

11-18-2025

## African Americans' Perceptions of the Impact of Childhood Community Violence and Historical Oppression on Parenting

Iyabo Adediran  
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# Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

G. Iyabo Adediran

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Walden University  
2025

Abstract

African Americans' Perceptions of the Impact of Childhood Community Violence and

Historical Oppression on Parenting

by

G. Iyabo Adediran

MA, Holy Names University 2014

BA, New College of California, 2008

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Developmental Psychology

Walden University

November 2025

## Abstract

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) can have detrimental impacts on lifelong functioning. Although African Americans experience disproportionately higher rates of community violence, one type of ACE, the potential long-term impacts of exposure to such violence and of historical oppression on their parenting practices in adulthood, was little understood. In this qualitative study, an ethnographic approach was used to explore African American parents' perceptions of how early exposure to community violence (before age of 18) and the intergenerational transmission of historical oppression influenced their current parenting practices. The conceptual framework, which integrated Engel's biopsychosocial model and Bowen's family systems theory, provided a culturally grounded lens for examining parenting. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 12 African American parents and analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. Findings indicate that African American parents draw upon early exposure to community violence and awareness of historical oppression to shape parenting strategies grounded in resilience, cultural identity, and legacy. Three central themes emerged: (1) My Foundation is Solid, (2) And Yet We Survived, and (3) African American Parenting Practices/Strategies. These findings provide a nuanced understanding of African American parenting within the context of adversity and systemic inequity. This study aims to contribute to positive social change by fostering individual self-awareness, promoting community-affirming practices, and informing policy development that advances trauma-informed, culturally responsive services, ultimately strengthening the provision of training in cultural humility.

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## Dedication

This body of work is dedicated to the legacy of the true overcomers in my life, my grandparents, L.C. Thomas and Cora B. Woods. Your ability to survive in the face of obstacles is a testament to our family, whom you have set the foundation for. To my parents. My angels, Jerri and Shola Adediran, your unwavering love and support continue to shine bright today. Daddy (I am officially your doctor) and Mama (now that I got my education, nobody can tell me nothing). Special shout-out to my brothers Cedric and Ayanfe (Fel); we all we got! And y'all keep me humble through our moments of laughter and how we go hard for each other. I couldn't imagine life without y'all in it, and I am so grateful for you both. To my Goddaughter, Ya'Nis, I believe in you, and if you put in the work and trust God's plan, the sky is the limit. To my nieces and nephews(Cedric II, Jaelyn, Ayanfe Jr., Trey, Elijah, Issa, and Chosen and my Great niece Zhamorii and nephews Zhakai and Zhamir, and the children that have yet to be born, I want you all to know that whatever you put your minds to, you can accomplish, just make sure you always put God first. Additionally, to my aunts and uncles (special shout-out to Red), thank you for being a part of my life. Also, to my extended nieces and nephews, keep pushing, you got this! Lastly, to my amazingly beautiful, intelligent, and talented baby girl and Princess Brown Girl Iyabo (Yaya), you are why I push so hard. I never knew a love so pure until God blessed me with you. I am honored to be your mother and thank God daily for the light he has sparked within you. The world is your canvas, and I want you to continue painting outside the lines, creating a path that is uniquely yours, made possible by God's grace.

## Acknowledgments

To God be the Glory for the things he has done. I am because of God's grace and mercy. I am eternally grateful to every member of my village. You have supported me through times when I didn't understand where I was headed, and I am thankful for that. First and foremost, to my Biz Besties, Sharral and Ashley, you are the sisters I never knew I needed; you encouraged me to embark upon this journey when I was adamant I was done with school, and I am thankful you did. My hope for us is that we continue to grow in the word of God, in our business, and in our sisterhood. Now don't leave me hanging, who got next?? To my Sista friends and brothers from another, all of you know who you are, and there are too many of you to name. I love you all, and your continued support over the years has meant more to me than you know. To my cousin for life, TJ, know that I love you, God got you, and I wish nothing but greatness upon your life. A special thank you to my love, Peter. You have listened to me complain, held me when I needed support, and, most importantly, prayed for me during times when I didn't have the strength to ask for help. I express my deepest gratitude to you for being in my life. Extra special thanks to my committee chair, Dr. Arlene Hogan. Your continued encouragement, sense of humor, and feedback have been outstanding. My second committee member, Dr. Natalie Marr, thanks for your constructive feedback and heartfelt guidance. Lastly, this doctoral journey would not have been the same without my study buddy, who became my friend, Adrianna. We accomplished our goal together by sharing resources, our vent sessions, and your encouragement.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to Study

Experiences during childhood, whether through direct victimization, witnessing violence, or generational transmission of violence, can influence an individual's psychological, relational, and physical outlook throughout their lifespan (Narayan et al., 2021). The influence of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) across a person's lifespan has been significantly studied since the groundbreaking research by Felitti et al. (1998). This study found that the accumulation of these experiences contributes to an increased risk of negative mental and physical health outcomes in adulthood.

Initially, research primarily focused on individual household experiences; however, the scope has since expanded to include community-level factors. Studies have shown that African Americans experience disproportionately higher rates of exposure to community violence (Cronholm et al, 2015; Giovanelli & Reynolds, 2021; Hampton-Anderson et al, 2021). This finding highlights the importance of examining the effects of community violence experienced before the age of 18 among African Americans, with 40.5% of those living in urban areas being affected. The findings also emphasized the necessity of including diverse groups and community-level adversity in ACE studies (Cronholm et al., 2015). The historical experiences of African Americans, which are deeply rooted in slavery, involve oppression, racism, discrimination, and unequal treatment, resulting in the breakdown of the African American family structure over generations. (DeGruy, 2017; A. T. Lee et al., 2023). Although the exposure of African Americans to community violence has been documented, their experiences have not been examined through a qualitative lens. This qualitative research study will explore African

American parents' perceptions of the influence of early exposure to community violence (prior to age 18) and the potential influences of historical oppression on their current parenting practices. This chapter will also provide an overview of the proposed study by summarizing the current literature, the social implications and significance of the phenomenon, the research question, and a brief introduction to the conceptual framework and justification for the methodological design.

## **Background**

### **History of Adverse Childhood Experiences**

Over the last 30 years, research has evolved to include an array of experiences affecting communities, and the expansion of the coined concept of ACEs has been one of the areas of focus for researchers. The research has consistently shown links between childhood adversity, such as physical and emotional neglect, discrimination, and abuse, and its enduring impact on individuals' lifelong functioning (Afifi et al., 2020; Cronholm et al., 2015; Felitti et al., 1998). Research has demonstrated that exposure to multiple adverse experiences before the age of 18 significantly increases the risk of substance use, physical health problems, depression, anxiety, and severe obesity, which are factors that collectively contribute to elevated morbidity and mortality rates (Felitti et al., 1998; Campbell & Egede, 2024; Gardner et al., 2019). The ACE study, led by Felitti et al (1998), revolutionized the understanding of household dysfunction, which had been previously seen as isolated issues. This study allowed for the examination of the cumulative adversities individuals encounter and their potential influence on both

emotional and physical health. However, a limitation of the initial study was its lack of participant diversity, with 83% of the population being European American.

