



A legacy of harm: Black survivors of homicide victims and gun violence in Canada

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Introduction

Every homicide leaves behind more than the immediate loss of a life. It leaves behind parents who will never recover from burying a child, siblings who carry grief into every room they enter, friends who witnessed violence they cannot unsee, and entire neighbourhoods that absorb loss upon loss with little institutional recognition of what that accumulation costs. In Black communities across Canada, these losses occur with devastating frequency. Alongside them, thousands more survivors live with the physical, psychological, and social consequences of gun violence that did not claim their lives but permanently altered them. Together, those surviving the homicide of a loved one and those living in the aftermath of gun violence form the human centre of this discussion paper, and it is their experiences, their needs, and their resilience that must anchor any credible policy and service response.

This paper is written for policymakers shaping the legal and funding frameworks that govern victim services, and the service providers on the front lines who receive survivors at their most vulnerable state. Policymakers and service providers alike are positioned to make a profound difference in the lives of Black survivors of homicide victims and gun violence. For the purposes of this paper, victim services refer to the range of supports available to individuals harmed by homicide and gun violence, including government-funded programs administered at the provincial and territorial level, police and court-based services that provide information and assistance throughout the criminal justice process, and community-based organizations that offer culturally grounded care, advocacy, and practical support outside formal institutional settings. Provincial and territorial victim compensation programs, which provide financial assistance to eligible victims of violent crime, are also included within this framework. Because service models, eligibility criteria, and funding structures differ significantly across jurisdictions, the barriers and gaps identified throughout this paper reflect patterns documented across multiple contexts rather than conditions specific to any single province or territory.

Black communities in Canada experience multiple and intersecting forms of victimization, including intimate partner violence, sexual violence, hate crime, and state-based harm. This paper, however, focuses specifically on homicide and gun violence: forms of harm that claim lives with finality and wound others in ways that are often invisible to the systems meant to serve them. Families bereaved by homicide face a form of violent loss distinct from other bereavement, marked by trauma, sudden rupture, and a justice process that can extend and compound their pain for years. Survivors of gun violence carry physical injuries, chronic trauma, and disrupted life trajectories that rarely receive the sustained, specialized support they require. Both groups navigate their experiences within a broader context of structural inequality. In 2022, Black people represented 25% of all firearm homicide victims in Canada despite comprising approximately 4% of the population (Perreault, 2024), reflecting not only a crisis of violence but a crisis of recognition and response. These disparities are not experienced uniformly. Gender, age, immigration status, disability, and sexual orientation each shape how Black survivors of gun violence and those bereaved by homicide encounter violence and navigate the systems meant to support them; however, disaggregated data capturing these intersecting dimensions remains severely limited in the Canadian context (Sharpe et al., 2025; Jeffers, 2023). Research documents, for example, that Black mothers bereaved by homicide navigate grief not only as Black people in a system that historically discounts Black loss, but as women whose emotional responses are frequently pathologized, and in some cases as immigrants whose precarious status shapes every

institutional encounter as a potential site of risk (Sharpe, Bailey, et al., 2024; Maynard, 2025; Deshman, 2009).

The conditions shaping these outcomes are identifiable and addressable. They reflect the accumulated effects of historical processes, structural inequalities, and institutional practices that have influenced where violence is concentrated, who receives protection, and whose losses are recognized as deserving of redress. From the legacies of slavery and spatial dispossession to the chronic underfunding of Black-led organizations and the limited availability of race-disaggregated victim data, the determinants of disproportionate harm are systemic in origin and require responses equally systemic in design. The paper begins with the historical foundations of anti-Black victimization in Canada, then examines contemporary patterns of homicide and gun violence, systemic barriers to victim services, data limitations, post-victimization experiences within the criminal justice system, and community-led resilience and innovation. It concludes with concrete implications for policy, research, and data development.

Canada is at a meaningful moment of opportunity. The development of [Canada's Black Justice Strategy](https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/cj-jp/cbjs-scjn/index.html) (CBJS) (<https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/cj-jp/cbjs-scjn/index.html>), the expansion of race-based data collection, and growing institutional recognition of anti-Black racism reflect genuine commitment to addressing longstanding inequities. The lives at the centre of this paper are not abstractions, they are people who lost someone they loved to violence, and people who survived violence but were left to rebuild without adequate support. Informed, coordinated, and well-resourced policy and service responses have the power to better recognize their experiences, address their needs, and ultimately contribute to a future in which fewer Black families and communities are called upon to endure such losses at all.

Historical foundations of anti-Black victimization in Canada

Three key concepts frame the analysis that follows. Racial capitalism describes the process by which economic systems extract value from racialized groups through exploitation, dispossession, and exclusion, such that race and economic inequality are not separate phenomena but mutually constitutive ones (Robinson, 1983). Structural violence refers to the ways in which social arrangements, including laws, policies, and institutions, systematically harm groups, not just through direct physical force, but through the organized distribution of disadvantage, which includes denying them access to resources, safety, and equal treatment (Galtung, 1969; Farmer, 2004). Intergenerational trauma refers to the transmission of the psychological, social, and physiological effects of severe or prolonged harm across generations, whereby communities subjected to sustained racial violence carry forward patterns of stress, mistrust, and vulnerability that shape present-day experiences of harm and help-seeking (Brave Heart, 1998). Taken together, these concepts operate in sequence: racial capitalism created the conditions of dispossession and exploitation, structural violence institutionalized them through law, policy, and the distribution of disadvantage, and intergenerational trauma embodies their cumulative result in the lives of those who continue to carry their weight. Together, they provide the analytical foundation for understanding how Canada's racial history is not simply a backdrop to contemporary violence but an active and ongoing determinant of it.

Any rigorous account of contemporary homicide, gun violence, and survivorship among Black communities in Canada must proceed from the endemic impacts of racial formation that began with slavery and never fully ended. The systems of control that once governed enslaved Black people did not disappear after abolition; they were transformed. After slavery formally ended, the stigma attached to being a "slave" was transferred onto the category of being "Black," shaping how institutions understood and treated Black people (Maynard, 2025). This racial stigma was built into major Canadian systems: segregated schooling that limited opportunity (Howard & Smith, 2011), immigration policies designed to restrict Black entry (Calliste, 1994), and policing and criminal justice practices that disproportionately targeted Black communities (Warde, 2013). These long-standing structures produced material inequality and normalized surveillance and punishment; they continue to shape where violence is concentrated today and influence how Black victims and their families are treated, and often overlooked, when they seek support or justice after experiencing harm (Sharpe et al., 2025).

