

Introduction

Over many decades, the movement to end domestic violence has invested great energy in increasing safety for survivors and their children, including partnerships with the police and courts, and innovations in services and resources. When George Floyd was killed by the police in 2020, our movement publicly took pause, reflected on our investment in all of these systems¹, and specifically asked ourselves how women of color were experiencing them. Knowing that Black/African American women experience domestic violence homicide at rates more than twice those of white women², we questioned if survivors of color felt they could call upon systems to help them get safer. We committed ourselves to deepening our understanding of the experiences of Ohio survivors and to developing strategies to improve how Ohio communities respond to *all* survivors, especially those who experience additional barriers due to racism, homophobia, xenophobia, language access, and other issues.

The Ohio Domestic Violence Network (ODVN) undertook a large state-wide needs assessment, funded by the Office of Criminal Justice Services and the Ohio State Bar Foundation, to learn how survivors were experiencing community resources available to them, and especially how marginalized survivors were faring.

Methodology

ODVN conducted the Needs Assessment by distributing a survey to survivors of domestic violence/intimate partner violence throughout Ohio. We reached out to local domestic violence programs (residential and community-based), prosecutor-based programs, and culturally specific programs to assist with inviting a diverse pool of survivors to participate in the confidential and voluntary survey. The survey was open between May and August 2021, and each survivor who completed the survey received a \$25 VISA card. Responses to the survey were recorded electronically using Survey Monkey. Survivors were connected with local advocates or the National Domestic Violence hotline if they needed support. Five focus groups were held to deepen our understanding of the data.

Profile of Survey Respondents

The survey was answered by 505 female and 56 male survivors in Ohio³. Participants ranged in age from under 18 to over 65; 80% were between 18 and 44 years of age. Twenty-nine (29) survivors participated in focus groups.⁴

¹ Moment of Truth Letter: <https://vawnet.org/events/moment-truth-movement-reckoning-and-renewal>

² *Racial and Ethnic Differences in Homicides of Adult Women and the Role of Intimate Partner Violence — United States, 2003–2014*, Petrosky, E., et. al., Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, Centers for Disease Control, 2017, at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5657947/>

³ Survivors came from the following geographic areas: 29% Central Ohio, 15% Southeast Ohio, 8% Southwest Ohio, 14% Northwest Ohio and 33% Northeast Ohio

⁴ Five focus groups were conducted with 29 domestic violence survivors whose racial/ethnic identities were: 34% White/Caucasian, 45% Black/African American, 10% Latina/Hispanic, 7% Asian/Pacific Islander and 3% multiple ethnicities.

Needs Assessment Questionnaire Female Respondent Demographics (N=505) ⁵						
	White		Black/African American		Non-Black Women of Color	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Total Respondents ⁶	269	54.3	153	30.9	73	14.7
With Children	214	79.5	123	80.4	55	75.3
LGBTQ+ Community Members (n=67)	26	38.8	19	28.4	22	32.8

Implementing the Findings

Any professional responding to domestic violence knows well the challenges of responding effectively. Whether we are shelter or court/community advocates, police officers, judges, child welfare workers, prosecutors, or others, we have worked hard to implement effective options for survivors. Funders have invested millions of dollars in Ohio. In our work, we bear witness to the suffering domestic violence causes to survivors and their children. We strive to build safer options for survivors and their children, though we know that every year, over 100 people die in our state due to domestic violence.⁷

Understanding the experiences of survivors through this report is critical to our success. When victims are telling us our best efforts have fallen short for them, it is urgent that we listen. To build safer responses and resources, we begin with our best intentions, knowing intentions are just a beginning. This study is a rare opportunity to hear directly from survivors about what they have experienced, and what will make things better for them and their children. In the last section of this report, we offer specific data-driven recommendations.

Survivors' Experiences with Systems of Response

This section discusses all surveyed female survivors' experiences with systems of response. Analysis of data for survivors who were women of color, immigrants, LGBTQ+ survivors, and men are discussed in the next section.

⁵ Of all survey respondents, 495 female respondents identified their ethnicity.

Of male respondents, 59% were White/Caucasian, 16% were Black/African American, 5% were Latino/Latinx, 5% were Asian/Asian American, 5% were Native American/Alaska Native, 4% were Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 2% identified as another ethnicity and 4% preferred not to answer.

⁷ Since the Covid epidemic began through 2021, Ohio domestic violence fatalities have increased substantially. See a complete compilation of ODVN's Annual Fatality Reports here: <https://www.odvn.org/media/>

Law Enforcement

Overall, most survivors said they had positive experiences with law enforcement. Regardless of race, about two-thirds of survivors said they would call the police again. A total of 60% of survey participants called the police regarding their most recent incident of domestic violence, and 91% had called the police for help in the past. Forty-one percent (41%) reported calling the police for help more than three times; 10% had called the police more than seven times.

Dispatch. 86% of responding women felt that dispatchers were helpful, and 84% said they were very or somewhat likely to call the police again for help based on their experiences with dispatchers.

Responding Officers. Most survivors said they were treated respectfully by responding officers and were grateful for their help. Some said the police “saved their life.” Many described positive experiences where police officers took action, were helpful, patient, and supportive, and made them feel safer. However, 17% reported that they were not treated with respect by responding officers, and 23% said officers did not treat their concerns seriously at all. Many reported that while they were the victim of the violence, they were arrested. Survivors whose experiences were not positive offered these insights:

“Sometimes I felt like I was bothering them.”