### **ACEs Expanded Version**

Initially focused on predominantly White middle-class participants, the ACE study has gradually broadened the area of scope to include individuals from various backgrounds. It examines potentially traumatic experiences in home and community settings (Zhen-Duan et al., 2023). Research by Finkelhor et al. (2013) and Finkelhor et al. (2015) aimed to broaden the understanding of ACEs by concentrating on the experiences of children aged 10-17, rather than relying on adult recollections of childhood. Their research incorporated a range of factors, including having a close family member or friend with a serious illness or injury, academic difficulties, parental conflict, limited social connections, low socioeconomic status, peer victimization, social isolation, and exposure to community violence (Finkelhor et al., 2015). A subsequent study by Cronholm et al. (2015) focused on African American adults and identified additional community-related factors, including community violence, peer bullying, experiences in foster care, discrimination, and growing up in unsafe neighborhoods.

Meanwhile, Lange et al. (2018) conducted research identifying a connection between adverse experiences before age 18 and the stress endured during parenting practices. Also, exposure to community violence encompasses several vital elements, including witnessing violent acts, hearing about violence experienced by others, or personally falling victim to violence (Centers for Disease Control, 2024). Furthermore, African American children exposed to violence via the usage of a weapon, physical

violence, and witnessing a death in the community also may encounter symptoms of anxiety, depression, and PTSD (Sargent et al., 2019).

### ***Community Violence Exposure and Gender***

Violence exposure is a community-wide issue. Nonetheless, research indicates that individuals experience it differently based on gender. Studies reveal that African American men residing in marginalized areas, who face bias and racial oppression, are often exposed to harm, commonly referred to as community violence (Gardner et al., 2019; Phan et al., 2020). African American men often experience higher exposure to community violence than African American girls, while the girls reported a higher level of exposure to sexual violence (Semenza et al., 2022). For men, experiencing community violence before turning 18 results in problems with alcohol and substances (Byrd et al., 2023) and hypervigilance (Byrd et al., 2023). A study by Sargent et al. (2019) highlighted that African American women who encountered community violence before turning 18 are subjected to severe physical intimate partner violence in adulthood at a rate of 36.3%. This contrasts with women who did not face such violence in their childhood, who experience it at a rate of 17.6% (Lacey et al., 2021).

### **ACEs and Parenting**

Parents who experience adversity before age 18 often find it challenging to regulate their emotional, physical, and social functioning, which may influence their children's future (Leite Ongilio et al., 2022). Research has primarily focused on the experiences of mothers and children and has noted an increase in parental stress (Lange et al., 2018) and challenges with formulating parenting skills (Hanetz-Gamliel & Dollberg,

2022). Boyd et al. (2022) examined the impact of family and community violence on African American children. The research found that when children who have experienced community violence have a strong relational bond with their parents, it leads to better emotional and mental well-being for the children (Boyd et al., 2022).

Although prevention is feasible, these ACEs continue to impact children and their families, leading to significant long-term effects (Swedo et al., 2023). Extensive research on ACEs and parenting has primarily concentrated on parenting stress (Lange et al., 2018), parental ACEs, and children's behavioral issues (Schickedanz et al., 2018; Schickedanz et al., 2021). These studies have mainly explored home environmental factors, such as physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, as well as household violence, without thoroughly investigating the broader environmental influences and their effects (Greene et al., 2020; Leite Ongilio et al., 2022).

### **Cultural Resiliency in the Face of Despair**

African Americans have faced a long history of systemic racism and oppression, including chattel slavery, discrimination, marginalization, racism, limited access to resources, and unequal socioeconomic conditions (DeGruy, 2017; Phelan & Link, 2015; Merrick et al., 2019; Scott-Jones & Kamara, 2020). Despite the potential turmoil these experiences have caused, the African American community has often managed to survive and prosper by using various coping strategies to withstand challenging experiences (Freeny et al., 2021). Understanding the importance of trauma being passed down through generations is vital, as it sheds light on the role of potential parenting influences.

This may also include the direct consequences of encountering community violence before age 18 (Smith et al., 2022).

African American people have endured a tremendous amount of trauma, which pre-dates the experience of chattel slavery in the United States, which involved a process of dehumanization via acts such as public humiliation and physical injury (Akbar, 1996). As the trauma remains unhealed, the impact is often passed down from one generation to the next, causing a rippled effect of symptomology coupled with the experiences of racism, discrimination, micro-aggressive undertones, and, in recent history, denial that the historical context of oppression exists causing a sense of erasure targeting the entire cultural group (DeGruy., 2017; Halloran., 2018;). This study explored African American parents' perceptions of how early exposure to community violence (prior to age 18) and the effects of historical oppression shape their current parenting practices.

### **Problem Statement**

While existing studies on ACEs highlight the necessity of focusing on African Americans due to their increased vulnerability to such exposures, it is equally vital to examine how these experiences are linked to the historical context of this cultural group. Additionally, perceived experiences of discrimination or racism have resulted in adverse parenting outcomes (Condon et al., 2022). This historical background has created a generational cycle of unresolved effects, passed down through generations, shaping some core aspects of the African American experience (DeGruy, 2017; Hankerson et al., 2022; Scott-Jones et al., 2020; A. T. Lee et al., 2023). Although research on ACEs acknowledges the influence of adversity on lifelong functioning (Felitti et al.,1998;

Cronholm et al., 2013; Finkelhor et al., 2015; Finkelhor et al., 2015), there is a lack of in-depth exploration into the potential perceived long-term impacts of community violence exposure and historical oppression on the parenting practices of African Americans as they mature into adulthood.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This qualitative research study explored African American parents' perceptions of how early exposure to community violence (prior to age 18) and the influences of historical oppression shape their current parenting practices.

### **Research Question**

Research on expanded ACEs has revealed that African Americans are exposed to community violence at higher rates than European American individuals (Hampton-Anderson et al., 2021). With the recognition of childhood exposure to community violence, there is a growing need to comprehend its effects on parenting practices. I sought to answer the following research question in the current study: To what degree do African American parents perceive that their experiences with hearing about stories of violence in their communities before age 18, and their racial and historical backgrounds, shape their current parenting practices?

### **Conceptual Framework for the Study**

This study employed two frameworks as its foundation: the Biopsychosocial model proposed by Engel (1977) and the Family systems theory developed by Bowen (1966).

