

Economic Security of Survivors: Overview

- Shelters reported that 74% of survivors **stayed with an abuser longer** due to financial issues.¹
- Survivors of sexual violence or stalking at college are more likely to **drop out**.²
- Survivors **lose 8 million days** of paid work annually.³
- **25%** of survivors were asked to resign or were fired from their jobs due to stalking.⁴
- Rape costs survivors over **\$145,000** in health care, lost wages and criminal justice system costs.⁵

Survivors of Color & Economic Security

Introduction

Domestic and dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking are crimes with deep economic impacts. These include both the resulting costs of violence as well as economic abuse as a tool of power and control. Ranging from housing instability to employment gaps to debt, the financial consequences of gender-based violence can thwart a survivor’s ability to recover from a violent attack, leave an abusive relationship, or remain independent. And yet, some groups not only experience violence at disproportionate rates, but also face distinct and significant barriers to safety and economic security.

This first brief in WOW’s Population Policy Series focuses on survivors from communities of color, including Black, Latino, Asian and Pacific Islander (API), and immigrant survivors. While “women of color” stands for many unique populations, there is an advantage to examining these groups together and accounting for the common sources of their economic insecurity. Past and present discrimination, lack of support from faith institutions and memberships, distrust of law enforcement and service providers who historically have not been culturally competent, and race-based material disenfranchisement have

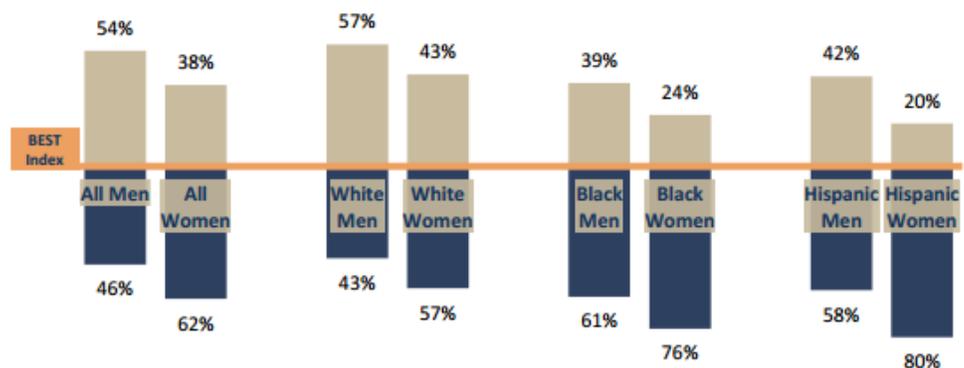
hindered survivors of color from seeking support and safety.

Women of Color and Economic Security

WOW’s Basic Economic Security Tables (BEST) Index measures the costs of basic expenses, plus savings for retirement and emergencies for 420 different family types at the local level.⁶ Based on this research, 62% of women in the US live in economic insecurity compared to 46% of men. Those who are economically secure— who are able to meet their basic needs and find stability through savings and assets— are better able to insulate themselves from harm. In this regard, women of color are especially vulnerable.

According to the BEST Index, **76% of Black and 80% of Hispanic women** fail to make ends meet, higher than both White women and their male counterparts (see Figure 1). Moreover, single mothers, a demographic that disproportionately consists of Black and Hispanic women,⁷ face the greatest hardship: **82% of single mother families** struggle to provide basic necessities of food, housing and health care for their families.⁶ This is particularly troubling considering that domestic violence survivors are often trying to survive alone.

Figure 1: Percentage of Single Adults with Household Income Above and Below the US BEST, by Race/Ethnicity



Victimization Statistics

- Married immigrant women experienced more physical abuse than unmarried: 59.5% to 49.8%.¹²
- Hispanic survivors report more rape by intimate partners than non-Hispanics (7.9% vs. 5.7%) despite equal rates of IPV.¹³
- Around 40% of Black women report unwanted sexual contact by age 18.¹⁴
- Puerto Ricans exhibit the highest rate of violence by a partner during pregnancy.¹⁵
- API immigrant survivors of domestic violence may experience direct or indirect abuse from extended family, especially in-laws.^{16, 23}
- 48% of Latinas reported an increase in partner violence since immigrating to the US.¹²
- Over 90% of Vietnamese women reported 0-2 people as sources of support in the US.¹⁶

Factors that contribute to the economic disenfranchisement or insecurity of women of color include worse employment prospects, unequal education and limited access to healthcare. Women of color not only earn less for the same work, but are clustered in low-wage sectors like the service industry as well as face **higher unemployment**.⁸ In 2012, unemployment for Black and Latina women was 13.3% and 11.4% respectively, compared to 7.2% for White women.