“They acted like they had more important things to do.”

“He said if he had to write a report, he would be taking both of us.”

“They act like I deserved it... like I brought it on myself.”

Overall, 38% of survivors said that during their interaction with the police, the responding officers shifted blame to them, which had significant impacts on them as crime victims. Fifty-four percent (54%) of those survivors said that they “shut down,” and 28% said that they stopped cooperating with the police. Some survivors described the impacts of being blamed:

“My depression got the best of me, and I felt like giving up the fight to get away, and just going back.”

“My trust in the legal system was lost.”

Of all women who called the police, 76% had children, and 62% of the time, they said their children were present at the domestic violence incident. When children were present, officers interviewed the children 29% of the time either during the most recent incident or at some point during interaction with law enforcement. Based on their prior experiences with calling the police, 68% of survivors said they were very or somewhat likely to call the police in the future. However, 23% said they were not likely to call the police again, and just over 9% were unsure if they would. Those survivors described a number of reasons they would not call the police in the future:

Fear of more violence from abuser	54%
Fear of being arrested instead of abuser	35%
Fear of children being taken away	34%
Didn't think police would believe them	28%
Fear of losing housing	23%
Fear of violence from police	21%
No access to a phone	11%

Prosecution and Courts

Sixty-two percent (62%) of participants sought help from a court regarding the most recent incident. Of those who filed criminal charges, only 59% received help from an advocate at a prosecutor's office. When they did have advocates, the vast majority (92%) of survivors found them helpful. Eighty-five percent (85%) of the participants said they received information from advocates about additional legal options, and three-quarters of them (76%) received additional resources and support such as housing information, shelter referrals, financial resources, Crime Victims Compensation information, and culturally specific resources.

Many survivors described prosecutors in a positive way; however, 14% reported that prosecutors made decisions about the case without consulting them, such as dropping or reducing charges. Twelve percent (12%) of the participants reported being pressured to agree to decisions about their case that made them uncomfortable, and 39% said they did not recall their interactions with prosecutors assigned to their cases. Survivors who had negative experiences with prosecutors offered these concerns:

"He decided to drop my case the day before our trial was supposed to start."

"They said, 'Oh great, she's here, I hate it when they show up.' I was sitting right in front of them. They didn't know what I looked like because they never took the time to meet with me."

"The prosecutor verbally berated me for calling and asking about the status... 10 months after the incident."

Among the survivors who previously had a protection order (criminal or civil), 14% said they were criticized by court personnel for seeking a protection order after the new incident. Of those who experienced this, 39% said they were criticized by prosecutors, 59% said they were criticized by judges/magistrates and 25% said they were criticized by advocates.

Child Welfare

More than half (56%) of the respondents had some involvement with the child welfare system, and more than a quarter of them (27%) had negative experiences. Focus groups were conducted to delve more deeply into the issues survivors experienced. Four major themes emerged, which are discussed in Appendix 1. Generally, survivors said case plans did not address the violence they experienced, and they felt harshly judged by workers who did not understand their experiences. Survivors reported that their violent partners were treated well even when they did not comply with case plans. Survivors who had an advocate reported that CPS outcomes were much more helpful to them and their children. Lastly, survivors told us that if their advocates were mandated reporters (meaning they were required by law to make reports to children's services) they would not seek services again from them.

Social Services

Exactly 70% of the respondents received social or support services from shelters, non-residential and community-based programs, and the Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services (ODJFS). Two-thirds (66%) of them used domestic violence shelters, 56% received housing assistance, 77% received counseling services, 62% attended support groups, 67% received help from ODJFS, and 56% were involved with ODJFS child protective services.

The chart below shows how helpful survivors found these services:

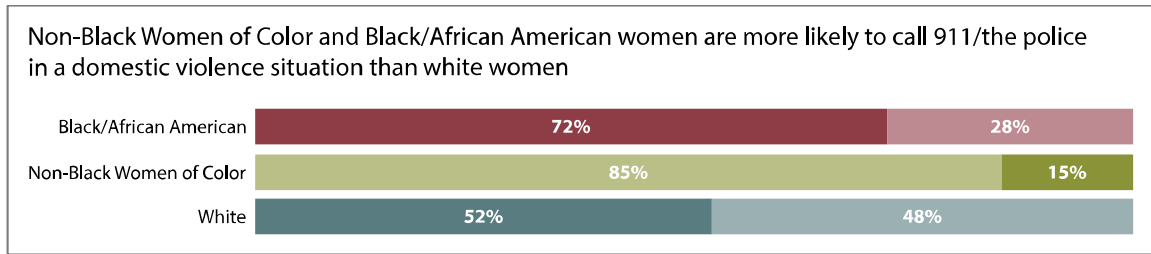
Services	Services Helpful	Services Not Helpful
Support Groups	96%	4%
Domestic Violence Shelters	95%	5%
Counseling	94%	6%
Housing Assistance	91%	9%
ODJFS	89%	11%
ODJFS Child Protective Services	73%	27%

Lack of access to interpreters, fear of losing their children, fear of not being believed, and fear of being treated unfairly were the most common narrative answers to the question "Please explain any barriers that would keep you from accessing social services." Others said they did not know about social services, how to access them or what they could offer. Some reported transportation or financial barriers to accessing services, as well as immigration status, shame, fears of discrimination, getting time off work, and privacy concerns, as well as worries about contracting COVID as barriers.