### **Biopsychosocial Model**

The biopsychosocial model by Engel (1977) emerged as an alternative approach to challenge the dominant biomedical model. By considering biological, psychological, and social variables, this method offered a more thorough knowledge of one's experience (Borrell-Carrió et al., 2004). The biopsychosocial–cultural model offers a valuable framework for researching ACEs among African Americans. A cultural component was added to the biopsychosocial model in 2015, which incorporated the cultural elements of one's experience. By considering a person's cultural background and various struggles, this expansion enables a more nuanced view of their sickness or suffering (Hampton-Anderson et al., 2021). It provides a starting point for analyzing participants' adversity experiences, especially those connected to communal violence. Using this model, researchers can better understand the biological, psychological, social, and cultural factors influencing health outcomes in this population (Hampton-Anderson et al., 2021).

### **Family Systems Theory**

Bowen's family systems theory, as seen via a cultural lens, served as the theoretical basis for this investigation. Bowen (1966) developed this theory to describe how family relational and emotional systems affect experiences that span generations. The theory looks at how family dynamics shape roles and actions. Families offer a distinctive multigenerational viewpoint on each member's well-being. The entire family structure may be impacted when one member goes through trauma or adversity (Reese et al., 2022). This study's emphasis on the African American community was strengthened by including a cultural viewpoint in Bowen's theory (Erdem & Safi, 2018).

### **Nature of the Study**

This qualitative study utilized a focused ethnographic research design to address the research question. Focused ethnography was an approach that examined specific cultural aspects of a group by exploring their beliefs, values, and viewpoints (Stahlke Wall, 2014; Roper & Shapira, 2000). This methodology aimed to uncover participants' lived experiences by concentrating on the cultural elements that shaped their perspectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). By incorporating the Focused Ethnography approach, researchers explored the participants' lived experiences by focusing on a specific phenomenon within a subcultural group where the researcher had familiarity or connection to the group being studied (Stahlke Wall, 2014).

### **Definitions**

This study employed standard terminology to enhance reader comprehension, which was elucidated through the following definitions.

*Adverse Childhood Experiences (conventional ACEs):* Concerns within the household, including alcohol/substance abuse in the home, witnessing domestic violence, and parental mental illness. Additionally, it encompasses various forms of child maltreatment, including emotional, physical, and sexual abuse, as well as parental incarceration and both emotional and physical neglect occurring before the age of 18 (Felitti et al., 1998).

*African American or Black:* The terms are often used interchangeably to describe an individual who lives in the United States and identifies with African origins (US Census Bureau, 2024).

*Community violence exposure:* Violence that occurs typically between people who do not know one another and occurs outside of the home environment (Centers for Disease Control, 2024; Kennedy, 2014). It is also known as secondary exposure to violence, where the individual is exposed to violence by witnessing or hearing about the violent encounter without being the victim themselves (Gibson et al., 2009).

*Expanded ACEs:* Expand the original definition to include community violence, peer victimization, foster care experiences, and discrimination occurring before age 18 (Cronholm et al., 2015).

*Historical trauma/oppression:* The gradual psychological and emotional harm experienced by multiple generations and impacts individuals within a collective group (Mohatt et al., 2014; Pumariega et al., 2022).

*Intergenerational trauma:* The historical trauma is transmitted across many generations and causes harm to community members and their offspring (Pumariega et al., 2022).

*Marginalized community:* A group or community without access to the social, financial, and educational privileges of those who are considered members of the dominant culture, and are often associated with gender, racial, and other identities (Baah et al., 2018; Sevelius et al., 2020)

*Parenting practices:* The daily behaviors and actions exhibited by parents that shape their children's belief systems (Bornstein et al., 2011; Vaughn et al., 2016).

### **Assumptions**

The study was grounded in four key assumptions. Firstly, it was anticipated that individuals would participate in the research of their own accord and openly share their experiences. Secondly, during interviews, participants were expected to feel at ease, requesting acceptance breaks for self-recalibration when necessary. Thirdly, the study assumed all respondents would provide truthful and sincere responses. The study required adults to recount their childhood experiences; the assumption was that they would accurately share their perspectives.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

This research study included exclusionary criteria consistent with the scope of the delimitations. The participants were between the ages of 30 and 55, identified as African American, and were parents (mother or father) of children aged 5-17. They also reported exposure to community violence in childhood and had grown up in the United States. As the study focused on the personal perspective of each parent, the mode for obtaining information came from the parents' reports alone. If a potential participant did not meet the above criteria, they were excluded from this study. This study aimed to enhance awareness about the possible connection between community violence-related adversity in childhood and adult parenting practices.

### **Limitations**

Various potential limitations could have influenced the study's results. A key challenge might have been recruiting participants through social media platforms, as this option could have limited participation. Once identified, participants might have had

difficulty providing comprehensive accounts of their past experiences. This research depended on participants' recollections, which could have been affected by memory gaps, underestimating the significance of specific violence exposures, or exaggerating their impact. The study focused on specific age ranges for parents and children, which may have restricted participant engagement. These age parameters could have limited the pool of interested individuals willing to participate in the research. By concentrating on parents aged 30-55 with children between 5 and 17 years old, the study might have missed valuable insights from earlier parenting stages, and the parents' age range could have led to more substantial memory lapses. Additionally, cultural stigma and concerns about possible repercussions might have made participants hesitant to share their experiences.

### **Significance**

ACEs are distressing events that took place from birth to 18 years old, often involving various types of abuse and neglect (About Adverse Childhood Experiences, 2024). Studies showed that ACEs profoundly impacted developmental and physical health (Webster, 2022). However, there was still a need to gain a deeper understanding of these experiences from the parents' perspective (Wattanatchariya et al., 2024). Research suggested that African Americans reported experiencing ACEs at higher rates than other demographic groups (Giovanelli & Reynolds, 2021; Maguire-Jack et al., 2020; Merrick et al., 2018). This study sought to significantly contribute to developmental psychology, healthcare, and policymaking by concentrating on this demographic. It aimed to aid in the creation of trauma-informed prevention strategies and interventions, enhancing clarity

about the perspectives of African American parents and the potential impact of ACEs and historical trauma on their parenting practices.