*While women as a whole earn 77 cents for every dollar their male counterparts earn, Black women earn 70 cents and Latina women 66 cents.*⁹

Lower completion rates in postsecondary education and a lack of workforce training contribute to the occupational segregation of women of color. While the ratio is improving, Black and Latina women still **earn fewer degrees** than White women: 21.4%, 14.9% and 30% respectively have at least a college degree.⁸

Immigrant women face similar obstacles. While there are many highly educated and skilled immigrants in the US, 26.5% of immigrants over 25 **do not have a high school diploma** – compared to 5.4% of native-born Americans— limiting their job prospects.¹⁰ Immigrants are employed predominantly as tailors, sewers, or agricultural workers – occupations that offer low wages, no benefits and little room for growth.¹¹ As a result, immigrants earn 77.5% of their native-born counterparts. Language fluency impacts both jobs and education.

Due to their over-representation in low-wage jobs without health insurance, women of color account for an overrepresented portion of uninsured women.⁸ This expectedly leads to poor health outcomes. For example, they have higher mortality for some cancers despite lower overall rates of cancer. They also disproportionately suffer from certain ailments, such as diabetes, heart disease and hypertension, all at great financial cost.

Barriers to Survivor Security

The economic insecurity of women of color makes them more vulnerable to intimate partner violence (IPV), sexual assault and stalking.^{17,18} Their economic insecurity also contributes to and combines with isolation, racism and discrimination, culture and legal status to shape how women of color experience and respond to violence.^{14,15}

Victimization and Reporting

Due to a lack of comprehensive, recent research, it is difficult to speak with total accuracy about the rate of victimization for each population. In addition, isolation, legal status and language barriers— along with broad diversity— prohibit generalizing data for survivors across immigrant groups. While it is known that IPV has decreased drastically for women of color in the last 20 years,¹⁹ especially for Hispanic survivors, exact numbers vary greatly across studies.

Despite variation in studies, Black and multiracial survivors consistently report the most violence.^{13,19,20} There is also often little difference between Hispanic and non-Hispanic reports of IPV,¹³ but Hispanic survivors generally face more barriers to safety, like economic insecurity, than White survivors. API survivors suffer less sexual assault, but more physical assault.²¹ See below for results of the 2010 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, the most recent large-scale study.²⁰

Significantly, however, **little difference in lifetime incidences** of intimate violence is found among groups after controlling for income levels.²² This can help explain why the rates of IPV are 35% higher among Black women,¹⁵ who are most likely to live

	Non-rape Sexual Assault	Intimate Partner Violence	Stalking
Black	41%	43.7%	19.6%
Latino	36.1%	37.1%	15.2%
API	29.5%	19.6%	N/A
White	37.6%	34.6%	16%
Multi-racial	58%	53.8%	30.6%

Fatality Rates Facing Women of Color

Economic insecurity can keep survivors from being safe or from leaving an abuser. This, and an economically stressed abuser, increases the chance of fatality. For already disenfranchised women of color, it is unsurprising that they suffer an undue share of IPV homicides.²⁸

- Washington found overrepresentation in fatalities of all women of color, crediting poverty and a lack of services.²⁸
- Georgia has the highest proportion of African American women killed. Also, 22% of perpetrators were unemployed.²⁹
- In Florida, 33% of homicide perpetrators were unemployed.³⁰
- 51% of intimate partner homicides in New York City in 2004 were immigrants.³¹
- Risk of homicide increases for women in larger cities.³²

Nationally, homicide of Black females is 2.5 times higher than for White females, while API female fatalities are 1/3 less.³⁴ National data could not be collected for Latina women.

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in economic distress and disadvantaged neighborhoods, than for White women.²³

- Domestic violence is three times as likely if the **abuser was unemployed** twice or more in five years.²³
- Domestic violence rates are three times higher for **couples with high financial strain** than low strain.²³
- Risk of injury rises if the abuser has less than a high school diploma.²¹

Since communities of color are more likely to experience financial strain, low education and unemployment, it is unsurprising that Black survivors are more likely to have weapons used against them and suffer **severe injury**.²¹ High financial stress and injury contribute to increased physical and mental health needs for Black and Latino survivors that can be hard to address in jobs without insurance or leave.