Experiences of Marginalized Survivors

Women of Color

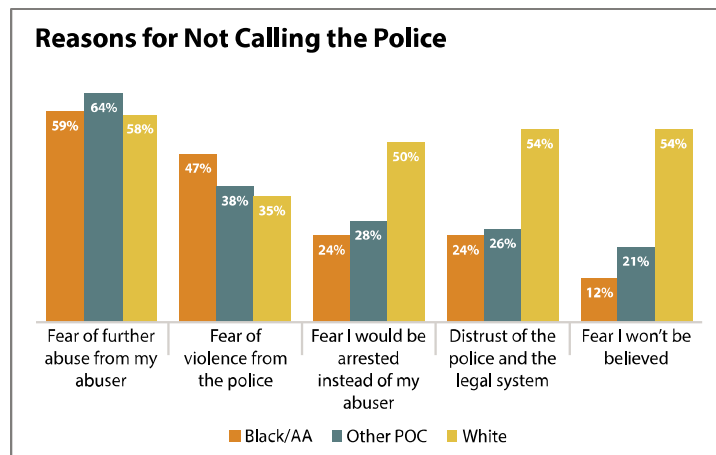
We analyzed data from women of color separately because these survivors have the highest rates of death by domestic violence homicide. Some areas of serious concern emerged:



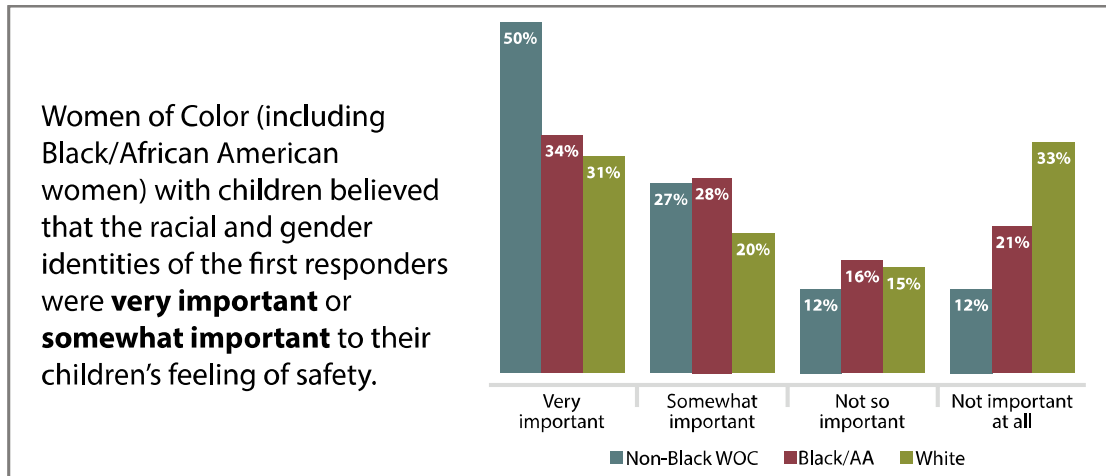
Law enforcement. Survivors who were women of color called police more often than white women, and, as with white respondents, about two-thirds of the respondents said they would call the police again. They reported positive experiences with dispatchers at similar rates to white women. However, they were less likely to make subsequent calls to the police for help. The 35% of all participants who were not likely to call police again offered different reasons depending on their race. Almost twice as many African American/Black survivors as white survivors cited their *fear of violence from the police* as the reason they were unlikely to call the police if they were experiencing domestic violence.

One survivor said:

"I need to know that we both will be safe" (in order to call 911).



Survivors who are women of color reported positive experiences with officers who they said were "professional," "patient" and made them "feel safe." But Black/African American survivors were far more likely to say they were treated disrespectfully by responding officers: Black/African American survivors reported 30% more often than white survivors that they felt they weren't taken seriously by law enforcement. Some stated they felt like officers "didn't care," were "insensitive," and "had no compassion." Women of color reported 30% more often than white survivors that police officers questioned their children. All survivors of color were five times more likely than white survivors to report that they believed their race or ethnicity to be the reason they were treated negatively by the police.



Courts. Survivors who were women of color sought help from courts at rates similar to white survivors. However, women of color reported that they felt court personnel did not take their concerns seriously 29% more often than white survivors. Women of color survivors were more likely than white survivors to say they were criticized by court personnel for seeking a protection order after previously having one.

Children and Child Protective Services. Women of color survivors were involved with child welfare workers 21% more often than their white counterparts. Women of color who were not Black/African American experienced high rates of being threatened with losing their children, more than double the rate for white women.

Deaf+ Survivors

One of the most compelling findings from the survey came from Deaf+ survivors, who described the negative impacts they experienced by not having appropriate language access. Twenty-two respondents, or about 5% of the respondents, were Deaf+, but only one of them reported being provided an interpreter when they called police. Many reported that family members were used to interpret, meaning there were no professional standards met and there was a loss of privacy. Several reported they were required to use pen and paper to communicate. Often, they say they were not fully separated from their abusers at the scene. Not having interpreters was a problem most often with law enforcement, but some also experienced this barrier in courts and social services. Deaf survivors also noted that sometimes the police did not understand Deaf+ culture and norms. Survivors told us:

"My ex-husband used to go outside with the police so I couldn't read their lips or hear them."

"The police felt that I was being combative because I was attempting to sign."

"The person who is most fluent with communication gets heard first, and first impressions get the power over the other person."

