MCASA
Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault

Sexual Violence Against Black & African American Women

FACT SHEET

Overview

Black and African American women experience disproportionately higher rates of sexual violence due to systemic inequality and historical marginalization.[1] For example, both the racial and gender wage gap and job segregation limit economic opportunities and make it more difficult for Black women to build wealth.[2] These economic inequalities contribute to higher rates of poverty and exposure to conditions that increase vulnerability to sexual violence.[3] Black women also experience high rates of childhood abuse, which increases the likelihood of victimization later in life.[4] When Black women experience sexual violence, issues such as police brutality, mass incarceration, and over-policing of Black neighborhoods discourage Black women from reporting, impacting their ability to access services and seek justice.[5]

Statistics[6]

- More than **20%** of Black women are raped during their lifetimes.
- For every Black woman who reports rape, at least **15** Black women do not report it.
- **1 in 4** Black girls will be sexually abused before the age of 18.
- **35%** of Black women experienced some form of contact sexual violence during their lifetime.
- **40%** to **60%** of Black women report being subjected to coercive sexual contact by age 18.

Barriers to Reporting and Seeking Help[7]

- **Racism and discrimination**: Past and ongoing experiences of racial discrimination can make Black and African American survivors less likely to trust healthcare providers, law enforcement, and other institutions, and believe they will receive fair treatment.
- **Stereotypes about Black women's sexuality**: Harmful stereotypes that portray Black women as hypersexual contribute to victim-blaming and the minimization of sexual violence. These stereotypes also cause others to question whether a survivor experienced sexual violence.[8]
- **Not being believed**: Black and African American women may fear that others will not believe them or will minimize their experiences of sexual violence because of racial and gender stereotypes. Fear of these negative reactions, including not being believed, can discourage survivors from disclosing sexual violence and seeking additional support.
- **Lack of culturally responsive services**: Survivors may not be able to find services that understand the ways that race, gender, and other identities shape their experiences, making it harder for Black and African American survivors to access support. This lack of culturally responsive services can discourage survivors from seeking help in the first place.

For survivor resources, please visit:

mcasa.org/survivors/culturally-responsive-services

[1] Bryant-Davis, T., et al, "Struggling to survive: Sexual assault, poverty, and mental health outcomes of African American women" (2010). American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 80(1), 61–70. Retrieved September 2026 from https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1939-0025.2010.01007.x
[2] See Citation 1
[3] Newton, Tianna and Colin, Elise, "How Policymakers Can Close the Wealth Gap for Black Women" (2024). Urban Institute. Retrieved September 2026 from https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/how-policymakers-can-close-wealth-gap-black-women.
[4] Mosley, Elizabeth A. et al., "Racial Disparities in Sexual Assault Characteristics and Mental Health Care After Sexual Assault Medical Forensic Exams" (2021). Journal of Women's Health. Retrieved September 2026 from https://doi.org/10.1089/jwh.2020.8935.
[5] "The Barriers That May Prevent Black Women From Reporting Sexual Assault " (2020). Blackburn Center. Retrieved September 2026 from https://www.blackburncenter.org/post/2020/02/19/the-barriers-that-may-prevent-black-women-from-reporting-sexual-assault.
[6] Barlow, Jameta Nicole, "Black women, the forgotten survivors of sexual assault" (2020). American Psychological Association. Retrieved September 2026 from https://www.apa.org/topics/sexual-assault-harassment/black-women-sexual-violence.
[7] Decker, M.R. et al, "'You Do Not Think of Me as a Human Being': Race and Gender Inequities Intersect to Discourage Police Reporting of Violence against Women" (2019). Journal of Urban Health. Retrieved September 2026 from https://doi.org/10.1007/s11524-019-00359-z.
[8] Washington, Darius M. et al, "Racialized Sex-Based Harassment: A U.S.-Based Intersectional Framework for Understanding Harassment of Black Women and Men" (2026). Behavioral Science. Retrieved September 2026 from https://doi.org/10.3390/bs16020184.

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