Cultural norms and religious practices can be another factor in the high victimization of women of color, especially if immigrants come from countries where such violence is condoned or not subject to the same laws as the US.²⁴ Factors such as differing social sanctions for abuse in native countries contribute to **lower reporting** rates by some women of color. For example, API survivors consistently show the lowest levels of domestic and sexual violence in major reports, but a compilation of community-based studies found IPV rates ranging from 41% to 61%.¹⁶ Experts agree that reported rape, for instance, is lower only because social values and culture discourage disclosure even in confidential settings.¹³

“The overriding rationale for many immigrant women staying in abusive relationships is...fear that deportation or loss of residency status could mean losing custody of their children.”²¹

In all, around one-fifth of rape, one-quarter of physical abuse and one-half of stalking by a partner is reported to police.¹³ A quarter of surveyed justice system workers said that IPV is the crime least reported by

immigrants, followed by sexual assault and gang violence.²⁵ Black survivors are more likely to report IPV than White survivors, but least likely to report rape.²¹ Latinos are less likely to report sexual assault.²⁶

Barriers to reporting to police, service providers or researchers include:^{14,15,24,27}

- Violence not defined as a crime in home countries or considered private
- Stigma or shame of assault or divorce
- Distrust of law enforcement and other institutions or services
- Financial dependence on the abuser
- Unfamiliarity with US norms and laws
- Fear of deportation and isolation

Unfortunately, a survivor’s safety and security is more at risk the longer these crimes go unreported. For domestic violence, reporting delays often lead to an increase in economic abuses and severity of violence with higher costs. For sexual assault, delayed reporting lowers the odds of receiving justice and restitution.

Involvement in the Justice System

Survivors of color face **violent histories** with the police either personally or as a community, and a history of legal barriers within a court system that traditionally has been unwilling to help, thus promoting fear and distrust.³² In one survey, Black survivors reported that officers refused to take reports and engaged in victim blaming rhetoric.¹⁸ Survivors may also fear perpetuating negative stereotypes or betraying loyalty to one’s community.

Immigrant survivors may be equally hesitant to seek help due to negative experiences with similar institutions in their native countries.²⁴ Moreover, some police agencies work with federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to share information or contract for language interpretation.²⁸ As a result of this alliance, they must **risk deportation** or go without crucial protection and safety planning.

Once survivors of color decide to report domestic violence, sexual assault or stalking to law enforcement, they are faced

“Cultural competence is a process that involves individual practitioners and systems responding to their clients in ways that recognize, value, and respect the clients’ cultures, languages, classes, races, ethnic backgrounds, religions, and other diversity factors.”²⁷

Help-Seeking Behavior among Asian American Populations

The Asian Task Force study found wide ranges of agreement on help-seeking attitudes among API respondents:¹⁶

- 29% of Koreans, 22% of Cambodians, 18% of Chinese and 5% of South Asians agreed that abused women should not tell anyone
- 82% of South Asians, 44% of Cambodians, 41% of Koreans and 37% of Chinese agreed that abused women should turn to a friend
- 74% of South Asians, 52% of Chinese, 47% of Cambodians and 27% of Koreans agree that abused women should call the police

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with additional barriers. Many survivors of color see the criminal and civil justice systems as racially biased and sexist. Many feel that the criminal justice system will actually exacerbate rather than alleviate their problems.²²

This highlights the problem of women of color’s **overrepresentation in the justice system**.³³ Black and Latino women are both highly disproportionately incarcerated in the US, chiefly for nonviolent offenses.¹⁴ Women of color also risk being arrested with the abuser (dual arrest) more than White survivors. Frequently these women are sexually assaulted in prison, either by guards or fellow inmates.³³ Both of these risks, and the huge consequences that incarceration has on economic security, decrease their likelihood of seeking help.

Another barrier for survivors of color is language access within the justice system. Failing to provide adequate interpretation services for limited English proficient (LEP) survivors on all police calls puts everyone’s safety at risk.²⁸ It also inhibits a thorough investigation. The situation can be made worse if police rely on an interpreter with ties to the survivor’s family or community. Police sometimes even gather information from the abuser, the abuser’s family or children, with **devastating repercussions**.²⁴ In situations of isolation, whether in rural communities or close-knit ones, use of a language line or a remote interpreter can avoid conflicts of interest and threats to survivor confidentiality.