### **Summary**

Chapter one served as an introduction to the qualitative research study, which aimed to explore the lived experiences of African American individuals who were exposed to violence in their neighborhoods during childhood and subsequently became parents. This research sought to uncover the potential influence of the historical experiences of oppression, exposure to community violence before turning 18, and the parenting approaches that African American parents utilized. Additionally, this chapter outlined the problem that motivated the study, provided background information, stated the purpose, described the framework conceptualization and nature of the study, and addressed the assumptions, scope, and delimitation significance, while defining key terms and proposing research directions. The subsequent chapter was set to offer a thorough analysis of existing literature on ACEs, childhood exposure to community violence, African American cultural dynamics, and family structures, with a particular emphasis on parenting and familial interactions unique to the African American experience.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

For over 30 years, researchers have explored the phenomenon of ACEs in various ways. While there had been a growing awareness of their effects on African Americans, the specific consequences might not have yet been fully uncovered. ACEs were described as potentially preventable, distressing events before age 18 and often had lasting effects

on adulthood (Swedo et al., 2023). Both the original and expanded ACE studies had highlighted the significance of focusing on household and environmental factors that resulted in lifelong impacts (Felitti et al., 1998; Finkelhor et al., 2013; Finkelhor et al., 2015; Cronholm et al., 2015). Additionally, African Americans have faced a prolonged history of historical and generational oppression and trauma affecting multiple generations and contributing to the potential influence of ACEs on the family (Hampton-Anderson et al., 2021).

This qualitative study aimed to investigate the lived experiences of African American parents who encountered ACEs related to community violence during their childhood, with a particular emphasis on how these parents perceived hearing stories of violence in their communities and how the historical context of oppression had shaped their parenting practices. Furthermore, the study sought to expand understanding of intervention strategies that could decrease the chances of transmitting potential stressors to future generations (Afifi et al., 2020).

A qualitative study utilizing a focused Ethnographic research design was considered beneficial in illuminating parents' voices and understanding their lived experiences regarding ACEs (Knoblauch, 2005). This approach provided a deeper understanding of how African American parents perceived, experienced, and coped with exposure to childhood community violence, historical oppression, and its potential influence on their parenting practices. By exploring the personal narratives of the study's participants, the study aimed to focus on the subjective experiences of those who had

endured ACEs and their parenting practices and gain valuable knowledge that could contribute to potential preventative measures in the future.

The purpose of this chapter was to comprehensively examine the existing literature and identify the research gap that this study sought to address. This extensive review aimed to establish the context and significance of the proposed research study. The chapter began with the literature search strategy, followed by a review of the conceptual framework and a comprehensive review of the literature, which included the history of ACEs, including the formulation of the conventional and expanded versions, exposure to community violence in childhood, African Americans and community violence, the historical context of intergenerational trauma, and parenting behaviors of African Americans. This chapter concluded with a summary.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

The peer-reviewed articles used in this study were retrieved from the Walden University databases, which included EBSCOhost, APA PsycArticles, APA Psynet, ProQuest, Google Scholar, ResearchGate, SAGE Journals, Taylor and Francis, Science Direct, and APA PsycINFO. Keywords that were used for the literature review included ACEs, adverse childhood experiences, African American parenting, African American parenting behaviors, Expanded ACEs, African American families, parenting transmission, parenting, community violence, neighborhood violence or community violence exposure, historical oppression in African Americans, historical trauma, generational trauma in African Americans, intergenerational trauma and violence.

## **Conceptual Framework**

This study was grounded in two conceptual frameworks: the biopsychosocial model introduced by Engel (1977) and the family systems theory proposed by Bowen (1966). The biopsychosocial model examined an individual's biological, psychological, and social aspects to understand how their experiences might have impacted their mental health. Comparatively, the family systems theory provided a method for comprehending individual behaviors within the family unit by analyzing patterns across multiple generations of the family structure. Erdem and Safi (2018) suggested expanding the family systems theory to encompass a cultural perspective. Meanwhile, Hampton-Anderson et al. (2021) integrated cultural frameworks into the biopsychosocial model, creating the biopsychosocial-cultural model.

### **Biopsychosocial Model**

In 1977, Engel developed the biopsychosocial model as a substitute for the biomedical model. The biomedical model is an approach that prioritizes biological factors in health analysis, disregarding the behavioral, psychological, and social dimensions of illness. This perspective focuses exclusively on physiological aspects when examining health conditions (Engel, 1992). The biopsychosocial model conceptualizes health challenges based on biological, psychological, and social factors to aid in determining potential outcomes (Borrell-Carrió et al., 2004). Furthermore, Engel (1977) argued that if a provider can identify one's connection to the mind and body, determining changes in the system can prevent adverse outcomes (Lugg, 2021). From the perspective of the

biopsychosocial model, coping with the hardships in their surroundings may be the root of long-term biological, social, and psychological issues (Lei et al., 2022).

In examining the potential lifelong impacts on individuals, the ACEs study aligns with the biopsychosocial model, which considers the entirety of human experiences. This model avoids viewing experiences as isolated events and instead highlights the interconnected factors of biological, social, and psychological functioning (Lehman et al., 2017). The biological factors contributing to the individual's brain functioning related to the stress response system in the brain are associated with the hippocampus and amygdala.

### ***Biopsychosocial–Cultural Conceptualization***

The original biopsychosocial model established by Engel (1977) highlighted the importance of focusing on biological, psychological, and social components. Highlighting the cultural aspects of individuals emphasizes the idea that people are complex and not one-dimensional (Hampton-Anderson et al., 2021). The original model that incorporates cultural elements is the biopsychosocial-cultural model. This enhanced framework enables a more comprehensive understanding of an individual's illness or distress by considering their cultural background and diverse challenges (Hampton-Anderson et al., 2021). When examining ACEs among African Americans, the biopsychosocial–cultural model serves as a valuable tool. It provides a fundamental perspective for investigating participants' experiences of adversity, particularly concerning community violence. The biopsychosocial–cultural model is a theoretical framework that employs a multifaceted approach when assessing an individual's health

and well-being, emphasizing biological, psychological, and sociocultural factors (Pham, 2014).

### ***Conceptual Application***

The research aimed to examine the perspective of the whole individual by considering biological, psychological, social, and cultural elements as it sought to understand the experiences faced by African American parents. Biological aspects played a role in developmental changes, potentially affecting brain growth, the stress response system, and the possible intergenerational transmission of outcomes (Dye et al., 2024; Scorza et al., 2023). As community exposure to violence occurred in the environment, lifelong effects could have influenced the psychological and social functioning of an individual (Cronholm et al., 2015). On the other hand, the psychological aspect assessed the mental and emotional effects, followed by social influences, as adverse events occurred within the community setting. Finally, the cultural aspect encompassed the historical and familial context that shaped one's capacity to handle adversity experienced before the age of 18 throughout their life.

### **Family Systems Theory**

In 1966, Bowen formulated the family systems theory to illuminate how emotional and relational family dynamics influence multi-generational experiences. This conceptual framework explores the ways family interactions shape individual roles and behaviors. Moreover, family systems offer a unique multigenerational lens to view each member's well-being, as adversity or trauma affecting one individual can reverberate throughout the entire family structure (Reese et al., 2022).