Legacies of slavery and anti-Black racial order

Although slavery was practiced in Canada for more than two centuries, its reality has not attained its due place in public consciousness. Slavery in New France and later under British rule was neither marginal nor benign (Maynard, 2025). It encompassed thousands of Black and Indigenous captives, formalized by royal assent in 1689 and sustained by routine physical, sexual, and reproductive violence that reduced Black personhood to exploitable property (Mackey, 2010). Enslaved women's reproductive capacities were monetized (Foster, 2011); sexual coercion and abuse were endemic; and the everyday holding of Black people in bondage relied on minute surveillance, corporal punishment, and the ever-present threat of force (Henry-Dixon, 2024; Maynard, 2025). Fugitive slave advertisements that listed height, clothing, scars, and degrading descriptions were among the earliest public tools used to identify, track, and criminalize Black people, making Blackness itself a marker of suspicion and a justification for policing. This practice established a pattern that carried forward into stop, search, and street-check practices in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (Maynard, 2025).

Post-emancipation racial governance and institutional segregation

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, newly free Black Loyalists and War-of-1812 refugees, promised land and equality for military service, were met with curtailed allotments, wage suppression, and white mob violence, including the 1784 Shelburne riot (Maynard, 2025). The post-abolition settlement affirmed a racial order in which Black life was tolerated as labour while denied civic belonging, helping explain durable mistrust in public institutions among descendants and later Black migrants (Sharpe, Aqil, et al., 2024). Segregated schooling, legally enabled by the 1840 *Act of Union* and entrenched by Ontario's 1850 *Common Schools Act*, lasted in parts of Canada into the late twentieth century (Howard & Smith, 2011)¹.

In housing and public spaces, sundown restrictions, municipal bylaws, and business practices barred Black presence. Police enforced the colour line, the legally and socially imposed boundary that determined where Black people could live, work, travel, and gather relative to white people (Howard & Smith, 2011), as in the arrest of Viola Desmond in 1946 (Reynolds, 2016). These arrangements

¹ The last legally segregated school closed in 1983 in Lincolnville, Nova Scotia.

normalized the routine restriction of Black movement and access to public life, conditions that research has since documented as direct contributors to today's uneven exposure to harm. Black gun violence survivors and those bereaved by homicide continue to encounter the weight of these historical patterns when they seek help: in police responses shaped by racial profiling and institutional mistrust (Wortley & Owusu-Bempah, 2022; Sharpe, 2015); in court processes that question the credibility of Black victims and minimize their losses (Owusu-Bempah & Jeffers, 2021; Saghbini & Paquin-Marseille, 2023); and in encounters with victim services. Victim services include government-funded programs, police and court-based supports, and community-based organizations operating across provinces and territories, as well as provincial victim compensation programs that provide financial assistance to eligible victims of violent crime. For a comparative overview of victim service structures, eligibility criteria, compensation programs, and delivery models across Canadian jurisdictions, see the 2024 report on [Victim Services in Canada](https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/jr/vsc-savc/index.html) (<https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/jr/vsc-savc/index.html>), which documents the substantial variation in service provision across provinces and territories (Department of Justice Canada, 2024). These barriers are not isolated experiences; they have been documented in community consultations and survivor-centred research across Canada (Jeffers, 2023; Sharpe, Aqil, et al., 2024; Sharpe et al., 2025). The sections that follow illustrate each of these barriers in greater depth, drawing on evidence from both populations to show how historical patterns of exclusion continue to shape the experiences of Black survivors navigating systems that were not designed with their needs in mind.

Immigration regimes and restriction of Black mobility

Immigration policy worked in tandem with domestic segregation to constrict Black presence. Even as Canada publicly celebrated antislavery credentials and, later, multicultural tolerance, federal administrators operationalized exclusion through pseudoscientific euphemisms like climatic unsuitability, codified in section 38 of the 1910 *Immigration Act*, alongside deterrence at borders and discretionary medical screening (Calliste, 1994; Maynard, 2025). The result was a demographic project that prized white settlers while rendering Black migration exceptional, precarious, and surveilled, conditions that echo today in discretionary enforcement, detention, and deportation practices that inhibit crime reporting and post-homicide cooperation among status-insecure families.

Spatial dispossession and the destruction of Black communities

Across Canada, multiple Black communities experienced displacement, containment, or erasure through state action, revealing a national pattern extending far beyond any single case. Among the most well-known is Africville in Halifax, razed in the late 1960s under the guise of urban renewal. Residents were forcibly relocated, and the community's cultural and institutional anchors were destroyed (Clairmont & Magill, 1999). In Vancouver, Hogan's Alley, the city's first and only concentrated Black neighbourhood, was demolished beginning in 1967 to construct the Georgia and Dunsmuir viaducts, permanently dispersing its Black residents (Landau-Donnelly, 2023, 2024). In Montreal's St. Antoine/Little Burgundy, mid-century urban renewal programs, deindustrialization, and highway construction fragmented a strong, culturally rich Black community, displacing long-standing institutions and weakening social networks that had historically mitigated exposure to harm (High, 2017). Amber Valley in Alberta, founded by African American homesteaders in the early 1900s, declined in the 1930s and 1940s under economic exclusion and racial hostility, pushing families into urban centres where

they encountered discriminatory housing markets and over-policing. In the twenty-first century, large-scale evictions and redevelopment in Ottawa's Heron Gate displaced hundreds of Black and racialized residents, dismantling protective social supports and echoing earlier renewal projects across North America (Crosby, 2023). Together, these cases illustrate a recurring pattern: Black communities across Canada have been subjected to spatial dispossession that fractures community life, reshapes risk environments, and continues to influence patterns of victimization, institutional trust, and survivorship today.

Racialized criminalization of Black people

The cultural politics that marked Black men as inherently dangerous took shape immediately after emancipation. Canadian politicians and legal actors explicitly invoked the stereotype of the Black male rapist to justify harsh penal policies, a claim thoroughly refuted by court records (Backhouse, 1999; Walker, 2010). White women's organizations petitioned the federal government to exclude Black men from settlement, invoking lynching discourse familiar from the United States (Palmer, 1982; Valverde, 2008). The Ku Klux Klan operated across Ontario, Saskatchewan, and Alberta during the 1920s, conducting cross-burnings and intimidation with little state interference, normalizing the view that Blackness was synonymous with disorder and criminality (Bartley, 2020; Parsons, 2024). Historical sentencing records document significant racial disparities in conviction and sentencing across Ontario between the late nineteenth and mid-twentieth century, with Black defendants more likely to be charged, convicted, and incarcerated at disproportionate rates even where legal variables were controlled, laying the foundation for differential treatment that continues in Canadian criminal justice today (Backhouse, 1999; Mosher, 1999; Owusu-Bempah & Jeffers, 2021; Saghbini & Paquin-Marseille, 2023).