One national survey found that courts have a shortage of interpreters, few materials in other languages, and poor relationships with local organizations.³⁵ Rural courts performed worse than urban courts. There is at times also **cultural confusion** about the need to gather or preserve evidence and to appear in court.²⁷ Communication is equally obstructed if courts use formal terms that do not have direct translation.²⁸ In fact, LEP survivors may forego justice due to a lack of familiarity with the legal system and the available protections.²⁵

Without a responsive and accessible justice

system, survivors lose the chance to obtain restitution for the cost of the offender’s acts and the chance for restraining orders to give protection and economic relief. Involvement in the justice system is also necessary for child support, repairing credit issues from economic abuse and accessing law enforcement to prevent further harm. Each of these avenues could help survivors of color retain, regain or build economic security, and thus, safety.

Services and Resources

Even if survivors of color chose not to engage in the justice system for any of the above reasons, there are numerous programs and services that could help them stay safe and secure. These include hotlines, shelters, legal help, counseling, and case management. However, many of the barriers that women of color face limit them from accessing needed resources.

Racial and ethnic communities perceive gender-based violence within their own context of gender roles, social mores, family and the suitability of resources.²¹ In one study, both Black and Latina women reported **pressure from friends and family** to stay with an abusive partner to keep the family intact, but also for financial reasons.³⁶ Faith institutions have also encouraged survivors from both groups to adhere to vows and stay in the marriage regardless of violence. Among immigrants, many come from cultures that emphasize patrilineality, “machismo” or self-sacrifice for family, all of which limit service-seeking behaviors and/or results.²⁴

“Color-blindness is not what you need if you’re trying to serve diverse communities. The trend is toward an increase in community-based, faith-based and grassroots services.”³²

Isolation, either within a group that does not address gender-based violence or in an abusive relationship, can prevent survivors from using services.²⁷ Abusers may deny information about resources, communities

Immigration Status as a Barrier

Domestic abusers often use legal status to control victims.²⁴ If the abuser is an immigrant, survivors may not report the crime for fear of getting the abuser arrested and losing legal or financial support.²⁷ If a citizen, abusers can keep survivors from working or leaving by threatening to have them deported often without their children. In a DC survey, 22% of victims stayed out of fear of being deported.¹² Many abusers also refuse to file proper immigration paperwork: 72% of Latinas reported spouses that failed to file petitions though over half qualified.

Sexual assault survivors face similar fears of arrest and deportation if they report to the police or seek help. This fear and distrust prevents many even from getting any needed medical attention following an assault, raising costs in the long-term and possibly decreasing the ability to work or attend school. Legal status may also limit a survivor's work options, which impacts the ability to afford help.²⁷

may not know what services are offered, or survivors may be wary of reaching out beyond an ethnic community.²⁸

Whether it is due to awareness, capacity or budgets, too many programs fail to provide culturally-specific services to survivors of color and immigrants.²⁶ For example, API survivors can feel uncomfortable or isolated in shelters due to preferences around food and undressing in public.¹⁵ If mainstream programs **lack cultural competency** and language interpretation, survivors are unlikely to seek their services.

20% of those in the US (55.4 million) speak a language other than English at home. Spanish is most common (34.5 million), followed by Chinese (2.5 million).³⁷

In rape crisis centers and IPV programs, there is a **huge shortage** of bilingual staff, translated materials and interpreters,²⁶ especially given that there are over 300 distinct languages spoken in the US.³⁷ An organization's lack of willingness or ability to accommodate the languages of its community builds distrust. Distrust also arises out of common stereotypes that all Latinos speak the same language or are illegally in the US.¹⁴ These myths prohibit survivors from receiving proper help.

On the other hand, survivors of color may also hesitate to utilize ethnic-based groups with appropriate language and cultural skills out of fear that their identities would not be confidential, risking their safety or community status.²⁸ Regardless of fear and language access, undocumented survivors are often **legally ineligible** for community-based services or economic support.³⁶

Survivors of color and immigrants who are unable or unwilling to access good, nearby services must forfeit many economic security-promoting resources. For example, it is harder to get housing, employment and childcare assistance. Survivors of color also greatly need but often miss out on help recovering from economic abuses such as setting up new accounts, repairing credit and financial management.