LGBTQ+

Survivors who were lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer/questioning had generally positive experiences with all of the systems, although they reported some areas of serious concern:

Law enforcement. LGBTQ+ survivors were less likely than their heterosexual counterparts to have ever called law enforcement. LGBTQ+ survivors shared in common with other survivors reasons they would not call the police, i.e. fear of losing housing, fear of arrest, etc. LGBTQ+ survivors also feared being seen as the perpetrator by the police [n=67].

38% of LGBTQ+ survivors reported they had never called the police about their domestic violence experiences.
16% more LGBTQ+ survivors than heterosexual survivors said they would not call the police because of fear of not being believed.
LGBTQ+ survivors reported fear of retaliation from their abusers as a result of calling 911 20% more often than heterosexual survivors.
Most notably, 35% of these survivors cited fear of violence from the police as the biggest barrier to calling 911, a rate almost double that reported by heterosexual survivors.
57% of LGBTQ+ survivors reported being blamed for the violence by the police, higher than any other reporting demographic.
13% of LGBTQ+ survivors reported they felt that their negative treatment by the police was due to their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Courts. LGBTQ+ survivors exhibited similar rates of seeking help from courts and experienced similar rates of finding court personnel generally helpful. However, they accessed advocates 10% less often than heterosexual survivors. These survivors' responses indicated the highest levels of being criticized by judges, magistrates, prosecutors, and advocates for seeking a protection order after previously having one; more than three times as often.

Children & Child Protective Services. LGBTQ+ survivors experienced involvement with the child welfare system 15% more often than heterosexual survivors. LGBTQ+ survivors had the highest rate of CPS involvement of all groups, 15% higher than non-LGBTQ+ survivors.

LGBTQ+ survivors were threatened with their children being taken away at the highest rate (41% of all LGBTQ+ survey respondents) — more than double the rate of heterosexual survivors.

Male Survivors

About 10% of survey respondents were male survivors; 44% identified as LGBTQ+, and about one quarter were limited English proficient (LEP). Forty-three percent (43%) of male survivors were parents.

Law Enforcement. Male survivors were the least likely group to have ever called 911. They had the most negative experience with dispatchers and were 20% less likely to call the police again based on their experiences with dispatch.

Male survivors reported that the police were disrespectful to them 47% more often, and that blame was shifted to them 21% more often. They said they were reluctant to call 911 for similar reasons as other survivors; however, they reported fear of losing housing 17% more often, fear of not being believed by police 36% more often, and fear of deportation four times as often. They were more likely to say that fear of police violence would keep them from calling 911 for help. Male survivors reported that their children were interviewed by police officers twice as often as female survivors, and at the highest rate of all survivors.

Courts. Male survivors reported positive experiences with courts at rates similar to their female counterparts. However, they reported being criticized for seeking a protection order after previously having one three times as often as female survivors.

Children and Child Protective Services. Male survivors had child welfare system involvement at a rate 36% higher than female survivors. Since CPS involvement was also higher for LGBTQ+ families, and many male survivors also belonged to this and other marginalized groups, it is impossible to determine if gender was a factor.

Summary Recommendations

In addition to their recommendations above, ODVN makes the following recommendations based on the data:

1) *Addressing Negative Experiences by Marginalized Survivors*

a) *Police Reform –*

- i) *Community-oriented policing.* Police violence impacts the calculations domestic violence survivors who are women of color or LGBTQ+ make when deciding if they will call 911 in an emergency. In the wake of the murder of George Floyd, racial justice activists have advocated for more restrictive use of force policies as a way to reduce killings by police. Eighteen states, the District of Columbia, and dozens of cities have enacted at least one police reform law, according to 8cantwait.org. The new laws include bans on chokeholds and shooting at moving vehicles, requirements that police issue a warning before shooting, improved reporting when police use force and other reforms. Ohio is among 32 states where reforms have not been enacted. Ohio needs to enact police reforms that improve the public's trust in law enforcement. More restrictions on the way law enforcement officers use force may help lessen the fear of police violence for domestic violence victims who need to call 911.

- ii) *Domestic violence units.* Survivors told us they feared police would get it wrong and arrest them or that officers failed to see the danger they were in. Around the U.S. and in Ohio police departments have specialized domestic violence units where officers receive advanced training to help them respond to these very complex calls.
 - iii) *Lethality assessments.* The General Assembly is considering HB 3, which would require police departments to use lethality assessments and refer survivors to domestic violence programs. Many Ohio police departments are already using lethality assessments to help officers determine which survivors are in the most danger. Preliminary findings in one of them – Cleveland – indicate that danger assessments paired with focused interventions with high-risk abusers are reducing homicides.⁸ The Ohio General Assembly should pass HB 3 so that law enforcement officers across the state are required to perform lethality assessments.
 - iv) *Advocacy/police partnerships.* Nineteen percent (19%) of survivors who responded to the survey said they would not have called the police had they known their partner could be arrested. This, along with survivors asking for access to advocacy when police are involved, calls for partnerships that offer non-criminal justice options for domestic violence survivors as well as better criminal justice outcomes when survivors believe prosecution will make them safer. Key elements include a survivor-centered focus and strong autonomy of advocates whose roles are clearly defined as advocacy and not investigation or efforts at increased prosecution. When advocates can retain this core function and bring resources to address barriers to victim safety, police/advocacy partnerships can reduce trauma and increase safety for survivors and their children.
- b) *Self-Monitoring and Accountability.* Each response system has a responsibility to assess how survivors are experiencing the assistance they provide and whether there are indications of bias. Self-assessment and community accountability are key to the overall improvements needed, as evidenced by this data. While it may look different in each system, organizations will provide better help to families seeking assistance by:
- i) Evaluating demographic data so that we understand the communities we serve.
 - ii) Building cultural competency training into core personnel training and ongoing staff development that responds to the community makeup.
 - iii) Ensuring language access and organizational compliance with Title 6 (foreign language access) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (Deaf+ language access).
 - iv) Developing written materials in print or online for survivors in the languages reflected in our local community data.
 - v) Diversifying our staff and monitoring compensation, promotions, demotions, and terminations through identity lenses such as race/ethnicity, LGBTQ+ status, etc.
 - vi) Diversifying our management staff and, for nonprofits, our boards.