This history of racialized criminalization has direct consequences for how Black people are recognized, or more precisely, not recognized, as victims of crime. Victimology scholarship has long identified the concept of the "ideal victim": a figure constructed as wholly innocent, unconnected to the circumstances of their harm, and therefore fully deserving of compassion and institutional response (Christie, 1986). In practice, this construction has functioned to exclude Black survivors of gun violence and those bereaved by homicide from the category of those deemed worthy of protection and support. Where Blackness has been institutionally coded as inherently dangerous or criminal, Black victims are routinely perceived through a lens of suspicion rather than sympathy, their victimization treated as ambiguous, provoked, or self-incurred (Linhares et al., 2023; Collins, 2014). This dynamic is compounded by what scholars have described as the victim-offender binary: the institutional assumption that those perceived as dangerous or previously involved with the criminal justice system cannot simultaneously occupy the position of victim (Wortley & Owusu-Bempah, 2022; Richardson et al., 2016). For Black gun violence survivors in particular, Richardson et al. (2016) found that providers frequently perceived Black male survivors of gunshot wounds through a lens of culpability rather than victimization, directly affecting the quality and continuity of care they received. For homicide-bereaved families, the same logic operates when courts and media frame the deceased as implicated in their own deaths, rendering their losses less grievable and their families less deserving of institutional recognition and support (Sharpe, Bailey, et al., 2024; Collins, 2014). The cumulative effect is a system in which the historical construction of Black people as dangerous continues to determine who is seen as a victim, who receives help, and whose harm is treated as worthy of redress.

Policing, surveillance, and state violence

Policing practices institutionalized the surveillance of Black movement from slave-patrol logics through vagrancy and prostitution laws that criminalized Black women's presence in public space, and later through drug prohibition layered onto already over-policed neighbourhoods (Maynard, 2025). The cumulative effect is a system calibrated to find crime where it chooses to look, generating statistical outcomes that rationalize further targeting, a self-fulfilling loop that compounds survivors' trauma when institutions tasked with protection are experienced as agents of humiliation and harm. These policing patterns shape today's homicide context by intensifying distrust, reducing cooperation, and diminishing clearance rates, with direct consequences for Black victims' access to justice. Together, these histories clarify how Canadian institutions came to mark Black bodies as dangerous in advance while simultaneously discounting Black victimization, and help explain why reporting, homicide clearance rates, and service uptake remain shaped by mistrust grounded not in perception but in demonstrable legal and political precedent. What follows examines how these foundational assumptions about who counts as a victim continue to shape the experiences of Black survivors of gun violence and homicide loss.

The 2026 UN Resolution on the transatlantic slave trade and its significance for Black Canadian survivors

On March 25, 2026, the United Nations adopted a Ghana-led resolution supported by 123 countries formally declaring the transatlantic slave trade a gravest crime against humanity and calling upon states to pursue reparatory justice, formal apologies, and the repatriation of cultural artifacts (Washington, 2026). Canada's decision to abstain from this vote, rather than affirm it, is itself diagnostic of the institutional ambivalence this section has traced: a posture that acknowledges the brutality of slavery in principle while declining to accept structural accountability in practice. For Black survivors of gun violence and those bereaved by homicide, the resolution carries concrete resonance. The structural conditions documented throughout this section, spatial dispossession, racialized criminalization, institutional under-protection, and the intergenerational transmission of trauma, are precisely the forms of harm that the resolution's framework of legacy of harm is designed to address. Recognition at the international level that these conditions are traceable to a crime against humanity, rather than the result of cultural deficit, the false notion that a community's struggles stem from internal flaws in its values, behaviours, or traditions rather than from external systems of oppression and inequality, or individual circumstance, affirms what Black communities and advocates in Canada have long maintained. Present-day disparities in victimization, survivorship, and access to justice are not aberrations but outcomes of an unaddressed historical wrong (Washington, 2026).

Contemporary patterns of victimization

Gun violence and homicide continue to shape the lived realities of many Black communities in Canada in ways that cannot be understood apart from broader social, economic, and institutional contexts. A recent report published in *Juristat* shows that firearm-related violence is rising overall, with around 14,500 incidents recorded in 2024, representing a rate of 36 per 100,000 population (Perreault, 2026). While the 2024 rate represents a 4.2% decrease from 2023, it is 44% higher than a decade ago, when

the rate was 25 incidents per 100,000 population (Perreault, 2026). Although the 2026 and 2025 editions of the report do not include racially disaggregated data, the 2024 edition indicates that Black communities continue to bear a disproportionate share of the risks and consequences (Perreault, 2024). This includes, but is not limited to, higher rates of firearm homicide victimization, repeated exposure to community violence, poorer economic outcomes, the compounding effects of stigmatizing media narratives and significant barriers to support following victimization (Aiello, 2025; Bouchard et al., 2020; Maynard, 2025; Mbari et al., 2026; Richardson et al., 2016; Sharpe, 2015).

Overrepresentation of Black gun violence victims

Black people represented 25% of all firearm homicide victims in 2022 despite accounting for roughly 4% of Canada's population (Perreault, 2024). This disproportionality mirrors a decade of elevated homicide rates in urban centres, where firearm homicides cluster and where Black residents face the cumulative effects of economic marginalization, limited housing options, and sustained exposure to institutional neglect (Sharpe & Aqil, 2025). Neighbourhoods marked by systemic disinvestment, restrictive zoning, and persistent housing insecurity are more likely to experience repeated cycles of violence, as spatial inequality shapes both opportunity and vulnerability (Sampson, 2012; Wacquant, 2008).

Risk factors

Poverty concentration and racialized housing markets channel many Black families into neighbourhoods lacking adequate community infrastructure, including safe public spaces, youth programming, culturally grounded services, and stable employment (Sharpe & Aqil, 2025). School systems reinforce these inequities through discriminatory discipline, academic streaming, and the under-provision of supportive services across multiple Canadian jurisdictions (Codjoe, 2001; Dei et al., 1997; James et al., 2017). Young Black men and boys are disproportionately represented in both victimization and perpetration statistics, a pattern linked not to inherent risk but to the intersection of structural inequalities and historical trauma (Clark, 2025; Department of Justice Canada, 2022). Young Black women and girls, while less represented in victimization statistics, face distinct risks rooted in the intersection of race and gender, including exposure to intimate partner violence occurring alongside community gun violence and a near-absence of services designed to hold both forms of harm simultaneously (Maynard, 2025). Black youth with disabilities face compounded vulnerabilities, as ableism and anti-Black racism together shape both their exposure to harm and their exclusion from recovery supports (Niles et al., 2025). Research documents a pattern in which young Black men who acquire physical disabilities following non-fatal shootings find that rehabilitation services do not account for ongoing trauma, that victim compensation frameworks do not cover long-term care needs, and that their treatment by providers is filtered through assumptions of culpability rather than recognition of harm (Richardson et al., 2016; Niles et al., 2025). Where these structural pressures converge with the availability of firearms through illicit markets shaped by cross-border trafficking, the likelihood of firearm injury increases. A public health approach to gun violence, grounded in trauma-informed and culturally relevant care, has been identified as essential for reducing harm and supporting recovery (Braga, 2022; Sharpe & Frans-Joseph, 2026; Singh et al., 2020), emphasizing social determinants of violence and the need for sustained investment in prevention and healing rather than reactive, punitive responses.

