

Concept Note

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Addressing Systemic Racism Across All Aspects of the Response to Domestic Violence: A Proposal for an Interdisciplinary Action Convening

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SUMMARY

Systemic inequities affect the response to **Domestic Violence** throughout all the structures that touch offenders and victims from policing to prosecution to interventions for the families affected. The combination of systemic racism, inequities in policing, overincarceration, and socioeconomic inequities is deadly—and Black and Indigenous people bear a disproportionate amount of the cost.

In addition to the loss of life and the pain to family members and survivors, racial injustice as it relates to Domestic Violence (Intimate Partner Violence -IPV) has a uniquely damaging impact on communities of color. Black and Brown men are far more likely to be arrested and prosecuted for domestic violence crimes as compared to their white counterparts and additionally victims and survivors, especially those of color, are too often criminalized or stigmatized by the systems meant to help them. To curb this disproportionate impact on communities of color and effectively respond to Domestic Violence, it is essential to determine concrete actions that actually contribute to the dismantling of structural racism across systems.

PROPOSAL

Approximately 40 national experts in Domestic Violence from the victim advocacy, justice, policy, offender intervention, community organizing, researchers, and the health sector have been meeting weekly since May 2020 to discuss what can be done to address racial injustice as it relates to Domestic Violence. We propose to bring together these experts and other important voices in a facilitated convening similar to those convened by the National Academies of Medicine. The outcome will be multilevel action plans and policy recommendations across systems in a published report to be widely disseminated.



The purposes of this convening would be:

1. **Bring together leading experts in Domestic Violence (IPV) with leading experts on dismantling structural racism** in a two-day virtual convening during Fall 2020 hosted by the Johns Hopkins University and its School of Nursing with expert facilitation.
2. **Provide brief (10 minute) thought provoking addresses by leaders in this space** such as Beth Richie, Oliver Williams, and Judge Ronald Adrine to help the participants think “out of the box” about new actions needed to dismantle structural racism across systems that seek to reduce Domestic Violence and its deleterious effects.
3. Follow the brief addresses with **facilitated discussions across disciplines and backgrounds** (rather than breaking into our familiar silos of criminal justice, offender intervention, health care, and domestic violence service organizations) to develop action strategies with policy, practice, research and training initiatives that can be disseminated, referred to and used at the national, state and local levels and at the organizational, governmental and funder strata.
4. **Produce a final report distilling the proceedings into policy recommendations that include the action strategies to be used and disseminated widely and intersectionally by the attendees and relevant stakeholders**

CONCLUSION

We recognize that these inequities are part of long history of structural racism throughout our systems that rest on a long history of economic and social inequities often enforced through the criminal justice system. Solving the problems of racial inequity related to Domestic Violence (IPV) will require us to confront the systemic racism and re-envision our law enforcement specific assistance and response. Importantly, it also requires us to examine the rest of the systems that are trying to address the problem so that all the systems work together in new and re-imagined ways. Alternatives to the traditional justice system response clearly need to be different from what we have been doing. We also recognize, those inequities notwithstanding, that many victims of domestic violence, irrespective of racial identity, are in extreme danger at the hands of violent abusers and therefore need a well-trained trauma informed police response, but a reimagined form of policing for domestic violence situations. Proper vetting must be done to ensure, to the degree possible, that law enforcement officers responding to these situations are neither intimate partner abusers nor racists and have had their own PTSD addressed, where it exists. We also recognize that primary, secondary and tertiary community prevention models need to be the first steps in domestic violence situations that are culturally specific and led by their communities with the police a last resort. These include re-imagining victim/survivor services across systems (such as child welfare and health care) so that victims/survivors of color are neither stigmatized nor criminalized by the systems meant to help them. We further recognize that new interventions are needed to help abusers become nonviolent, interventions that do not depend on criminal justice mandates except in the worst cases. This is what most victims want. Cases need to be triaged so that the those that are the most dangerous are responded to by those with the skills and training to do so and with interventions calibrated to their issues. All of these issues have been considered previously, and good work has been done, but it has been piecemeal rather than coordinated, and primarily white expert led versus led by communities and experts of color. Most importantly, we feel the fierce urgency of NOW, that the present high level of public engagement around these issues supports and requires immediate attention and action.

Johns Hopkins School of Nursing is improving the health of individuals and diverse communities locally and globally through leadership and excellence in nursing education, research, practice, and service. As part of Johns Hopkins University, we are honored to lead this important initiative and crucial work through conducting rigorous research, supporting evidence-based policies, convening experts in their fields, and sharing this knowledge.