⁸ Preliminary findings in a project focused on high-risk cases in Cleveland, Ohio indicate that danger assessments paired with focused interventions with high risk abusers are reducing homicides. See: <https://www.odvn.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/CPD-1-5-Homicide-Analysis.pdf>

- vii) Developing safe, confidential, anonymous survivor feedback loops so that we can better understand what issues or barriers survivors in our community are experiencing. Consider holding our own ongoing focus groups or online surveys. Make options for complaints and feedback easily available, and use the feedback to improve.
 - viii) Analyze how, when and how long we are engaged with survivors by demographic data. For law enforcement, this may be analysis of 911 calls and arrests by ethnicity of victims and offenders. For domestic violence programs, this may be length of services/shelter stays, involuntary exit patterns, referrals to child protective services, access to material resources, and other services through a demographic lens. For child welfare, this may be analyzing removals, time in foster care, and termination of parental rights through these same lenses.
 - ix) Consider forming a survivor advisory group to help identify systemic improvements to our local responses and services.
- c) *Ongoing Anti-Bias Training* should be implemented for every system responding to domestic violence. Courts and law enforcement were systems where survivors perceived bias in the way they were treated, either because of their race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, immigration status, or language. Anti-bias training should be a core and ongoing resource for court and police personnel, CPS, domestic violence service providers, and others to ensure that Ohio victims perceive and experience our justice system and social services systems as fair and free of bias.
 - d) *Child Welfare Reform* is needed so that marginalized communities are not over-represented in the caseload. When cases open because of domestic violence, the focus should be on the perpetrator and safety. Ohio has invested impactful training resources in the Safe and Together CPS model for these cases, which focuses on bolstering protective parent strengths and addressing the violent parent; however, this model needs to be institutionalized throughout the CPS system.
 - e) *Outreach Strategies* are needed to reach marginalized survivors. Reaching and engaging with survivors of color minimally requires staff diversity, building trust, thinking outside the box, building partnerships with key leaders in their communities, and an internal commitment to address bias on an ongoing basis.
 - f) *Language Access* is required under federal law for many first responders and federally funded service providers who should ensure their compliance with Title VI⁹ and the Americans with Disabilities Act.¹⁰ Programs need to develop a full capacity to serve Deaf+ survivors and non-English speakers, to fulfill their obligations under the law, and to ensure that Deaf+ survivors and non-English speaking survivors have equal access to services by agencies that understand their experiences and culture.¹¹

⁹ HHS Publication - Guidance to Federal Financial Assistance Recipients Regarding Title VI Prohibition Against National Origin Discrimination Affecting Limited English Proficient Persons at: <https://www.hhs.gov/civil-rights/for-individuals/special-topics/limited-english-proficiency/guidance-federal-financial-assistance-recipients-title-vi/index.html>

¹⁰ Americans with Disabilities Act requirements for effective communication with Deaf/Hard of Hearing individuals <https://www.ada.gov/effective-comm.htm>

¹¹ Violence in the Lives of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Special Collection of Resources, VAWNET, at: <https://vawnet.org/sc/violence-lives-deaf-or-hard-hearing>

- g) *Funders* can play a key role in requiring grant applicants to implement concrete plans to address bias and the needs of marginalized survivors and report on compliance with federal law, collaborative partnerships, and organizational capacity during grant-seeking or grant monitoring.
- 2) *Housing Protections* – Many survivors said that they were reluctant to call 911 for fear of losing their housing. Ohio is one of a minority of states with no protections for survivors of domestic violence who are private tenants.¹² While protections do exist for federally subsidized housing, private renters may be subject to eviction if landlords discover the domestic violence. Others may be evicted because law enforcement is called to their home, either through lease terms or local ordinances. Statutory protections are needed to ensure that Ohio domestic violence victims can call 911 without fear of losing their homes.
- 3) *Funding Resources* are needed to address a number of issues raised by survivors:
- a) Public defender resources for misdemeanor cases are extremely limited. Consequences for survivors are often severe, including the loss of children. Funding prohibitions on legally assisting survivors who have been arrested should be re-evaluated.
 - b) Some expenses are excluded by Crime Victims Compensation (CVC); survivors with certain criminal convictions are ineligible. CVC should expand compensation to better assist survivors.
 - c) Legal services funds are needed on a larger scale overall, and prohibitions against assisting survivors in the child welfare system leave many with court-appointed counsel who are not responsive. The complexity of child welfare litigation involving domestic violence calls for advanced legal skills and strategies, and a number of national organizations have developed technical assistance in this area.¹³ Improvements should be made to the court-appointed system. Funding limitations on assisting survivors with civil legal needs in this area should be re-evaluated so that survivors are effectively represented in these complex cases, especially since the outcome can be permanent termination of parental rights.
 - d) Survivors need advocacy services when involved in the CPS system, and said that advocates made a world of difference in their ability to get their children out of the foster care system and back at home. Promising models around the country should be evaluated for replication in Ohio.¹⁴
- 4) *Courts*. Ongoing training in domestic violence could be beneficial to court personnel. Prosecution policies should ensure that when survivors want to prosecute, cases with evidence can go forward. Marsy's Law provisions to have meaningful input and notice should be monitored to ensure the law is followed.