Media narratives

Media narratives further shape public understanding of these patterns. Coverage of shootings in Black neighbourhoods often frames violence as a problem internal to these communities, emphasizing crime, gang activity, or individual pathology rather than structural histories of displacement, poverty, and unequal protection (Collins, 2014; Sharpe & Aqil, 2025). Racialized framing in media reports condition public opinion and shape policy priorities, including support for punitive enforcement rather than preventive, community-based strategies (Entman & Rojecki, 2001; Gilchrist, 2010). Families of Black homicide victims frequently report that news coverage minimizes the humanity of their loved ones or circulates unconfirmed details about criminal involvement, further marginalizing those already facing profound loss (Sharpe, Bailey, et al., 2024). This dynamic extends into digital and social media environments, where Black youth and families bereaved by homicide or impacted by gun violence are increasingly exposed to graphic content, public grieving, and online conflict that compound trauma in ways offline support systems are ill-equipped to address, meaning that traditional in-person services such as counselling, victim advocacy, and community support programs were not designed to respond to the specific and compounding harms that occur in digital spaces, including the viral spread of violent imagery, public shaming, and real-time online conflict (Patton et al., 2016). The framing of Black gun violence victims as implicated in their own harm is not confined to legacy media; it permeates institutional responses as well, shaping how medical systems, courts, and service providers interpret and prioritize the needs of Black survivors of gun violence and homicide loss (Beard et al., 2023; Richardson et al., 2016). Richardson et al. (2016) found that Black male survivors of gunshot wounds were frequently perceived by providers through a lens of culpability, that is, viewed as responsible for or deserving of the violence done to them, rather than as victims deserving of care, a framing that affects the quality and continuity of care they receive and mirrors the minimization documented in media coverage. Together, these patterns of narrative harm compound the structural barriers facing both Black gun violence survivors and those bereaved by homicide, embedding stigma into the very systems and public discourses that survivors must navigate in the aftermath of violence.

Enduring impacts of victimization on survivors

The impacts of gun violence and homicide extend well beyond the immediate victims. Families, friends, and witnesses experience deep emotional and psychological trauma that can manifest in long-term mental health challenges, disruptions in employment and schooling, and strained family dynamics. Exposure to community-level violence contributes to chronic stress, reduced social cohesion, and weakened collective efficacy, making communities more vulnerable to future harm (Hipp & Wickes, 2017; Scarpa, 2003), and producing a form of intergenerational trauma resulting from young people growing up in environments marked by repeated loss, limited mental health support, and persistent fear. Yet survivors and community members often receive limited recognition or assistance, with public responses tending to remain focused on the fatal event, leaving survivors of non-fatal shootings, bereaved family members, and affected neighbours without sustained support (Sharpe, 2008; Sharpe & Aqil, 2025). For Black survivors specifically, barriers to help-seeking intersect with racial profiling, immigration insecurity, and negative encounters with police (Sharpe, Aqil, et al., 2024). These barriers are further compounded for Black survivors navigating additional marginalized identities. Older bereaved family members, Black survivors with disabilities, those with precarious immigration status,

and Black 2SLGBTQ+ individuals each face layers of exclusion that standard support frameworks do not address, and that existing data systems are not yet equipped to measure (Deshman, 2009; Maynard, 2025; Niles et al., 2025). Community consultations document a recurring pattern in which immigrants bereaved by homicide are deemed ineligible for post-homicide supports, required to leave Canada, and replaced in the grief process by family members left to absorb both the loss and the financial and logistical consequences of their departure, illustrating how immigration status can transform an already devastating loss into an administrative and financial crisis (Jeffers, 2023; Sharpe et al., 2023).

Access to victim services and supports

A multi-site survey of victims of crime in the early 2000s found that almost 90% of victim respondents had received some assistance within the criminal justice system (Prairie Research Associates Inc., 2004). However, while precise utilization rates for Black victims are not currently available due to the absence of race-disaggregated service data, research undertaken with Black victims of crime consistently indicates that fewer Black people access victim services compared to the general population (Sharpe, Aqil, et al., 2024; Sharpe, 2015). Evidence from the Sharpe et al. (2025) scoping review and CBJS community engagements (Jeffers, 2023) demonstrates that barriers are embedded within the design, eligibility structures, and operational logics of mainstream victim service systems.

These barriers do not fall evenly across all Black survivors. Black women bereaved by homicide or impacted by gun violence navigate victim service systems within a context of gendered anti-Black racism that renders their credibility routinely questioned and their access to services responsive to the intersection of racial and gender-based harm severely constrained (Maynard, 2025). Black youth, and young Black men in particular, are disproportionately represented among gun violence victims yet frequently encounter systems that treat them as suspected perpetrators rather than recognized victims, limiting their access to support from the outset (Clark, 2025; Department of Justice Canada, 2022). Black 2SLGBTQ+ survivors face compounded barriers rooted in the historical targeting of both Black and queer communities by law enforcement, producing acute institutional distrust and a near-absence of culturally affirming and identity-responsive victim services (Maynard, 2025). Where these identities intersect, as they frequently do, the barriers multiply. A Black transgender woman bereaved by homicide, for example, may simultaneously navigate racial profiling, gender-based dismissal, and the absence of any service equipped to hold the full complexity of her experience. Recognizing these distinct and overlapping needs is not a secondary consideration but a foundational requirement for any victim service framework that seeks to reach Black survivors of gun violence and homicide loss.

Eligibility

Victim services in Canada are primarily delivered by provinces and territories, with programs developed in response to jurisdiction-specific needs, legislation, and resources, and generally organized around supporting individuals in the aftermath of specific criminal incidents. While broader legal frameworks such as the *Criminal Code* of Canada and the *Canadian Victims Bill of Rights* help guide the treatment of victims within the justice system, they do not govern the administration of victim services, which varies across jurisdictions.

