

A portrait of a man with short dark hair and a goatee, wearing a dark hoodie. He is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. The background is a blurred wall with graffiti, including a large white letter 'M'. A bright yellow vertical bar is on the left side of the image.

WHEN WE TELL OUR STORIES

**How survivors of color are most harmed and
least helped by the public safety system**

Executive Summary

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Most crime survivors want a public safety system that offers a pathway to accountability for harm, support for healing, and a process of restoration after experiencing violence.

While decades of research have informed programs and services that best meet crime survivors' needs, remarkably little attention has been paid to the experiences of survivors of color.

This report delves into one overarching question: What do survivors of color need in the aftermath of trauma?

The qualitative research collected here presents the lived experiences of 40 Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and multiracial survivors. While participants' experiences are as diverse as the people themselves, their voices converged over shared themes of invisibility, strength, distress, resilience, unhealed trauma, and determination.

The data pointed to four findings.

Finding #1: Most survivors of color do not report crimes.

The vast majority of survivors interviewed in our study did not report the crime or crimes they experienced, mostly out of fear that they'd be disbelieved, blamed, ignored, or harmed further by police. And while generations of survivors of color have turned within their close-in networks for safety and healing, broader community-based support is limited.

Consequently, crime survivors of color are less likely to experience healing and resolution that could come with survivor programs and services. to experience healing and resolution that could come with survivor programs and services.



Finding #2: Most survivors of color do not have access to opportunities to heal.

Few survivors of color felt supported by the public safety system in the aftermath of a violent incident.

Most received no information on how to navigate the criminal justice system or how to access trauma support; when help was offered to survivors, it was often culturally inaccessible.

Finding #3: The criminal justice system prioritizes prosecution and incarceration over the needs of survivors.

Survivors of color expressed that their needs were generally not met by the criminal justice system. Survivors wanted accountability, justice, and safety, but many felt that the criminal justice system's means of achieving these were inadequate, narrow, and sometimes even at odds with what they would have liked. With the system's strictly punitive focus on prosecution and incarceration, it offers no options for people to get on the path they need to heal.

Finding #4: Many survivors of color do not identify as victims.

Survivors of color, particularly men, found it difficult to acknowledge that they have been a victim and need help to heal. Survivors attributed this to a range of factors: racial bias in the criminal justice system that assumes men of color are potential perpetrators; the false binary that a person can either have committed a crime or been a victim, but not both; and a culture of masculinity that socializes men to think that being a victim or needing help is a sign of weakness.

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Recommendation #1: Elevate restorative practices that are responsive to and driven by people impacted by harm.

City, county, and state governments and funding organizations need to invest in community-driven restorative processes. Survivors should have the option of choosing a restorative process, not just be given the false choice of incarceration or not accounting for harm at all.

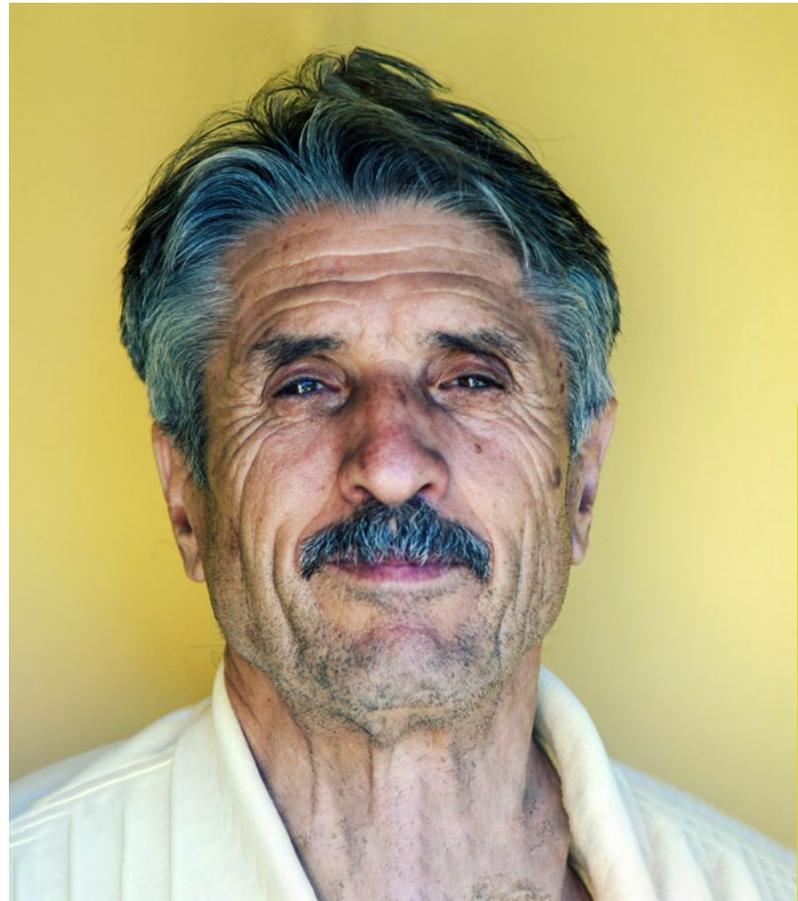


Recommendation #2: Substantially increase funding for new and existing community-based and culturally specific healing services.

Criminal justice systems should shrink the use of prosecution and meaningfully invest in community-based and culturally specific services for people who have experienced harm and violence. These services should be readily available and not depend on a survivor's willingness to prosecute the harm or otherwise cooperate with law enforcement.

Recommendation #3: Identify and address historical trauma to Black, Indigenous, and Latinx people and communities as well as other people and communities of color in Oregon.

The state needs to conduct its own truth and reconciliation process to identify and address the harms of historical trauma to people and communities of color in Oregon. The process must be driven and informed by Black, Indigenous, and Latinx people, as well as other people of color.



Recommendation #4: Improve public safety and other agencies' capacity to serve people who have experienced trauma and survived violence.

The state should require training in culturally specific and healing centered approaches for law enforcement and other relevant agency staff who interact with people who have experienced trauma or been harmed by violence, with measured in changed outcomes for survivors.

Part Three of this report outlines different actions that all of us can take to advance the changes we need.

Whether as a community member, advocate, direct service provider, public safety professional, or elected official, we all have an important role in creating and supporting better outcomes for Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and other survivors of color in our communities.

Together we can use the resources and power we have to meaningfully transform our response to violence — one rooted in humanity, equity, accountability, and healing.



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