Bowen's 1966 theory comprises several interconnected elements that give meaning to family members' experiences. These components include differentiation of self, which involves the capacity of an individual, when faced with stressful situations, to create a space to hold their emotional autonomy while also maintaining close connections with others (Bowen, 1978). This process lends itself to the nuclear family emotional system, a collaborative emotional system that transmits experiences from one generation to the next and explains the developmental process. As this study seeks to explore the parenting practices of individuals exposed to community violence before age 18, examining their level of autonomy while also engaging with others within the family unit can potentially offer clarity regarding outcomes. One possible outcome of difficulties in the self-differentiation process is triangulation (Willis et al., 2020). This occurs when a conflict between family members leads to the involvement of another family member who was not originally part of the disagreement, which can affect the individual's psychological well-being, especially if a child is involved. (Cepukiene, 2021).

### ***Family Systems-Cultural Perspective***

In 2018, Erdem and Safi broadened the initial framework of family systems theory by integrating a cultural viewpoint that had not been previously considered. This approach highlights the necessity of considering how relationships are interpreted. To gain a comprehensive understanding of this idea and achieve a more inclusive grasp of how the culture of individual families influences relationships, it is essential to explore narratives of intergenerational experiences, considering factors such as ethnicity, race,

gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, family background, values, and customs (Erdem & Safi, 2018).

### ***Conceptual Application***

To assist in the conceptualization of the research associated with community violence, transmission of oppression, and current parenting practices for African Americans, principles from the Family Systems theory were utilized. Family systems theory views the family as a complex, layered entity, considering individual characteristics and the dynamics of balancing the influences from the larger family structure (Velandia et al., 2024). Differentiation of self was a key aspect of the theory. It was viewed from a generational landscape, emphasizing the family's and its members' ability to cultivate healthy relationships. This involved navigating complex situations that caused stress, managing emotions, and encouraging individual growth and interpersonal connections (Skowron, 2005). This research was consistent with this theory as it sought to investigate how individuals perceived their family experiences within the historical context of oppression and how personal experiences with community violence before the age of 18 influenced their parenting behaviors. Some of the potential consequences of this theory also emphasized the potential social impacts on the family and the emotional transmission from parents to children, particularly in the context of African American experiences and the generational traumas linked to their racial heritage (Josiah et al., 2023).

## **Literature Review Related to Key Concepts**

### **Adverse Childhood Experiences Study**

The landmark research on ACEs conducted by Felitti et al. (1998) established the foundation for examining ACEs and their potential long-lasting health impacts. This pioneering study utilized a seven-item questionnaire, which captured the severity of adversity by the amount of abuse experienced, ranging from 0 to 4. The various forms of abuse are (physical, sexual, and emotional), violence directed at mothers, substance misuse within the household, and the presence of mentally ill, suicidal, or incarcerated family members, which contribute to dysfunction within the family unit (Felitti et al., 1998).

The survey was mailed to 13,494 individuals, with 9,508 questionnaires returned. The study population was predominantly European American (83%). Participants had a mean age of 56.1 years and an average educational background of at least 14.6 years. The sample showed similar distributions in gender and education levels (Felitti et al., 1998). However, the lack of comprehensive demographic information hindered the analysis of health outcomes across diverse populations (Felitti et al., 1998). The potential health effects of ACEs on non-European American groups remained unknown due to insufficient data on other racial and ethnic populations (Felitti et al., 1998). Additionally, the research established that individuals who endured multiple ACEs were at an elevated risk for physical health concerns, including heart disease, cancer (Holman et al., 2016), Chronic Lung Disease, and Liver disease. Also noted were mental health complications, including Depression, Anxiety, substance use, and suicide risk (Hughes et al., 2017).

Based on survey data collected from 2011 to 2020, the CDC (2023) reports that 63.9% of adults residing in the United States and the District of Columbia have experienced at least one adverse event, while 17.3% of the population has reported encountering four or more ACEs (Swedo et al., 2023).

The initial phase of the ACE study not only uncovered instances of household dysfunction, such as alcohol abuse, domestic violence, and mental illness, but also revealed various forms of childhood abuse, including psychological, physical, and sexual mistreatment and criminal behaviors (Anda et al., 2005). Using the seven survey categories, the likelihood of unfavorable health outcomes rose proportionately depending on the number of adversities experienced (Felitti et al., 1998). Research indicated that exposure to four or more adverse experiences before age 18 is associated with elevated risks of substance abuse, health challenges, symptoms of depression, severe obesity, and sexual concerns, which have contributed to increased morbidity and mortality rates (Felitti et al., 1998).

### *ACE's Study's Second Wave*

Shortly after completing the study's first wave, a second wave of surveys was sent to the same population participating in the first study. In the second wave, 8,667 respondents were captured, a slight decline from 70% of the original participants to 65% of respondents (Dube et al., 2001). After reviewing the first study, the survey also included health analysis questions that were deemed necessary (Dube et al., 2001). The subsequent wave expanded upon the initial seven categories by incorporating three additional adverse areas: physical and emotional neglect, as well as parental separation or

divorce (Felitti et al., 1998). The list of risk factors was also broadened to include suicide attempts in adulthood (Dube et al., 2001). Following the original study, numerous investigations have connected ACEs to long-term consequences. Research has shown a connection between various cancer outcomes (Hu et al., 2021) and stress related to ACEs (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2021; Wise et al., 2011; Brown et al., 2010). Research examining ACEs and their long-term impact on Type 2 Diabetes concluded that difficulties in managing the effects of childhood adversity contributed to a Type 2 Diabetes diagnosis (Campbell & Egede, 2024). The scope of research has broadened to encompass experiences specific to ethnic minorities, including difficulties associated with immigration status stemming from deportation concerns (Barajas-Gonzalez et al., 2021). Additionally, statistics from major U.S. metropolitan areas indicate that 19% of African American, 23% Latino, and 29% Native American youth reside in neighborhoods with limited growth opportunities (Barajas-Gonzalez et al., 2021). This contrasts with two thirds of Asian and White populations who live in high-opportunity areas, contributing to the exposure to discriminatory practices for people of color, resulting in childhood adversities (Shonkoff et al., 2021).

### ***ACEs Expanded Version***

Early studies and follow-up research highlighted the importance of expanding the research focus beyond adversities confined to the household environment (Finkelhor et al., 2013). Building upon this, Finkelhor et al. (2013) and Cronholm et al. (2015) expanded the list of ACEs to encompass community-based factors such as violence, peer bullying, foster care experiences, and discrimination. Both studies aimed to capture both

traditional (household) and expanded (community) adversities among minority populations, contrasting with the original research that primarily reflected the experiences of White middle-class individuals (Felitti et al., 1998). The study by Finkelhor et al. (2013) mainly aimed to assess the potential benefits of expanding the range of ACEs. The research gathered responses from children aged 10-17, with an additional focus on primarily capturing demographic information from parents. Participants were interviewed via telephone in a nationwide study that included at least 70% of African American, Hispanic, and low-income populations. The study delved into the original ACE categories and nuanced areas of concern. Children were asked to answer yes/no to six specific areas of violence (witnessing, theft, murder of a close loved one, observed violence, experience of riots, and war zone). At the same time, parents were asked about whether neighborhood violence was a significant issue (Finkelhor et al., 2013). The results showed that 63.4% of youth reported exposure to community violence, whereas 4.3% of parents indicated that neighborhood violence was a significant problem (Finkelhor et al., 2013). This investigation increased attention to the importance of documenting the experiences of minority populations compared to the original study.