In addition to varying eligibility and intake processes, [victim services](https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/jr/vsc-savc/index.html) (<https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/jr/vsc-savc/index.html>) in Canada are typically structured around models such as court-based, police-based, system-based, and community-based approaches that emphasize incident-based and individually focused approaches to victimization (Department of Justice Canada, 2024). However, the experiences of Black people impacted by gun violence and those bereaved by the homicide of a family member or friend often encompass collective, chronic, and racialized forms of harm, including repeated exposure to violent injury and death, community violence, and systemic discrimination (Sharpe, 2015). Sharpe et al. (2025) found that both populations navigate relentless traumatic injury, yet these forms of trauma can fall outside traditional eligibility categories where those categories are more narrowly tied to formally reported criminal incidents. As a result, community-based programming such as collective healing circles, community prevention work, and trauma-informed supports for neighbourhoods affected by recurring gun violence and serial homicides have, in some funding contexts, experienced challenges accessing federal support despite directly addressing what survivors identify as necessary for healing. It bears noting that some federal programs have supported Black-led community-based organizations without requiring proof of a reported crime, representing meaningful progress in aligning funding eligibility with the realities of Black survivors. Certain eligibility frameworks, nevertheless, continue to structurally exclude the very modalities of support most aligned with the needs of both Black gun violence survivors and homicide-bereaved families and friends. This underlines the importance of how eligibility criteria are designed across federal and provincial programs. The gaps in victim services operate with particular force for survivors whose identities place them at multiple intersections of disadvantage. Black women, Black youth, and Black survivors with precarious immigration status are among those most likely to fall outside narrow eligibility criteria, not because their harm is less severe, but because the frameworks were not designed with their realities in mind (Deshman, 2009; Sharpe, 2015; Maynard, 2025). Research documents a pattern in which Black youth who witness the shooting of a peer do not qualify as direct victims under incident-based eligibility frameworks despite experiencing profound trauma, while their well-founded fear of criminalization during any police encounter forecloses the formal report on which eligibility itself depends (Sharpe, 2015; Clark, 2025).

Mistrust of institutions

Research has consistently shown that Black individuals, families, and communities carry a chronic mistrust of institutions, particularly those connected to the criminal justice system (Cotter, 2022; Wortley & Owusu-Bempah, 2022). Support frameworks tied to formal police reporting or criminal charges place an unreasonable burden on survivors who may choose not to engage with law enforcement due to prior experiences of racial profiling, criminalization, or institutional harm. This dynamic operates independently of immigration status: even among Black survivors who are citizens or permanent residents, fear that reporting will result in the criminalization, surveillance, or endangerment of partners, family members, or community members functions as a significant barrier to accessing services. Sharpe, Aqil, et al., (2024) found that many Black survivors of gun violence and families bereaved by homicide were unaware of their rights. As a result, many Black survivors enter victim service systems later, intermittently, or not at all, reinforcing patterns of unmet need and inequitable access to support following violence and loss.

Barriers to access

Navigating information about rights and available supports within the criminal justice system presents a significant challenge for many Black survivors of gun violence and homicide loss, particularly given that information is not always proactively provided, a practice rooted in important considerations around victim privacy and trauma-informed care, including the recognition that unsolicited information can itself be retraumatizing (Illingworth & Ferrera, 2021). Nevertheless, this approach can place a considerable burden of navigation on survivors already managing acute trauma, grief, and systemic distrust, underscoring the need for flexible, survivor-led models of information sharing that are responsive to individual needs and circumstances. Research with Black survivors of homicide loss further suggests that access to service providers who share survivors' cultural backgrounds or possess a strong understanding of Black cultural experiences can be critical to engagement and healing (Sharpe, Aqil, et al., 2024). It is well established in homicide literature that grief is deeply influenced by cultural values, spiritual beliefs, family structures, and community traditions (Sharpe, 2008). Therefore, supports are often less effective when providers lack an appreciation of these cultural dimensions of mourning and recovery. As a result, culturally responsive and culturally informed services should be understood as a fundamental component of equitable access for Black survivors of gun violence and homicide loss.

Immigration-related exclusions

Immigration precarity profoundly shapes how non-status and precarious-status migrants impacted by gun violence or the homicide of a loved one experience the criminal justice system. Fear of deportation functions as a powerful deterrent to reporting crime or accessing police protection, even in cases involving serious victimization (Deshman, 2009). The Toronto Police historically operated under an often ask, always tell practice, meaning that officers were encouraged to ask about immigration status during interactions and were required to report that information to federal immigration authorities, in which encounters with law enforcement routinely led to disclosure of immigration status to federal authorities, resulting in detention or removal. The CBJIS consultations (Jeffers, 2023) reveal that participants described individuals with precarious status being deported because of their involvement with the criminal justice system. Research conducted with Black survivors of homicide loss documents the profound consequences of immigration precarity in practice. In one account, a participant described how an immigrant fiancé of a homicide victim was deemed ineligible for post-homicide support and required to leave Canada, with other bereaved family members funding his departure (Sharpe et al., 2023). For Black gun violence survivors in similar circumstances, accessing medical care, mental health support, or compensation without triggering immigration consequences requires navigating a system that was not designed to protect them (Sharpe et al., 2023). This research was conducted through the Centre for Research and Innovation for Black Survivors of Homicide Victims (The CRIB), a community-anchored research initiative whose findings are referenced throughout this paper.

Lack of targeted supports for survivors

Neither Black people impacted by gun violence nor those bereaved by homicide are recognized as distinct populations within Canada's victim service frameworks, their needs subsumed within the broad and undifferentiated category of victims of crime. For those bereaved by homicide, the experience of losing a family member or friend to murder is sudden, violent, and often public, unfolding alongside a

criminal justice process that can extend and retraumatize for years. Homicide-bereaved individuals face a significantly heightened risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and related traumatic stress symptoms compared to survivors of other violent crime (Zinzow et al., 2011), navigating shock, rage, guilt, helplessness, grief, isolation, and dissociation as they attempt to make meaning of a loss that defies ordinary understanding (Sharpe & Iwamoto, 2022; Armour, 2003; Rheingold et al., 2012). For Black people living in the aftermath of gun violence, non-fatal shootings can result in permanent physical disability, chronic pain, neurological injury, and severe psychological trauma, with recovery further complicated by ongoing community violence, economic disruption, and the trauma of navigating medical and legal systems that rarely centre their experiences. Despite growing evidence of the distinct and severe impacts of both homicide bereavement and gun violence survivorship, Canada lacks homicide and gun violence specific support services at the scale required to help those in need.

Geographic inequities

Victim services in Canada are primarily delivered at the provincial and territorial levels, resulting in diverse service models that complicate national comparative analysis. Data on service utilization is rarely disaggregated by identity or geography, making it difficult to identify disparities or gaps for marginalized groups (Office of the Federal Ombudsperson for Victims of Crime, 2025), a challenge even more pronounced for Black gun violence survivors and homicide-bereaved families who remain statistically invisible in utilization data. Primary studies in large urban centres demonstrate consistently low levels of service utilization among both populations (Asante, 2024, 2025), and these disparities are likely considerably more severe in rural and remote regions where victim services are already scarce and cultural responsiveness even less available.

