



The National Center on Violence Against  
Women in the Black Community

## | When Black Women and Girls Go Missing

**“We noticed that a lot of African American children that go missing are initially classified as runaways. They don’t get an Amber Alert or media coverage.”**

– Natalie Wilson, Co-Founder and Chief Operating Officer, Black and Missing Foundation, Inc.

### Statistics

Thousands of Black women and girls go missing each year, yet their stories rarely reach national headlines. Research has indicated high rates of sex trafficking among Black women and girls, especially compared to their racial counterparts. Despite such disparaging statistics that highlight a national crisis - the media, systems, and the community at-large continue to underreport the vast amount of missing Black and indigenous women.

According to the National Crime Information Center in 2020, of 268,884 women and girls who were reported missing, 90,333 of them were Black. These rates are disproportionately and disturbingly high due to Black women and girls making up only 15% of the U.S. female population.

Studies have shown that intersecting factors such as low socioeconomic status, sexual abuse, child-welfare involvement, and the adultification and/or hypersexualization of Black girls contribute to the increased vulnerabilities that survivors experience. Black women and girls are more likely to experience poverty than their racial counterparts, while traffickers tend to target survivors with a low socioeconomic status. Women who experience intimate partner violence may also be at a higher risk of being sex trafficked. Research has shown that of women who have called the National Human Trafficking Hotline, 36.9 percent were trafficked by an intimate partner.

### Recommendations

**When Black women and girls are reported missing, they are frequently classified as runaways which removes a sense of urgency in response.**

In 2016, an estimated 1 out of 6 endangered runaways reported to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children were likely child sex trafficking victims. Of those, 86% were in the care of social services or foster care system.

With the exception of Black publications and journals that cover the issue, few stories receive or garner national media attention. In many ways, missing Black women and girls are experiencing what is now considered a silent crisis.

There are strategies we can employ to begin addressing the issue of nationwide issue of missing Black women and girls and it includes the following:

- Provide local government agencies with education on stereotypes that impact law enforcement or system response to missing Black girls.
- Share data on missing Black women and girls across mainstream news and media outlets.
- Provide financial and logistical aid to support local agencies in solving disappearance cases.
- Fight for affordable housing and food security for Black families.
- Use victim-centered models and center Black girls and women as victims of sexual and gender based-violence.
- Support underfunded and under-resourced groups.

The Black and Missing Foundation reported in 2010 that most women disappear in states such as New York, Georgia, North Carolina, Maryland, and Florida with Washington D.C. having the highest contacts to the National Human Trafficking Hotline made per capita.

**Nearly 40 percent of missing persons are of color, yet, African-Americans make up only 13 percent of the population. - Census.gov**

Ujima Inc., The National Center on Violence Against Women in the Black Community addresses the issue of missing Black women and girls in the context of trafficking and runaway youth programs through our FVPSA funding:

**Outreach and Engagement**

Ujima Inc., conducted a series of listening sessions on community violence where participants spoke extensively about the reality and impacts of sexual and intimate partner violence. Panelists were able to amplify the need for filling the gaps in community resources.

Ujima Inc., hosted a Wellness Friday webinar series during Domestic Violence Awareness Month, where advocates and the community joined together virtually to discuss methods to promote sexual assault and domestic violence healing.

**Training and Technical Assistance**

Ujima Inc., participated in a panel discussion for HHS for Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month on the intersections of dating violence, human trafficking, and youth of color.

Ujima Inc., hosted a webinar in recognition of Sexual Assault Awareness Month, *And Still We Rise: Unpacking the Reality of Sexual Violence and Assault on Black Women and Femmes Survivors*. This webinar highlighted the intersections of sexual violence experienced by Black women and femmes, underscoring how we may experience sexual violence throughout our life cycle. Our panelists explored how experiences with identity, implicit bias, misogynoir, adultification, and classism shape survivor experiences.

Ujima Inc., hosted a webinar on *The Black Woman/Child: Exploring the Impacts of the Adultification of Black Girls and their Experiences with Violence*. This conversation explored the reality of adultification experienced by Black girls, and how it impacts their experiences with violence, trafficking, and trauma.

Ujima Inc., participated in the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) 2022 fall symposium panel on intimate partner violence and community resources.

Ujima Inc., held a presentation on Protect Black Children for *#MeToo: Empowering Young Women and Girls to Break the Silence at University of D.C.*

Ujima Inc., presented at the 2021 HHS/ACF Runaway and Homeless Youth National Grantee Training for HHS on *The Power of 3: Services, Safety, and Sanctuary for LGBTQ Youth and Youth of Color*.

**Research and Evaluation**

We conducted research and resource gathering around the intersections of human trafficking, and domestic and sexual violence.

Ujima Inc., is developing a fact sheet on missing Black women and girls and the intersections of trafficking and domestic violence.

Ujima Inc., published a fact sheet on [Youth Sex Trafficking](#) in October 2022.

### **Public Policy**

Ujima Inc., participated in the 2019 Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, Annual Legislative Conference - Issue Forum on “*Trafficking in the Black Community*” to raise awareness about the prevalence of trafficking in the Black community; to identify gaps in current legislation related to responding to trafficking of Black women and girls; and to explore culturally specific strategies and programs addressing trafficking of Black women and girls.

### **Examples of Culturally Specific Promising Practices in the U.S.**

The Center for Global Women’s Health University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing  
[Webinar: Regional Impact of Human Trafficking: What Can You Do?](#)

Office of Justice Programs Missing and Murdered African American Task Force, A Division of the Minnesota Department of Public Safety  
<https://dps.mn.gov/divisions/ojp/Pages/missing-murdered-african-american-women-task-force.aspx>

### **Additional Resources**

<https://time.com/6159565/missing-black-girls-relisha-rudd/>

<https://missouriindependent.com/2022/10/21/kansas-city-missing-black-women/>

<https://www.npr.org/2021/09/24/1040048967/missing-black-women-girls-left-out-media-ignored>

<https://rights4girls.org/girls-dc-not-missing-disappeared/>

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/black-girl-gone-a-true-crime-podcast/id1556267741>

### **Documentaries on the Issue**

<https://www.hbo.com/black-and-missing>

<https://stillsearchingdocumentary.com/>

## References:

*Davey, S. (2021, August 7). Snapshot on the state of black women and girls: Sex trafficking in the U.S. " publication " Congressional Black Caucus Foundation " Advancing the global black community by developing leaders informing policy and educating the public.*

*Green Party Women's Caucus (Jan 20, 2021)(n.d.). As black women and girls go missing, and the media and the police do little, a National Task Force is required to address the issue.*  
[www.gp.org](http://www.gp.org).

*Heinze, J. L. (2021, August 23). Tracking trafficking trends in America.*

*Lindsey, T. (2020, February 20). The urgent crisis of missing black women and girls.*

*Lindsey, T., & America, G. V. (2022, March 30). Why black women and girls like Relisha Rudd go missing.*

*NAACP. (2022). Missing African American Women and Children in the United States of America.*

*Patton, L. D., & Ward, L. W. (1970, January 1). Missing black undergraduate women and the politics of disposability: A critical race feminist perspective. Penn State.*

*Pruitt-Young, S. (2021, September 24). Tens of thousands of black women vanish each year.*



This publication is supported by Grant No. 09EVO527 awarded by the Department of Health and Human Services, Administration of Children and Families, Family Violence Prevention and Services Administration. The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this resource are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the United States Department of Health and Human Services.