The investigation revealed a pivotal finding by stressing the necessity to extend the scope of adverse experiences beyond the initial study's concentration on abuse and household dysfunction. It emphasized incorporating elements like exposure to community violence in subsequent research endeavors (Finkelhor et al., 2013). To further highlight the relevance of these additional areas, Finkelhor et al. (2015) conducted an additional study that included community violence questions that asked the youth if they

had observed an assault involving a weapon, experienced the loss of someone close through murder, been exposed to shootings, riots, or explosions, or resided in a war-torn area. Participants who reported at least two of these experiences were assigned a code of one, signifying high exposure to violence within their community. Finkelhor et al. (2015) addressed a significant gap by providing insights into the need to broaden the scope of the original ACE study. While this research concentrated on individuals aged 10-17 and their experiences, it did not cover the issues faced in adulthood (Finkelhor et al., 2015).

Although groundbreaking, Finkelhor et al. (2015) could not capture the adult population's retrospective experiences of adversity prior to age 18. This gap in the literature led to the significance of the Philadelphia ACE study, which enhanced the understanding of African Americans' experiences and assessed whether focusing solely on household dysfunction could adequately reflect the diverse experiences of various groups (Cronholm et al., 2015). Participants were selected following the 2012 Southeastern Philadelphia Household Health Survey. The study sample comprised adults, with a demographic breakdown of 45.2% European American, 43.6% African American, 35% high school and college graduates, 52.2% aged 35-64, and 29.7% aged 18-34 (Cronholm et al., 2015). This demographic profile differed significantly from the original study, which included 79.8% European American and 4.8% African American participants, with 43.4% college graduates and 31.5% college graduates (Felitti et al., 1998).

Specific questions related to the original ACEs were either removed or modified in the expanded study to better align with the participant group and enhance response

accuracy. This included eliminating questions about divorce and providing more detailed explanations regarding physical and emotional neglect. Despite these changes, the two studies used slightly different methods to categorize levels of adversity (Cronholm et al., 2015). The original study categorized adverse experiences using a scale of 0, 1-3, and more than four (Felitti et al., 1998). In contrast, the expanded ACEs assessment used ranges of 0, 1-2, and more than 3 to measure the extent of adversity, revealing that 19.6% of participants experienced only conventional ACEs, 49.3% encountered both conventional and expanded ACEs, and 13.9% faced only expanded ACEs (Cronholm et al., 2015). These results highlight the importance of both ACE questionnaires in accurately capturing the experiences of diverse populations. On the other hand, the expanded version offers a broader perspective by collecting data about home and community environments (Giovanelli & Reynolds, 2021).

### ***Community Violence***

Community violence disproportionately affects the African American population, with a 14% higher mortality rate from gun violence compared to their White counterparts (Gillum et al., 2024). Black children under the age of 18 encounter community violence at a rate of 24.56%, making it the fourth most frequent category of ACEs (H. Lee et al., 2020). Research has indicated that discriminatory actions related to cultural groups are connected to mental distress and health problems among young people (Priest et al., 2013; Pittman & Farrell, 2022). While direct victimization is a key factor in assessing its impact on the community, indirect exposure, such as hearing about or witnessing violence without being directly involved, also constitutes a form of community exposure

(Gibson et al., 2009; Kennedy & Ceballo, 2014; Nelson et al., 2020). This type of secondary trauma is prevalent in urban areas (Brennan et al., 2007) and has been shown to have long-lasting adverse effects on both physical and mental health (Nelson et al., 2020).

Individuals living in environments with high levels of violence exposure are at risk of experiencing both physical and mental health challenges (Altman et al., 2018). In research by H. Lee et al. (2020), which aimed to determine the significance of including exposure to community violence as an additional aspect of the ACEs study, participants were asked an extra question beyond the original 10: "Did you ever witness someone in your neighborhood threaten or seriously injure another person?" The results indicated that individuals with three or more ACEs experienced higher rates of community violence exposure, with a percentage of 2.4% compared to 1.1% of the participants who did not experience ACEs.

### ***Community Violence Exposure and Gender***

African American men are exposed to high rates of community violence resulting from living in marginalized communities, bias, and racialized oppression (Gardner et al., 2019; Phan et al., 2020). When comparing African American boys and girls under the age of 15, 29.1% of boys and 10.7% of girls reported having witnessed violent crimes, while 10.6% of boys and 5.2% of girls indicated they had been victims of such crimes (Giovannelli & Reynolds, 2021). Repetitive exposure to community violence can cause a sense of hopelessness and helplessness that can potentially impact the emotional and physical well-being of African American men (Whipple et al., 2021). A study capturing

the experiences of 535 African American men with an average age of 13.5 by Thomas et al. (2016) determined that 84% of the sample was exposed to physical violence, which led to 96% of the men engaging in physical violence, and 15% of the physical fights leading to physical injury.

### **Parenting: African American Culture, Values and Beliefs, and Traditions**

#### ***Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma and Adversity***

The enduring effects of exposure to adverse experiences can be transmitted across generations, with parental experiences influencing their offspring (Schofield et al., 2018; Yehuda & Lehrner, 2018). Children of parents who faced childhood adversities are more likely to encounter similar challenges (Warne & Lajimodiere, 2015). Additionally, the combination of community trauma and maternal stress during pregnancy increases the probability of children experiencing ACEs (Campbell & Egede, 2024). The growing field of intergenerational ACEs investigates how childhood adversities impact multiple generations within families. Notably, when both parents' adverse histories are considered, their children show a 40.5% higher likelihood of reporting ACEs compared to those whose parents have no history of adversity (Schickedanz et al., 2021). Although research has highlighted links in the generational transmission of adversity, there remains a lack of focus on exploring how childhood experiences of community violence influence current parenting practices. Additionally, experiences of perceived discrimination or racism have been associated with adverse parenting outcomes (Condon et al., 2022). Moreover, growing up in a marginalized community with limited resources can contribute to a persistent cycle of poverty, exacerbating the challenges faced (Harms & Garrett-Ruffin,

2023). The scarcity of resources and financial constraints can sustain poverty in high-crime areas, making it harder to minimize exposure to violence (Lacey et al., 2021). This study seeks to capture such insights, which could lead to a better understanding of how to help mitigate the potential multigenerational effects of adversity.