Funding instability for Black-led organizations

The gap in funding is especially pronounced for Black-led and Black-serving organizations that Black gun violence survivors and homicide-bereaved families trust and turn to for support. Black-led organizations, those founded, governed, and operated by Black people with deep roots in the communities they serve, received just 0.03% of all philanthropic foundation funds, meaning grants and donations from private and community foundations rather than government sources, in the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 fiscal years (Pereira et al., 2020). Black-serving organizations, which include mainstream victim service providers and community organizations that serve Black clients but are not necessarily Black-led, received only 0.15% during the same period (Pereira et al., 2020). These figures speak to a broader pattern of chronic underinvestment that extends across funding streams and requires urgent attention at every level of government. Both Black gun violence survivors and homicide-bereaved families and friends seek relational, community-anchored support in the aftermath of violent loss and injury, consistently turning to trusted networks, spiritual communities, and Black-led organizations as they are perceived as safer and better equipped to understand the layered dimensions of their experiences (Sharpe, 2008; Sharpe et al., 2025). Critically, investment must flow not only to Black-led organizations but also to mainstream victim service providers willing to develop culturally responsive practices in genuine collaboration with Black communities, ensuring that those who deliver services have the training, relationships, and accountability structures necessary to serve Black survivors with competence and care (Jeffers, 2023; Sharpe et al., 2025). When programs are forced to

scale back or close due to unstable funding, established pathways to healing are disrupted, trauma is compounded, and frontline workers who are often themselves survivors are left demoralized and structurally unsupported. Mapping these initiatives and developing sustained, adequate funding streams across both Black-led and culturally trained mainstream organizations is a foundational requirement for any serious policy commitment to supporting Black survivors of gun violence and homicide loss across Canada.

Data limitations

The invisibility of Black victimization is shaped in no small part by a fragmented and institutionally cautious approach to collecting and reporting victim-related data disaggregated by race. Canada has struggled for decades to generate nationally comparable data on victims due to provincial-territorial variation in service models, definitions, and reporting systems, with each jurisdiction independently determining who qualifies as a victim and what information is recorded, making cross-jurisdictional analysis difficult (McDonald, 2025). Despite major advances in police-reported and survey-based data, no national dataset captures how victims access services or how their needs are addressed across jurisdictions (AuCoin, 2025). Following the *Canadian Victims Bill of Rights* in 2015, Statistics Canada's Canadian Victim Services Indicators Pilot Survey emerged from efforts to assess how victim rights are implemented and measured at a national level. The aim of this pilot survey was to assess the feasibility of creating nationally comparable indicators on victim service use and outcomes. This process, which ran from fall 2015 to 2019, found major challenges related to inconsistent definitions, differences in how data are collected, and variation in service delivery across jurisdictions. A more recent publication on national victims' data highlights some advances since the pilot but notes that the resource intensive nature of data collection remains a key barrier to producing high quality and consistent data (McDonald, 2026).

Because data collection systems do not disaggregate primary measures by race, ethnicity, or type of violence, Black victims of gun violence, or police violence are not readily identifiable categories in administrative data, leaving the unique patterns of victimization they face statistically obscured. The Statistics Canada Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Survey publicly reports only four high-level clearance categories, omitting case-specific reasons that would reveal systemic failures, and institutions have little incentive to collect or publish data that would highlight their own inadequacies (Office of the Federal Ombudsperson for Victims of Crime, 2025). The forthcoming expansion of UCR data to include ethnicity variables for all police-reported crimes marks an important step forward (Statistics Canada, 2025), as does the CBJIS External Steering Group's recommendation for a unit within Statistics Canada to coordinate a justice system-wide race-based data program (Jeffers, 2023; Owusu-Bempah & Jeffers, 2021). This invisibility is compounded across intersecting identities. Because race-based data is not routinely collected alongside gender, age, disability status, immigration status, or sexual orientation, it is not currently possible to produce reliable demographic breakdowns of how homicide bereavement and gun violence survivorship affect specific subgroups within Black communities in Canada. This gap is itself a policy problem. Disaggregated data that captures the distinct experiences of Black women, Black youth, Black 2SLGBTQ+ individuals, and Black survivors with disabilities is essential for designing services that can reach those who carry the greatest burden (Sharpe et al., 2025; Jeffers, 2023; Owusu-Bempah & Jeffers, 2021). In the absence of such data, patterns of differential access go undetected: whether Black women bereaved by homicide access

services at lower rates than Black men, or whether Black survivors with disabilities are systematically excluded by inaccessible intake processes, are questions that current administrative data cannot answer (AuCoin, 2025; Office of the Federal Ombudsperson for Victims of Crime, 2025). These positive indicators must be followed by consistent recording practices, jurisdictional alignment, and a willingness to confront the structural inequities that data will inevitably reveal.

Post-victimization experiences

For Black people impacted by gun violence and those bereaved by the homicide of a family member or friend, what follows a violent incident is a second and often prolonged encounter with institutions whose responses can either support healing or deepen harm. Police interactions, court processes, credibility assessments, and sentencing outcomes are filtered through the same racial logics and structural inequities documented throughout this paper.

Police response and reporting

Research consistently demonstrates that Black communities in Canada experience disproportionate rates of police stops, surveillance, and use of force, producing a relationship with law enforcement fundamentally different from that experienced by white Canadians (Wortley & Owusu-Bempah, 2022). Sharpe (2015) found that Black survivors engage in a racial appraisal process before deciding whether to report harm or seek institutional support, frequently resulting in non-reporting, delayed reporting, or partial disclosure, each of which affects the trajectory of investigations and the likelihood of cases proceeding to prosecution. Families of homicide victims report being treated as suspects rather than bereaved relatives, receiving limited information about investigations, and being excluded from processes that directly affect them, reflecting institutional cultures in which Blackness functions as a marker of suspicion that does not dissolve even in the face of clear victimization (Maynard, 2025). For gun violence survivors, non-reporting forecloses access to victim services and compensation mechanisms contingent on formal police reports, creating a self-reinforcing cycle in which institutional practices that produce mistrust simultaneously undermine the investigative outcomes that families need to access justice and begin to grieve (Sharpe, 2015; Wortley & Owusu-Bempah, 2022). The decision not to report is shaped by intersecting considerations. For Black women survivors, fear of having their own conduct criminalized or their relationships surveilled adds a gendered dimension to the racial appraisal process Sharpe (2015) describes. For Black youth, the likelihood of being treated as a suspect rather than a victim further discourages engagement with institutions already experienced as hostile (Clark, 2025; Department of Justice Canada, 2022). Richardson et al. (2016) document a pattern in which Black male survivors of gunshot wounds are approached by responding institutions as potential perpetrators rather than as victims of harm, a response that deters future reporting and forecloses access to compensation and services contingent on that report, reinforcing a cycle in which institutional practices compound rather than address the harm already done.