¹² Ohio is among 23 states that have not enacted housing protections for private tenants who are experiencing domestic violence, such as the ability to break a lease, or avoid eviction because the police were called, according to the National Housing Law Project. See: <https://www.nhlp.org/wp-content/uploads/2017-NHLP-DV-and-Hsing-State-Compendium-FINAL.pdf>

¹³ *Reasonable Efforts Checklist for Dependency Cases Involving Domestic Violence*, National Counsel of Juvenile & Family Court Judges, at: https://www.ncjfcj.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/reasonable-efforts-checklist_web2010.pdf and Futures Without Violence, at: <https://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/children-youth-teens/quality-improvement-center-domestic-violence-child-welfare-advancing-adult-child-survivor-centered-practice/>

¹⁴ <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/domviolence/collaboration/system/>

- 5) *Confidentiality* is a central concern for survivors. While Ohio has yet to grant privilege to domestic violence advocates, this gain cannot come at the price of privacy by making advocates mandated reporters. Survivors were adamant that this would have an extremely negative impact on their ability to seek help in dangerous situations.
- 6) *Addressing poverty* is a key element to better domestic violence outcomes. The data tells us that some survivors are too poor to own a phone and that many do not have transportation or have other financial barriers to get to a safe place, pursue legal options, or receive services. Addressing poverty should be incorporated as a key service in nonprofit budgets and should be an expectation of funders.
- 7) *Employment protections* are needed. Survivors told us that not being able to get time off work was a barrier to them participating in services. While domestic violence survivors who are state employees in Ohio enjoy certain workplace protections¹⁵, the non-state workforce remains at risk for employment instability due to domestic violence. Private employers and municipalities should consider adopting the policy for state workers to implement common-sense employment protections for survivors that increase their safety, job security, and workforce retention.

Recommendations from Survivors

We asked survivors what would make systems more helpful and make them more likely to call upon them. They said they needed earlier access to advocates, quicker response from police, and responders who are knowledgeable about domestic violence and various cultures. They also wanted meaningful interventions that would reduce the violence they were experiencing. Deaf+ and survivors who spoke English as a second language wanted better language access. Survivors wanted police departments to reduce police violence and ensure officers were skilled in both de-escalation and domestic violence response. A list of their ideas and needs can be found in Appendix 2.

A final note: It is our hope that this report will help inform policy recommendations for social service agencies, more effective collaborations with law enforcement, better training, and improved advocacy support for survivors when and where they need it most.

¹⁵ <https://das.ohio.gov/Portals/0/DASDivisions/DirectorsOffice/pdf/policies/humanresources/HR-27%20Barbara%20Warner%20Workplace%20Domestic%20Violence%20Policy%2010212019.pdf?ver=2019-10-21-112928-447>

Seeking Safety, Equity, and Justice

Appendices for 2021 Ohio Statewide Survey Results

February 2022



Appendix 1: Focus Groups with Battered Women Involved with Child Protective Services

Child Welfare

About 15% of survivors involved with child protective services (CPS) did not have a positive experience. Focus groups were conducted to delve more deeply into the issues that survivors experienced. Four major themes emerged.

First, while most child welfare cases opened regarding concerns about the domestic violence, most often *the case plans did not address the violence in any way*. Often, survivors were ordered into assessments even though they were not the perpetrators, and they were frequently ordered into parenting classes, even when they did not present with parenting deficiencies. All survivors said their caseworkers never talked with them about safety. Survivors whose children were removed because of their partners' violence typically had their own visits limited to a few hours per week, supervised, even though they presented no safety concerns to their children.

Second, survivors felt *the child welfare system was harsh, judgmental, and unable to understand their experiences*. Overwhelmingly, women said they were criticized, judged, traumatized, blamed, and disrespected. These were common statements in the focus groups: "I didn't feel they were there to help me. They don't care about us. They ruined my life. They don't come to protect us or our kids, they come to judge us. It felt like they see the worst in us. It felt like the whole world was against me."

Third, *violent parents fared well* in the CPS system. Many women said their violent partners, whose behaviors were the basis for most cases, were rarely ordered to do anything and were never held accountable if they did not comply with the case plan. The harsh judgements women experienced seemed to be applied only to them; they felt that their abusers "got away with everything," charmed workers, and were rarely judged negatively as parents or compelled to stop their violence.

Last, survivors said that when they had a *domestic violence advocate*, they were able to succeed most of the time in getting their children back from CPS. Survivors identified a number of essential resources from advocates such as access to housing help, food, access to legal advice and representation, relocation help, safety planning, emotional support, and court accompaniment. Many said they felt less alone in the CPS system and that their advocates could help them communicate with CPS caseworkers when they did not understand what the survivor was experiencing.

Focus groups uncovered an intersection between responding systems. While numerous survivors said that they were arrested even though they were the victims, some of the survivors involved in the CPS system said their children were initially removed because they (the survivors) were arrested instead of the perpetrator. Even when charges against survivors were later dropped, children stayed in foster care for as long as a year.