### ***Parenting & ACEs***

The role of the African American parent is multi-layered as it requires the implementation of a process that prioritizes safety for their children, which includes preparation to endure the backlash of discriminatory behaviors that may occur over their lifetime (Condon et al., 2022). An investigation aimed at establishing a link between ACEs and pregnancy outcomes found that women with a minimum of three adverse experiences faced the risk of hypertension during pregnancy and premature birth (Miller et al., 2021). Research conducted by Wattanatchariya et al. (2024) verified that childhood experiences of abuse resulted in an increased likelihood of employing unfavorable parenting strategies toward their children. The historical context of oppression is linked to Black women's exposure to community ACEs, as opposed to household ACEs (Lange et al., 2018). On low-income mothers' experiences with stress, the results determined a statistical significance between the stress experienced in their parental role and the history of ACEs, with significant parental distress and ACES experienced by 33.33%. Nevertheless, this research had limitations as it excluded fathers and focused on delving into the mothers' experiences in detail.

Mothers who have endured adversity during their childhood and have difficulties with emotional regulation may experience significant behavioral risks, potentially

affecting their children (Osborne et al., 2021). Studies investigating the psychological effects of ACEs on mothers have found a link between increased stress levels and mental health challenges, which can lead to strict parenting methods, thereby impacting their children's behavior (Rowell & Neal-Barnett, 2021). Although this research focused on maternal experiences, further studies are needed to examine paternal experiences (Hanetz-Gamliel & Dollberg, 2022).

The limited exploration of the expanded ACE survey necessitates a study examining the distinctions between conventional and expanded ACEs among Black mothers. K. A. Lee et al. (2022) concluded that Black women encountered a higher prevalence of expanded ACEs than conventional adversities. Additionally, the results indicated that a substantial portion of participants were exposed to community violence and neighborhood safety issues. The research underscored the need for further investigation to comprehensively capture adversity experiences from individual, community, and family perspectives within this demographic. Understanding the effects of ACEs on maternal well-being is crucial and requires additional research efforts, K. A. Lee et al. noted. In a different study, Afifi et al. (2020) examined how traditional and expanded ACEs contribute to mental and physical health issues for both parents and their offspring, which led to psychological and physiological health outcomes across the lifespan.

### **Adversity and Mental Wellness**

Adversity prior to age 18 has led to various clinical mental health diagnoses such as post-traumatic stress disorder, Depression, Anxiety, and substance abuse concerns

(Bellis et al., 2019; Freeny et al., 2021). A decrease in mental health capacity has been noted in the research to be attributed to the lifelong impact of ACEs and has also been attributed to the parenting behaviors toward their children once they have reached adulthood (Shonkoff et al., 2021; Wattanatchariya et al., 2024). Community-level violence has been linked to mental health concerns (Finkelhor, 2013). In a study conducted in New York City on ACEs, community violence exposure, and access to behavioral health services, the study determined that only 50% of African American men and women utilized mental health services and African American mothers who report multiple community adversities were also more likely to report a diagnosis of clinical depression at 1.52% (K. A. Lee et al., 2022).

### **Cultural Resiliency in the Face of Despair**

As stated by Maya Angelou, a prolific poet, “No man can know where he is going unless he knows exactly where he has been and how he arrived at his present place.” Studies have shown that epigenetics involves generational changes transmitted through inherited genes and contributes to the disparities associated with health for African Americans (Aroke et al., 2019; Charney et al., 2025). Dr. Joy DeGruy (2017) proposes that African Americans have experienced what she calls a legacy of trauma. This notion describes the generational transfer of environmental influences via genetic inheritance. Furthermore, studies on epigenetics have offered some explanation regarding the influence of environmental factors contributing to the transmission of DNA (Scorza et al., 2023). This transmission of experiences can occur during utero or early childhood from

the context of the mother's or father's histories of trauma, leading to changes in a person's genetic makeup (Yehuda & Lehrner, 2018).

Building upon the initial ACE research, a notable shift occurred in the medical community, moving beyond focusing on current symptoms to incorporate social factors and traumatic experiences for a more comprehensive understanding of an individual's condition (Maguire-Jack et al., 2020). A comprehensive study spanning 30 years, conducted by Giovanelli and Reynolds (2021), investigated ACEs in a predominantly African American sample from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The research, which involved 1100 participants with a nearly equal gender ratio, uncovered higher rates of parental and domestic violence compared to more affluent populations, exceeding 40% and 24%, respectively, and found that male subjects reported more significant exposure to community violence (Giovanelli & Reynolds, 2021). The study results were captured using an expanded version of the ACEs (Finkelhor et al., 2013).

A study utilizing data from the National Child Health Survey (2016) focused on the experiences of children from Latinx, White, and Black backgrounds, expanding the original adverse categories by including neighborhood violence and discrimination. This research confirmed a notable lack of literature that examines the differences in experiences among various racial and ethnic groups and indicated that Black children were more likely to encounter multiple types of ACEs, such as neighborhood violence, in comparison to their White and Latinx peers (Maguire-Jack et al., 2020). Primarily, ACE studies have focused on cumulative adverse experiences and long-term effects in response to previous research that looked at the different areas of mistreatment separately

(Maguire-Jack et al., 2020). Research on ACEs has emphasized how an individual's cultural background can impact potential outcomes (Metzler et al., 2017). However, due to limited research on expanded ACE experiences, including community violence, the long-term effects remain unclear (Maguire-Jack et al., 2020).

### ***Adversity and Spirituality***

Spirituality has historically been a cornerstone of the African American experience and often serves as a light amid darkness and turmoil and as a pivotal source of comfort, a way to increase connection (Freeny et al., 2021). Furthermore, spirituality is defined as seeking a connection to a dedicated source, also identified as a divine being, using practices rooted in religious beliefs (Hope et al., 2024). In a study conducted with young African American men after exposure to violence, they noted their belief in prayer and God as a coping strategy (Byrd et al., 2023). One's spiritual beliefs have served as a strategy to assist in coping with developmental and emotional concerns, and according to believers, this method of coping has offered a solution to address developmental and mental health concerns (Aggarwal et al., 2023).

### **Summary and Conclusions**

Chapter two's discussion offered a review of literature concerning both the current and historical contexts of ACEs, exposure to community violence, and African American parenting. Additionally, the literature emphasized the factors contributing to the oppression faced by African Americans. This review expanded the understanding of their experiences and outlined the current issue the research addressed, as well as the study's purpose.