Court processes and testimonial credibility

Black gun violence survivors and homicide-bereaved families encounter further layers of inequity when cases proceed through the courts. Black individuals involved in the criminal justice system, whether as accused, witnesses, or victims, are subject to credibility assessments shaped by racial stereotypes with

deep historical roots in Canadian legal culture (Owusu-Bempah & Jeffers, 2021). Homicide-bereaved families describe being poorly informed about procedures, excluded from meaningful participation, and confronted with defense strategies that criminalize the character of their deceased loved ones, a practice disproportionately applied in cases involving Black victims, framing their deaths as less innocent and therefore less grievable (Sharpe, Bailey, et al., 2024; Collins, 2014). For Black gun violence survivors called as witnesses or seeking recognition as victims within proceedings, racial disparities extend beyond accused persons to those presenting as victims, with Black individuals more likely to have their character and credibility questioned and their victimization treated as ambiguous (Carlin, 2016; Cooke, 2023)

Secondary victimization

Secondary victimization for Black people impacted by gun violence and those bereaved by homicide is not an occasional failure of individual practitioners, but a structural feature of systems not designed to centre their needs. Black homicide-bereaved survivors frequently experience institutional encounters with police, courts, and victim services as compounding rather than relieving their trauma, with being required to repeatedly recount traumatic events, receiving inadequate information about rights and processes, and watching loved ones' characters publicly diminished all identified as sources of secondary harm that intensify grief and deepen institutional mistrust (Sharpe & Iwamoto, 2022). Media coverage constitutes a significant and underexamined site of secondary victimization for both populations, with racialized framing constructing Black victims as less innocent and more responsible for the violence they experienced, compounding the pain of bereaved families and shaping the social environments in which they must grieve (Collins, 2014; Sharpe, Bailey, et al., 2024). Secondary victimization takes distinct forms across intersecting identities. For Black women bereaved by homicide, the combination of racial and gendered dismissal can render their grief doubly invisible, their emotional responses simultaneously scrutinized and disregarded (Maynard, 2025). For Black survivors with disabilities, secondary victimization can include being denied adapted communication supports or having their accounts discounted on the basis of both race and cognitive or mental health status (Niles et al., 2025; Arnason et al., 2023). Research documents a pattern in which Black mothers bereaved by homicide encounter media coverage that frames their child as responsible for his own death, court processes that exclude them from meaningful participation, and institutional responses that read visible grief as erratic rather than as the expected response to catastrophic and violent loss (Sharpe, Bailey, et al., 2024; Collins, 2014).

Sentencing outcomes

Black accused persons are more likely to be held in custody before their trial and more likely to receive a prison sentence, reflecting racial bias operating at multiple points across the justice system (Owusu-Bempah & Jeffers, 2021). For homicide-bereaved families, these disparities produce deeply complex experiences. When the person accused of killing their loved one is also Black, families can find themselves torn between wanting accountability and knowing that the justice system treats Black accused persons unfairly, leaving them with outcomes that feel neither just nor healing (Sharpe & Aqil, 2025). With regard to Victim Impact Statements, families often feel unsupported in the process, reporting that they receive little guidance on how to prepare their statements and rarely hear how their words were considered at sentencing (Illingworth & Ferrera, 2021). This lack of meaningful participation

can deepen the sense that their loss has not been fully recognized by the system. For gun violence survivors, sentences that feel inadequate can intensify fear, erode whatever trust remains, and reinforce the belief that the justice system does not take their harm seriously (Department of Justice Canada, 2022).

Intersectionality: Ethnicity, gender, class, age, disability, and sexual orientation

Post-victimization experiences are not uniform across all Black gun violence survivors and homicide-bereaved individuals but are shaped by the intersection of race with gender, class, age, disability, and sexual orientation in ways that produce distinct vulnerabilities and distinct patterns of institutional response.

Ethnicity: Black people are not a monolith. The category of Black encompasses individuals and families with roots across the African continent, the Caribbean, Central and South America, and beyond, each bringing distinct histories, languages, cultural frameworks, migration experiences, and relationships with Canadian institutions. For many African-born survivors of gun violence and homicide loss, post-victimization experiences are compounded by limited familiarity with Canadian legal institutions, language barriers, and immigration precarity that shapes every institutional encounter as a potential site of risk (Deshman, 2009; Jeffers, 2023). Caribbean-origin communities with multigenerational roots in Canada bring distinct institutional relationships shaped by settlement, labour exclusion, and racialized policing, and the urban renewal fragmentation of their neighbourhoods has durably weakened community support available to survivors of gun violence and homicide loss (High, 2017). Cultural frameworks for grief, healing, and meaning-making vary significantly across African and Caribbean communities and must be recognized as central to any meaningful post-victimization response, with survivors drawing on spiritual coping, collective care, and maintained connections to deceased loved ones as primary strategies (Sharpe & Boyas, 2011; Moore et al., 2022; Bryant-Davis et al., 2011). Language further compounds post-victimization barriers for survivors whose primary languages include French, Spanish, Haitian Creole, Somali, Amharic, or other languages spoken across African and Caribbean communities (Illingworth & Ferrera, 2021). Post-victimization policy and service design must collect data disaggregated not only by race but by ethnicity, language, generation, and migration history, and invest in Black-led organizations rooted in specific communities, so that the full diversity of Black survivors' experiences is visible, understood, and addressed (Sharpe et al., 2025; Pereira et al., 2020).

Gender: Black women bereaved by homicide or impacted by gun violence navigate post-victimization systems within a context of gendered anti-Black racism that renders them simultaneously hyper visible as objects of surveillance and invisible as subjects deserving of care, with their credibility routinely questioned, their emotional responses pathologized or dismissed, and their access to services responsive to the intersection of racial and gender-based harm severely constrained (Maynard, 2025).

Black 2SLGBTQ+ individuals impacted by gun violence or homicide loss navigate post-victimization systems within a context of multiple and intersecting marginalization. Distrust of police institutions, which have historically targeted both Black and 2SLGBTQ+ communities, is particularly acute for those who hold both identities, and access to culturally affirming and identity-responsive services remains severely limited (Maynard, 2025). Together, these intersecting dimensions underscore that policies and

services must be responsive to the full complexity of who survivors are, accounting for the ways in which race, gender, class, age, disability, and sexual orientation combine to shape both the harm experienced and the support required.

Class shapes experiences in ways inseparable from racial capitalism: Black gun violence survivors and homicide-bereaved families with fewer economic resources face compounded barriers, including limited ability to attend court proceedings, reduced access to legal advice and representation, and fewer resources to fund informal supports that formal systems do not provide (Wacquant, 2008; Sampson, 2012).

Age intersects with race to produce distinct vulnerabilities at both ends of the life course. Young Black men and boys, disproportionately represented among gun violence victims, often find that their age and gender activate stereotypes that criminalize Black youth, resulting in their treatment as suspected perpetrators rather than recognized victims (Clark, 2025; Department of Justice Canada, 2022). Older bereaved family members, including grandparents raising grandchildren following the homicide of their own children, may face challenges navigating institutional systems and having their grief recognized as requiring specialized support.

Disability: Gun violence survivors who acquire physical disabilities face long-term rehabilitation needs and ongoing costs that victim compensation frameworks rarely address comprehensively, while those with pre-existing mental health conditions or cognitive disabilities may encounter additional credibility barriers and require adapted communication approaches that mainstream services are often ill-equipped to provide (Niles et al., 2025). The compounding effects of anti-Black racism and ableism mean that Black survivors navigating disability within victim service systems face intersecting forms of exclusion rooted in systems that were not designed to account for the distinct experiences of those living at the intersection of Blackness and disability (Anderson, 2020; Arnason et al., 2023; Niles et al., 2025). Research across Canada has documented that Black people with disabilities are frequently rendered invisible within mainstream disability services, encounter disability stigma that deters help-seeking, and are pushed to choose between accessing culturally relevant support and accessing disability-specific services, rarely finding both in the same place (Arnason et al., 2023).