In the conclusion of these focus groups, we asked survivors how it would impact them if all domestic violence agency staff were mandated reporters. With only one exception, every woman said she would not call the agency or its hotline. Many said, "There is so much at stake. I couldn't risk losing my kids again."

Appendix 2: Ideas and Needs as Laid Out by Survivors

Law Enforcement

- a) Quicker response time (this was one of the most frequent concerns)
- b) Specialized DV units and/or officers with advanced understanding of domestic violence, who:
 - a. would be less likely to be manipulated by abuser
 - b. would be better able to recognize dangerousness indicators, including non-violent risk factors
 - c. would take all domestic violence reports seriously
 - d. would be skilled at primary aggressor assessment so that the victim is not arrested
 - e. had advanced knowledge about mental health, trauma, PTSD and domestic violence dynamics
- c) Having language interpreters at the scene (and via phone or tablet computer, if in-person is not an option) or texting options for Deaf+ survivors
- d) Diversity in gender and race of responding officers
- e) Separation of the parties at the scene and privacy from neighbors during investigations
- f) Interpersonal elements of active listening, non-judgment, non-blame of the victim, patience, concern for the victim, compassion, and empathy
- g) Responder skill in de-escalating potentially dangerous situations
- h) Non-violence by officers in the community, and accountability measures such as body cameras and better new officer screening
- i) Having quick access to an advocate at the scene or by phone, and follow-up advocacy resources
- j) Cultural knowledge of various communities (Deaf+, immigrant, LGBTQ+, communities of color, disability, etc.)
- k) Arrests followed by accountability and meaningful interventions in the courts to reduce violence

Advocacy and Shelter Resources

- a) No delays in accessing emergency safe shelter
- b) Interpreter access
- c) Advocacy access and help navigating other systems; lower caseloads so advocates have time for survivors
- d) Interpersonal elements of active listening, non-judgment, non-blame of the victim, patience, concern for the victim, compassion, and empathy
- e) Relocation resources, including out-of-county
- f) Transportation to shelter
- g) Non-restrictive shelter environments to promote healing
- h) Cultural knowledge of various communities (Deaf+, immigrant, LGBTQ+, communities of color, disability, etc.)
- i) Transitional housing

- j) Better community awareness of how to access services, and less waiting time for services
- k) Shelters: Better security outside shelter facilities, including security cameras and gates, fewer rules to reduce monitoring and control of survivors in shelters (as the monitoring is similar to having to live under abusers' rules, and is not conducive to healing), and child care in shelter to allow moms to conduct outside business and have time for self-care
- l) Multi-lingual advocates, culturally specific advocates who are from Deaf+, immigrant and LGBTQ+ communities
- m) Access to trauma/mental health services without long waiting lists

Courts

- a) Interpreter access
- b) Longer distance specifications in protection orders
- c) Protective actions to stop abusers
- d) Having language interpreters available for ESL and Deaf+ (and via phone or e-notebook, if in-person is not an option) or texting options for Deaf+ survivors
- e) Cultural knowledge of various communities (Deaf+, immigrant, LGBTQ+, communities of color, disability, etc.)
- f) Better access to protection orders
- g) Eliminate presumption of shared parenting when there is a history of domestic violence and/or child abuse
- h) Protection order enforcement
- i) Prosecution and offender accountability

Community Resources and Policy

- a) More fair employment laws so that victims don't get fired for issues related to their victimization
- b) Easier process and broader cost eligibility for Crime Victims Compensation
- c) Legal advice and services, including for immigration concerns
- d) Virtual court hearings for increased safety

Appendix 3 – In Their Own Words: Narrative Responses from Women of Color Survivors Regarding Police Response

Problematic Interactions with Law Enforcement

A notable amount of quantitative and narrative responses indicated that survivors who were women of color had positive experiences. They used words like “helpful, patient, comforting, put me at ease, etc.” But a substantial number did not have positive experiences. Below, in their own words, are the kinds of concerns they expressed:

- *Not so great. Some of them refuse to help once they see that I'm Hispanic.*
- *The police really haven't helped with anything. They just act like they don't care.*
- *I just feel like my particular case was passed off as non-serious, or as the police called it, a mutual fight, when I feel I was defending myself!*
- *The police literally disregarded me. I was naked, and me and my neighbor explained that the man was still in the house. They continued asking who the house belonged to...*
- *They also said I was not beat up and the EMTs had to explain to them, yes, and showed them my back...they don't care about people. I'm always hesitant to call the police because when they show up, they assume things about the situation without asking questions.*
- *When I did call the cops, they told me that since the abuser lived in the home more than 30 days, they couldn't remove him.*
- *Only one responding officer really seemed to care. The lady and the officer behind the desk were rude and didn't really care, it seemed, until they looked my abuser up and saw charges pending against him.*
- *Some positive, a lot negative.*
- *The police that I encountered were horrible. Because [abuser] had lived in the area for 10 years, they always showed aggression toward me and barely let me talk, and he knew that every time.*
- *It took them over two hours to respond, during which time I feel someone could have gotten seriously injured or killed had the situation stayed elevated.*
- *To sum it up, frustrating.*
- *Sometimes it has been okay because they were understanding, but other times they seemed like they didn't care. When my face was all busted up and I wasn't thinking straight, they asked questions instead of calling for EMT.*
- *It was such an ordeal that it makes it hard to trust law enforcement when you're stopped for anything.*
- *911 takes 5-8 hours to respond to the scene. 911 does not follow up with the victims. 911 does not go to the abuser's home to follow up or arrest at all.*
- *After my experience, I had a lot of trauma when I saw an officer, and I was having panic attacks.*
- *Terrible. Once they didn't even come out. Once I had to report an incident on the voicemail. Once they just stood there.*
- *I feel like calling the police did not fix anything.*
- *It seemed like they were making it easy for the abuser.*
- *Insults and critical comments about how I raised my kids.*
- *Some police were rude and did not care that I was hard of hearing and acted like I was a burden or that they could not be bothered to deal with accessibility issues. Others were nice and accommodating, i.e. spoke slowly, repeated often, and made sure I understood.*
- *The police have hurt me.*
- *I went to the police, but they didn't help me as much as I thought they would.*
- *Once came to my home to investigate and did not give me much help.*