Strategies and Solutions

Economic Security

Because economic security is so directly connected to survivor safety and because women of color struggle to achieve that security, one obvious strategy to keep survivors of color safe is to improve their economic well-being. Economic security is best accomplished by employment, education, asset building and health care.

Employment While other barriers cannot be ignored, the starting point must be employment. Job training and [workforce development](#) are critical for job seekers. Case managers can direct survivors to [good jobs](#), which pay an adequate wage, provide benefits, offer career paths and allow for flexibility needed by survivors. However, many occupations that fit this description are **nontraditional** to women.

Direct service providers should work with survivors of color on [realistic career planning](#) and budgeting using the [BEST](#). Once a career is chosen to put them on the path to economic security, services can partner with [employers](#) to provide jobs and training, or with [community colleges](#) for the requisite education.

Several employment policies could help survivors of color, who are often stuck in inflexible low-wage jobs without benefits:

- Raise and index the [minimum wage](#).
- Ensure [paid leave and sick days](#).

Key Recommendations: Direct Service Providers

- Collect data on the ethnic makeup and economic needs of the community.
- Provide interpreters and resources in multiple languages specific to local needs.
- Develop partnerships and cross-training with the justice system, ethnic organizations and others in CCRs.
- Train staff on policies regarding assistance programs, immigration, and employment discrimination.
- Advertise services creatively and appropriately in communities of color.

Our suggestions for building economic security will not work for everyone. Solutions will vary by case and may depend on each survivor's ability and comfort with working, managing finances or living independently.

Child Care & Transportation

Transportation and child care are among the top costs in the BEST Index. While not barriers limited to women of color, survivors may need to address them to stay at school or work.

- Though underfunded, apply for state child care subsidies.
- Explore transportation assistance through TANF, elderly or medical services.
- Target training or jobs that offer child care.
- Enroll children in Head Start programs.
- Partner with local providers for discounts to survivors.
- Partner with charities or faith-based groups.
- Pursue Rideshare or carpool opportunities.
- Invest in child care or transportation micro-businesses within housing programs.

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- Strengthen workforce development like the [Workforce Investment Act](#).
- Fund job training programs like the [Women in Apprenticeship and Non-Traditional Occupations \(WANTO\)](#) program to support women of color.
- Offer subsidized on-the-job training for disadvantaged populations so they can earn while job training.

Education Both a high school diploma and continued education, in either community college, universities or apprenticeships, are key to economic security. Case managers should direct survivors to programs that lead to good jobs while considering debt and making a payment plan. Organizations can post materials to study for and take the [GED](#). Finding online and flexible classes that will accommodate single parent and working survivors may also be beneficial. Since cost is such a barrier for financially insecure women of color, case managers should be aware of, and policymakers should create, scholarships and grants for minority women and/or survivors.

Survivors of color should consider science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields, as these jobs tend to pay better and are in greater supply. Students will also require adequate support and programs to keep them in school since women of color face barriers to completion.⁸ Policymakers and institutions should also deeply consider equity and affirmative action for women of

Key Recommendations: STOP Administrators

- Train law enforcement, prosecutors and courts on cultural competency.
- Collect data on restitution, protection orders and arrests for survivors of color.
- Provide forms, signs and interpreters in the most common languages by location.
- Coordinate between sectors and offices.
- Educate grantees on U visas and other legal protections for immigrant survivors.
- Conduct fatality reviews with a focus on overrepresentation of survivors of color.

color and the institutional barriers that deter them from quality education.

Asset building Savings and assets are hugely important for survivors to build and retain independence. Bank accounts are the easiest and most accessible way to save. Unfortunately, minorities and immigrants are **highly un- or under-banked**: only 41.6% of African Americans, 48.7% of Hispanics and 45.8% of non-citizens are fully banked.³⁸ This leaves them vulnerable to predatory lending, decreases earned interest and creates poor credit.³⁹ Services can promote [personal banking](#), [college savings plans](#) and [Individual Development Accounts](#).

Healthcare Since women of color have poorer access to health care and survivors of color face greater physical and mental health needs, access to quality healthcare is necessary for economic security. States that implement the Affordable Care Act and expand Medicaid will greatly improve the insurance and cost barriers facing survivors of color. However, **access** to quality care, language barriers and fear due to legal status all need to be addressed by educating staff and survivors alike, partnering with providers, and outreach.