Community resilience, advocacy, and transformative approaches

A substantial body of research demonstrates that racialized communities, particularly those shaped by collectivist worldviews, draw upon relational, communal, and spiritually grounded strategies to cope with trauma and chronic stress, relying on family networks, friendship circles, community elders, and culturally embedded practices that affirm connection and shared responsibility (Boss, 2006; Daly et al., 1995; Moore et al., 2022; Sharpe, 2015). These relational forms of coping are closely tied to non-Western cultural frameworks where healing is understood as both a personal and collective process, and spiritual practices remain central sources of strength (Bryant-Davis et al., 2011; Jacob et al., 2023; Markus & Kitayama, 2014). Sharpe and Boyas (2011) found that survivors engaged in spiritual coping and meaning making, maintained emotional and symbolic connections to the deceased, relied on collective care, and often concealed their emotions as a way of protecting others from additional burden. In contexts of structural inequality, racialized violence, and historical trauma, community-based and culturally rooted responses are indispensable to individual and collective healing, filling gaps left by

under-resourced formal systems and embodying forms of innovation aligned with the values outlined in CBJs.

Based on these findings, Sharpe et al. (2018) developed the first culturally responsive intervention for Black survivors of homicide victims, grounded in her Model of Coping for African American Survivors of Homicide Victims, integrating spirituality, communal coping, meaning-making, and the recognition of structural racism into trauma-informed support, with promising outcomes adapted to several Black communities within North America.

The Youth Association for Academics, Athletics and Character Education (YAAACE), a Black-led, Black-focused, and Black-serving organization operating in Toronto's Jane and Finch community since 2007, exemplifies culturally responsive, community-driven gun violence prevention. Serving more than 1,000 families and clients annually, YAAACE's Centre for Community Safety and Roots of Violence implements strength-based, trauma-informed programs, including TO Wards Peace and New Narrative, that support justice-involved youth and adults while addressing the structural conditions and biased narratives that contribute to community violence. Its data-driven knowledge mobilization work, multi-sector partnerships, and engagement with all three levels of government position YAAACE as both a direct service provider and a systems-level advocate, demonstrating that sustained, culturally grounded investment in Black-led organizations produces meaningful outcomes for Black gun violence survivors, homicide-bereaved families, and the broader communities in which they live.

Recognizing the central role of community resilience and Black-led innovation, the Government of Canada has increasingly adopted a public-health and community-driven approach in advancing CBJs. The Supporting Black Canadian Communities Initiative (SBCCI), launched in 2019, strengthens Black-led organizations, addresses systemic barriers and anti-Black racism, and promotes the full social and economic inclusion of Black Canadians. Since its inception, SBCCI has provided more than \$200 million to build capacity, expand programming, and reinforce the leadership of Black community institutions across the country, including an additional \$25 million for 2024-25 and \$36 million for 2025-26, reflecting federal recognition that long-term safety, justice, and well-being in Black communities must be grounded in culturally responsive, Black-led solutions.

Implications for policy, research, and practice

This paper has examined the historical, structural, and institutional conditions that shape the disproportionate burden of homicide and gun violence borne by Black communities in Canada, and the persistent gaps in recognition, data, and service that compound the harm experienced by those left to survive it.

Black survivors of gun violence and those bereaved by homicide face profound trauma shaped by racism, inequity, and repeated exposure to loss. Specialized, culturally grounded support systems are not supplementary but foundational to any adequate response. Black-led organizations and grassroots groups have proven essential in providing trusted, culturally reflective programs, and their sustained funding is a policy priority, not an afterthought. At the same time, the responsibility for culturally responsive care cannot rest solely on Black-led organizations. Many are chronically under-resourced, and their communities are themselves disproportionately affected by homicide and gun violence. Mainstream victim service systems must also build their capacity to serve Black survivors with cultural

aptitude and responsiveness. This includes; post-homicide training for service providers, dedicated, Black-led units and Black victim support workers embedded within provincial government victim service structures, ensuring that care is shared, sustained, and structurally supported.

Systemic racism shapes how violence is experienced and responded to at every level. Policy must explicitly address the barriers of institutional distrust, fear of criminalization, and absence of culturally appropriate services that Black families encounter when seeking help. Canada is only now beginning to collect race-based data on victims, accused persons, access to services, and criminal justice outcomes. Without accurate disaggregated data, the experiences of Black survivors will remain invisible to the systems meant to serve them. Quantitative data alone is also insufficient. Qualitative research that captures the narratives and lived experiences of Black victims and survivors is equally necessary, centering their voices as authoritative sources of knowledge about what harm looks like and what healing requires. There is a particular need for qualitative and intersectional research that captures how homicide bereavement and gun violence survivorship are experienced across gender, age, disability, immigration status, and sexual orientation within Black communities. The current absence of such data does not mean these differences do not exist; it means the systems designed to respond to them cannot see them (Sharpe et al., 2025; Jeffers, 2023). Research and community consultations point to recurring patterns: Black grandparents raising grandchildren following the homicide of their own children, Black 2SLGBTQ+ survivors of gun violence navigating service environments hostile to both their race and their identity, and Black newcomers bereaved by homicide who cannot report to police without risking deportation each carry distinct and compounding burdens that aggregate statistics will never capture (Jeffers, 2023; Maynard, 2025; Deshman, 2009). Qualitative and community-engaged research that centres these experiences is not supplementary to the evidence base. It is part of it. Trauma caused by community violence is a public health issue. It demands coordinated, multi-sector action grounded in the socio-cultural contexts of Black communities, not policing alone.

Sustained investment in Black-led organizations strengthens community safety, supports youth, and contributes to breaking cycles of violence and inequity. Effective responses to violence must be built with survivors, not for them, drawing on community knowledge, cultural strengths, and lived experience at every stage of program design, research, and policy development. Healing is both individual and collective. Black communities' use of spirituality, community rituals, collective care, and maintained connections to lost loved ones must be recognized and supported by formal systems. Families, schools, community organizations, service providers, and governments each have a role in addressing the root causes of violence and building environments where Black youth and families can be safe.

Change is possible and already underway. Through CBJS, Black-led research centres like The CRIB, and community mobilization across the country, new pathways are being built that centre healing, equity, and justice. Those who are surviving the homicide of a loved one and those who survived firearm injury but were left to rebuild without adequate support deserve the full and sustained commitment of the systems, institutions, and policymakers positioned to make a difference. Whether that commitment is honoured will depend on continued collaboration, investment, and accountability.

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