- *I had a very bad experience with police. Their report at my house was very bad, very incomplete, and they only wrote down what the abuser said about the DV incident.*
- *Sometimes they discriminate against me, and I feel it's because I am Black.*
- *My experience with our local law enforcement has been a half good, half bad encounter because some police are mean and don't take the right time to [understand] a situation, and sometimes the way they talk to you as a person is offensive. It is not what you say – it's how you say it.*
- *Not helpful at all, and they haven't been understanding.*
- *Some good and some bad.*
- *Terrible and one-sided.*
- *My experience is that police do not like Black women at all. Period. It doesn't matter what happened to me. They checked the house said, welp, he is gone, and they took no evidence of the crime scene, no pictures of the window. They just towed the car and left.*
- *I had to leave my own home and my abuser got to stay.*
- *I was falsely accused of domestic violence, and instead of doing their research, they just arrested me.*
- *Very negative because my abuser was a police officer as well.*
- *Demeaning.*
- *Insensitive and horrible.*
- *Unfairly saying they will arrest us both.*
- *I feel like they could take it more seriously. It's almost like swept under the rug or like it's my own fault.*
- *In general, I feel judged and that the police would rather not bother with domestic calls.*
- *Unfortunately, oftentimes when I sought help, the police did not want to arrest the abuser. In fact, one said that if he had to write a report, he would be taking both of us to jail.*
- *911 does not take the incident seriously. 911 does not give accurate police reports. 911 does not show empathy. 911 does not follow up with the abuser (arrest the abuser).*
- *That first officer seemed to lack any kind of empathy. He spoke to me like I was the perpetrator. Once back at my apartment, he made me feel very uncomfortable as he gathered evidence and continued to dismiss me and anything I had to say as I tried to show him where the evidence was.*
- *Well, I am a Black woman. Even when I call the police, I am often prejudged. My abuser was a white male. They would get both sides of the story. And somehow I would still be taken to jail just for defending myself.*
- *They almost act like it's bothersome. One incident took them three hours to get there after three phone calls were made to them.*
- *Terrible. They never came out.*
- *A lot of times I felt like the bad guy instead of the victim.*
- *Very bad experience. Police are not educated enough about behaviors of abusers.*
- *Police think women lie and overexaggerate*
- *I felt like they acted like they had more important things to do, like I was taking up their time.*

Impact of Victim Blame on Survivors

- *I became severely depressed, broke down.*
- *My depression got the best of me. I felt like giving up the fight to get away, and just go back.*
- *I became triggered by the lack of empathy and by the total and utter denial that I was the person who initially called the police. And open toxic communication strategy caused me to not only shut down but become enraged and fear I would be arrested.*
- *I stopped calling.*
- *My trust in the legal system was lost.*
- *I feel helpless.*

Factors that Would Help Enable Survivor Trust in Police and 911

- *For them to be fair and actually treat me with respect and fairness and not based on race or based on my abuser's work.*

- *If they were not rushing people. It would be nice if they meet people where they are. It would be nice if they took the time to listen. Police should understand the effects of trauma on victims.*
- *If they actually showed concern. I should have just gone to the hospital and called the rape crisis people. They did nothing for me, no pictures of the crime scene.*
- *If I was to know they would help me and not the abuser.*
- *Proper treatment of cases and correct handling of evidence.*
- *For them to believe you and listen.*
- *If they answered without the run-around.*
- *Knowing that they are there to help and not judge.*
- *If they came faster.*
- *A little bit more empathetic.*
- *Sending officers who are not one-sided who can listen.*
- *Them actually doing something before I'm seriously injured or dead.*
- *Knowing they will be fair and no one will be shot.*
- *Be a little more patient, a little more empathetic.*
- *Patience, skilled handling ability, police speed.*
- *Compassion and a little understanding.*
- *Knowing something would be done and that law enforcement would not treat the victim like the accused.*
- *Even if I had to call them, being an African American citizen, both me and my husband, I NEED to know that we both will be safe no matter the situation.*
- *Proper de-escalation training in hostile environments. Being treated like a person, not a suspect when actually calling for help.*
- *New training more geared to mental health, community policing, focusing on de-escalating tactics.*
- *Response in a timely manner.*
- *If they actually cared.*
- *They need more training in domestic violence. Knowing that we are scared and our thinking process may be off because of fear and thinking of what may happen to us after the abuser returns.*
- *Quicker response. More options for victims.*
- *If they showed up on time.*
- *If I had more assurance that they wouldn't take it as lightly.*
- *They have an open mind and not judgmental.*
- *Police need to get training about DV and how abusers use the system.*
- *If they acted like they actually cared and weren't judgmental or racist.*
- *Having officers who truly understand domestic violence.*
- *If there were more resources to help immediately after the incident. If the police would actually take these situations seriously.*