Cultural Competency

Cultural competency is essential for the STOP system, coalitions and direct service providers to reach women of color and increase reporting.³⁵ Cultural competency and the training that goes with it need to

Key Recommendations: State Coalitions

- Conduct research and data collection on state needs, resources and best practices.
- Provide cultural competency training for staff, subgrantees and STOP trainers.
- Advocate to policymakers and STOP programs for policy change around issues facing survivors of color.
- Hold a state conference or convening with all stakeholders to educate on the economic security of survivors of color.
- Identify or fundraise for scholarships and training programs for survivors of color.

A Call for Research

There is a severe lack of thorough data on rates and coping strategies of survivors of color as a whole and for specific groups.^{18,21,35} Recent research on immigrants has shown serious limitations of aggregation, exclusion, limited comparability, and lack of context.²⁷ Furthermore, sexual assault is even more under-researched than domestic violence.²⁵

Better research is the only way to fully realize reporting tendencies and thus to accurately serve underserved populations. Guidelines should include the following elements:

- Do not focus on one crime specifically.
- Oversample ethnically diverse women.¹⁸
- Conduct more longitudinal studies.
- Investigate rape of the most vulnerable (poor, incarcerated, drug-addicted, etc.).¹⁸
- Explore the huge inconsistencies in API reporting rates.

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be tailored to the ethnic, geographic and service needs of the community.¹⁸

Competency is not achieved by a one-time training, but is rather an ongoing effort that involves understanding and addressing various contexts like religion, culture, laws and discrimination that create barriers. Staffing should reflect the ethnic makeup of the community being served.²⁶

Language Access

Language for limited English proficient survivors is a key aspect of cultural competency that service providers and the justice system should accommodate using the following guidelines:³⁵

- Do not use family members or the abuser as an interpreter.
- Collect data at intake on English ability, native language and national origin.
- Provide qualified interpreters at each step of the justice system.
- Create multi-lingual signs and forms.
- Consider vocabulary, word choice and naming as part of accessibility.

Because language ability is intricately tied to the ability to earn a degree, find a job and navigate housing and healthcare, it is also vital for immigrant survivors to be able to improve their English proficiency. Direct services can help survivors find **ESL classes**. Services can also work with language programs to overcome the cost and scheduling barriers that exist for many survivors and increase advertising in proper forums.

Partnerships and Outreach

No one group has the ability to fully serve every population. [Partnerships](#) are needed to build capacity and reach vulnerable victims. The justice system and direct services should not only partner with each other, but also with local workforce and ethnic organizations.²⁸ For example, One Stop Career Centers can be trained on domestic violence and sexual assault to recognize barriers survivors face and link them to appropriate jobs. To best connect with key partners, develop or revive [Coordinated Community Response](#) (CCRs).

In addition to partnerships, **creative outreach** is needed towards victims themselves to overcome the emotional, physical or linguistic isolation of survivors of color. Promising avenues of outreach include religious institutions, youth groups, health centers, employment centers and language schools. Because of variation in reporting and comfort level with outside communities, every possible resource should be targeted and each should be involved in the CCR. For example, some groups of Latinas report sexual assault to a health care provider, but no one else.²¹

Law enforcement should also conduct targeted outreach in **economically disadvantaged neighborhoods** as well as to communities of color.²³ Because of the evidence that economic instability increases violence, the criminal justice system would benefit from educating those communities as well as increasing police attention and police training in those areas.

Policy

Funding One simple thing policymakers can do to improve the lives of survivors of color is to provide adequate funding for direct service and the justice system. More and better informed funding is needed for services in general, but especially for cultural training, outreach, and language services. With state and federal budgets slashed daily, staff are already being overworked and underpaid.²⁶ Culturally-specific services are the first to be eliminated. After showing the huge impact

Key Recommendations: **Policy Makers**

- Increase funds for services and research.
- Utilize previously unused U visas and grant equal benefits as T visas.
- Protect children of VAWA self-petitioners.
- Preserve assistance programs.
- Reform arrest policy to prevent dual arrests and expand economic relief.
- Set equal opportunity standards in employment legislation and targets for women and minorities in job training.

