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THE CENTRE FOR RESEARCH &
INNOVATION FOR BLACK
SURVIVORS OF HOMICIDE VICTIMS

The Centre for Research & Innovation for Black Survivors of Homicide Victims

Submission to:
Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights
Committees and Legislative Services Directorate
House of Commons

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About The CRIB

The Centre for Research & Innovation for Black Survivors of Homicide Victims ([The CRIB](#)) is a multidisciplinary social work research centre focused on using community engaged methods and principles to advance research, policy, and practice for Black survivors of homicide victims. Homicide disproportionately impacts Black people throughout our global communities. The inordinate representation of Black homicide victims places already marginalized communities at great risk for compromised mental, physical, and spiritual well-being. Despite the prevalence of homicide in Black communities, research on the traumatic impact of murder on surviving family members and friends of murder victims is limited. The scarcity of research on the experiences of Black survivors of homicide victims leaves researchers, policy makers, and practitioners with little evidence to develop culturally responsive evidenced-based interventions designed to support survivors as they bereave and grieve the murder of their loved one(s). The CRIB leads the response to these formative rifts through the development of culturally responsive research, impactful policy, evidenced based practice, and training for service providers and community-based agencies who work with Black survivors of homicide victims.

Who Are the Survivors? The Impact of Homicide on Black Communities

Homicide-related death has a devastating impact on the mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being of family members and friends (hereafter referred to as survivors), who must face the daunting challenge of learning to cope with the homicide of their loved one(s). Experiencing the murder of a loved one interferes with daily functioning and disrupts the ability of survivors to make meaning of the world around them, having profound consequences on their mental health, productivity, quality of life and well-being.^{1,2,3,4,5}

When a loved one is murdered, survivors often find themselves entangled in a complex labyrinth of emotions, reactions and engagement with a myriad of health care providers (e.g. clinicians, physicians, paramedics) and justice system providers (e.g. police, Crown attorneys, defence counsel, probation and parole officers) (hereafter referred to as service providers). The impact of the daily lived experience of racism at the interpersonal, institutional and internalized levels further compounds these complicated emotions. The scarcity of research in these areas leaves researchers, policy makers, and health care and victim service agencies with limited evidence to train frontline service providers to deliver culturally responsive interventions that support survivors as they bereave and grieve the murder of their loved one(s).⁵

Approximately 600 murders occur in Canada each year. Statistics Canada data highlights the steady increase in homicides over the past five years (2016-2020).⁶ Of the 10 provinces and three territories in Canada, homicide has consistently been highest in Ontario.⁶ Over the past five years, on average 232 murders occur in Ontario each year.⁶

Ontario also has the largest racialized population.⁷ Racialized Ontarians account for 75% of homicide victims, 44% who identified as African, Caribbean or Black (ACB).⁷ When comparing the rates of homicide in major Ontario cities, Toronto has the highest number of homicide victims in the country, averaging 77 homicide victims annually.⁸

Despite alarming homicide trends in Canada, current understanding of homicide and its effects on Black communities predominantly derives from US-based research on African American

adult survivors of homicide victims, which found that African Americans experience the homicide of a loved one (e.g., child, parent, sibling, friend) an average of 2.5 times in their lifetime.^{9,10}

Moreover, research estimates that **each homicide victim has at least 7-10 family members and/or close friends left behind struggling to survive their tragic death**, disproportionately placing Black communities at increased risk for adverse mental health effects related to homicide victimization (e.g., depression, post-traumatic stress disorder).^{11,12}

The current rates of homicide suggest that for the past 5 years, every day, approximately 3,850 Canadians living in Toronto must face the daunting challenge of surviving the murder of their family members and friends, and these survivors are disproportionately ACB.

Despite estimates, the *lack of systematic race-based data in Canada* significantly underestimates the extent of mental and or psychological harm facing Black people as a result of experiencing homicide.¹³ The overrepresentation of racialized survivors of homicide victims, especially those from Black communities, highlights the increasing need for victim services to be well versed in the provision of support services in a culturally responsive manner.