Number of Visas

- 4,285 VAWA self-petitions in 2011, compared to 487,020 petitions for spouses & relatives of US citizens
- T visas capped at 5,000
- U visas capped at 10,000

Crimes Covered under U Visas:⁴²

- Sexual Assault
- Domestic Violence
- Rape
- Torture
- Trafficking
- Incest
- Prostitution
- Sexual exploitation
- Abusive sexual contact
- Female genital mutilation
- Kidnapping or abduction
- False imprisonment
- Blackmail or extortion
- Witness tampering
- Obstruction of justice
- Perjury
- Manslaughter
- Murder
- Attempt, conspiracy or solicitation to commit any of the above crimes

that these crimes have on economic productivity and communities, funding should be restored and even expanded.

Justice System Because women of color are overrepresented in prison and more likely to be face dual arrest, [arrest policy](#) reforms should repeal mandatory arrest laws, discourage dual arrest and offer records expungement if convicted for self-defense or coerced crimes. In addition, policies need to be implemented to protect women of color from sexual assault while in prison, such as providing counseling and health services and punishing offenders. Available relief, access, and process in [restitution](#) and [protection orders](#) must also be improved.³⁵

Assistance Programs If a survivor of color is economically insecure, there are numerous federal assistance policies that can bridge the gap in the short-term. One program explicitly for survivors is [Unemployment Insurance](#) (UI). At present, over 30 states and cities offer UI if one resigned or was fired due to sexual or domestic violence.⁴⁰

On the other hand, survivors of color face extensive hurdles in accessing assistance programs like SNAP, SSI, TANF, CHIP and Medicaid. Location and coordination

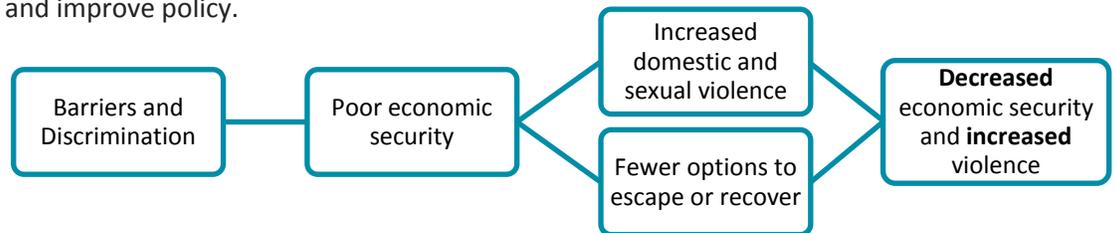
between offices, language, required ID, and knowledge and accessibility of forms can all be improved to better serve survivors.

Immigration Receiving healthcare and non-cash benefits does not jeopardize legal status. However, confusion still exists and legal immigrants follow [special provisions](#). In 1996, federal policy reform opened up many programs to qualified immigrants who waited five years. About half of the states provide TANF, Medicaid, CHIP and/or SNAP, while a few have further eligibility for some immigrants.⁴¹

Beyond general assistance programs, legal protections exist for immigrant victims of gender-based violence.⁴² **U visas** give legal status, temporary work authorization and protection against removal to crime victims who cooperate with police. **T visas** grant immigration relief to trafficking victims, who often experience sexual assault, and give more access to benefits than U visas. **VAWA self-petitions** are for victims of violence by a US citizen or resident spouse, parent or adult child. It allows them to get permanent residency without the abuser’s knowledge or support. VAWA also offers ‘cancellation of removal’ and the ‘battered spouse waiver’ to immigrants.²⁴

Conclusion

WOW’s definition of economic security includes education, assets and supports in addition to employment and income adequacy. For survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence and stalking, economic security also becomes a matter of safety. In particular, survivors of color and immigrant survivors face barriers to both their economic security and their safety, with complex interplays between the two, as shown in the chart below. To stop the cycle, interventions are needed at every point and involvement is needed by every sector. Survivors of color need jobs and workforce development, but they also need solutions to racism and institutional discrimination. They need more culturally competent services, but also comprehensive policy change from the local to the federal level. In short, solving the barriers that put already vulnerable members of society at further risk of victimization and violence takes an entire community. But the impact it will make on the lives of those survivors—and on our society as a whole—is worth continuing to raise awareness, build partnerships and improve policy.



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Stay tuned for the Women of Color Network brief series further exploring issues facing survivors of color and economic security.

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For further information, visit the [ESS Project webpage](#).

Additional Resources

[Asian & Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence](#)

[National Immigrant Family Violence Institute](#)

[Victim Rights Law Center](#)

[Aequitas: The Prosecutors' Resource on Violence Against Women](#)

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