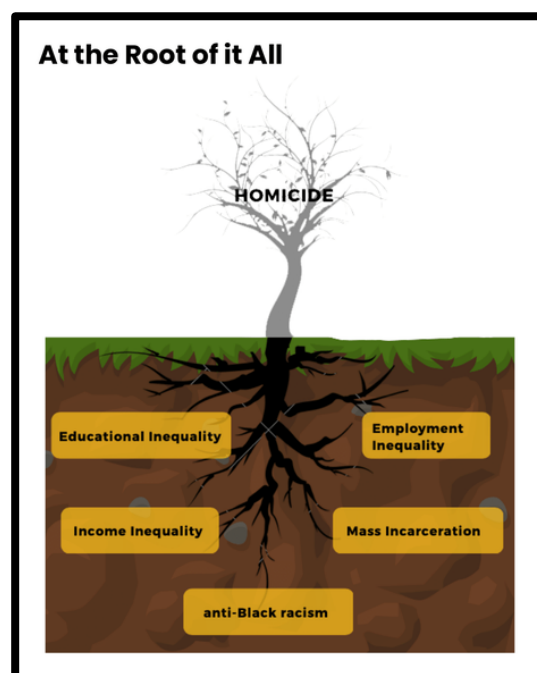
What are the Root Causes? The Social Determinants of Homicide

Social determinants of homicide are the inequitable conditions forged from anti-Black racism that contribute to the overrepresentation of homicide for Black communities.^{5,12}

Eliminating structural inequities is essential to preventing homicide as well as helping family members and friends of murdered victims survive the aftermath of violent and tragic death.

Addressing these inequities requires advancement in the policies we design, the services we deliver, and the culturally responsive research infrastructures we build.

Click here for more information on the Social Determinants of Homicide:
<https://www.the-crib.org/social-determinants-of-homicide.html>



How Can the Government of Canada Help? Engage Research, Policy and Practice

We call on the Government of Canada to consider the following research, policy, and practice recommendations to create an actionable plan designed to identify and address the social determinants of homicide through the equitable distribution of resources that will change the landscape of service provision for Black communities disproportionately impacted by homicide.

1. Fund research to address the Social Determinants of Homicide

- Support research that employs innovative methods/strategies designed to center and amplify the voices and experiences of Black survivors of homicide victims throughout the diaspora.
- Advance culturally responsive approaches to post-homicide research by creating sustainable opportunities to partner with interdisciplinary scholars, service providers and communities disproportionately impacted by homicide.
- Develop a database for tracking social determinants of homicide.
- Develop tools of measurement designed to capture and assess the experiences, impact and coping strategies of Black survivors of homicide victims.
- Examine the relationship between the COVID-19 pandemic and homicide.

2. Advance public policy to address the Social Determinants of Homicide

- Advocate for race-based data collection relevant to social determinants of homicide (e.g., employment, housing, income, education, etc.) and homicide victims.
- Fund community-based agencies that support overrepresented and yet under-resourced Black survivors of homicide victims.
- Mandate service providers (e.g., healthcare, criminal justice, education, and social services) receive training relevant to the impact of experiencing traumatic injury due to chronic exposure to both anti-Black racism and homicide for survivors of homicide victims.
- Revise the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board allowing survivors of homicide victims to apply for compensation without restrictions.

3. Promote evidence-based practices to address the Social Determinants of Homicide

- Provide education and training to services providers across sectors (e.g., faith-based, community, legal, medical and mental health, law enforcement, education) so that programming/interventions are rooted in culturally appropriate approaches to the continuity of care.
- Assess trauma histories of individuals and communities to inform the provision of trauma-informed and culturally appropriate services.
- Work across sectors to address the social determinants of homicide and improve upon the integration of services that survivors of homicide victims engage and interact with as a result of experiencing the murder of a loved one.

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