The study conceptualized the research problem by applying biopsychosocial-cultural and Family systems theory from a cultural lens. Moreover, the study utilized a qualitative research design and a focused ethnography approach to explore the perspectives of African American parents who encountered community violence before turning 18, along with the historical oppression experienced by African Americans, which may influence their parenting practices. Chapter three will elaborate on the rationale behind the study's methodology and research design, as well as the data collection and analysis strategy, and address potential concerns regarding trustworthiness.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

This qualitative research study explored African American parents' perceptions of the influence of hearing stories of violence in their communities (prior to age 18) and the potential influences of historical oppression on their current parenting practices. The research examined how these early exposures potentially influenced the parenting strategies used with their children aged 5-17. Additionally, it aimed to enhance our comprehension of common themes associated with childhood violence exposure, the influence of historical exposure to oppression generationally, and the potential effects on parenting practices in adulthood. The ultimate objective was to establish a foundation for creating intervention methods to reduce the potential transmission of stressors to subsequent generations (Afifi et al., 2020). The key factors covered in this chapter include detailed information regarding the usage of the qualitative research method and design, the role of the researcher, the selection process for the participants, and the method for collecting data. Additionally, this chapter will cover the plan implemented for the focused ethnographic data analysis process, address concerns related to trustworthiness, and ethical considerations.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

The phenomenon of interest is African American parents' perceptions of the influence of early exposure to community violence (prior to age 18) and the potential influences of historical oppression on their current parenting practices. The research question guiding this study was, To what degree do African American parents perceive

that their experiences with hearing about stories of violence in their communities before age 18, and their racial and historical backgrounds, shape their current parenting practices? A focused ethnography design was used to focus on the importance of capturing the cultural knowledge and perspective of the participants. Furthermore, Focused ethnography enabled an in-depth examination of participants' experiences by concentrating on the subculture within African American culture, specifically regarding the intersectional identities of those exposed to community violence before turning 18 and who are now parenting (Knoblauch, 2005; Trundle & Phillips, 2023). This approach also benefited from the researcher's existing knowledge of the participants' experiences, which helped to shorten the interview process since the researcher already had a foundational understanding of the phenomenon (Trundle & Phillips, 2023). This design allowed the researcher to obtain in-depth data quickly (Shannon et al., 2023). A qualitative design aligned with this research study, allowing participants to share their perspectives regarding the phenomenon, including how it influenced their worldview as a parent. It allowed the researcher to formulate meaning associated with their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This design also captured the research responses from the historical context of exposure to violence before age 18 and the intergenerational context transmitted from generation to generation.

In contrast, a quantitative design was not chosen as this design focuses on the retrieval of measurable data utilized to prove or disprove a hypothesis (Lim, 2024). Moreover, since early research on ACEs (Felitti et al., 1998; Cronholm et al., 2015) employed a quantitative approach, broadening the scope to include the participants'

perspectives can provide context that statistical data lacks. Conducting semistructured interviews with a group of 10-15 individuals enabled the exploration of questions related to their experiences as parents who encountered community violence before turning 18.

### **Role of the Researcher**

A researcher's responsibility in a qualitative study can differ based on the research design. As a focused ethnographer in this study, I conducted each interview without bias, which could have negatively impacted the study's outcomes (Higginbottom et al., 2015). Primarily acting as an observer, I utilized technology, specifically Zoom, to record interviews that lasted between 30 and 45 min. The semistructured interview questions (see Appendix A) were open-ended, encouraging participants to discuss their experiences, beliefs, and perspectives on their childhood, historical oppression, and current parenting. Furthermore, the study was framed through the cultural lens of African Americans, by focusing on the subcultural group affected by community violence, historical oppression, and current parenting roles (Knoblauch, 2005). As a member of the African American cultural group, I possess insider knowledge, which potentially helped me overcome barriers to building rapport within the community. However, my identity as an African American parent who experienced community violence in childhood could present challenges. To address potential bias or ethical concerns, I adhered to the ethical guidelines established by the Walden University ethical board before recruiting participants and throughout the data collection and analysis phases.

## **Methodology**

The research methodology for this qualitative study utilized a focused ethnographic design, allowing the researcher to capture the experiences of a cultural group via in-depth interviews (Knoblauch, 2005). The methodology is captured via an explanation of the strategies utilized to select the study participants, a plan for sampling, instrumentation, and data analysis, the process for collecting data, trustworthiness, and a plan for addressing potential ethical concerns.

### **Participant Selection Logic**

The participants for this research consist of African American parents who encountered community violence before turning 18. Participants were selected through a purposive sampling approach. This method enabled me to apply a specific criterion for study inclusion, ensuring that participants had relevant experiences related to the research question (see Bekele & Ago, 2022). A recruitment flyer was posted on social media platforms (Facebook and Instagram; see Appendices B and C). The flyer accompanied an introductory message requesting all interested participants to agree to the study criteria and complete the consent form by scanning the QR code or clicking the website hyperlink. The flyer distributed via social media included the purpose of the study, participant eligibility criteria, adherence to confidentiality, the timeframe, and the voluntary nature of participation in the study. The criteria identified were essential to ensure that participants could provide insights based on their childhood experiences, have relevant parenting knowledge, and possess adult perspectives regarding their past adversities. The age range also ensured that participants had sufficient life experience

while not having recently encountered the childhood adversities being studied. The participants met the criteria for participation in the study if all areas captured in the inclusion criteria were met, and the informed consent was signed. The hyperlink on the study flyer leads the potential participant to the SurveyMonkey website, where they consent to participating. Once the consent form is agreed upon, the potential participant is forwarded to a demographic data form for completion (see Appendix D). The researcher received an email after completing the consent and demographic forms. The researcher then sends the scheduling website, and the participant is prompted to select an available day and time. Notification of acceptance and confirmation of interview day and time was emailed (see Appendix B). Also, a reminder email was sent 1 day before the interview (see Appendix G). If the participant did not meet the eligibility criteria to participate in the study, an exclusionary email (see Appendix C) would have been sent.

### ***Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria***

To participate in the research study, individuals must be African American parents, either mothers or fathers, raising at least one child between the ages of 5 and 17. Additionally, they should have experienced community violence before turning 18 and be between 30 and 55 years old at the time of the study. Participants were excluded if they did not encounter community violence before age 18, did not identify as African American, or were not parents. Those over 55 or under 30, or not currently parenting a child aged 5-17, were also excluded from the study.

## **Instrumentation**

As a researcher, I utilized myself as the primary instrument for collecting data. I offered both video and audio interview options, depending on the preference of the participant to conduct semistructured interviews. Also, upon consent from the participants, an audio recording for transcription was utilized to capture accurate data for further analysis. The participants will be asked five open-ended and five follow-up questions (see Appendix E).

### ***Researcher-Developed Instrument***

I created an interview guide consisting of five open-ended and five additional follow-up questions, as detailed in Appendix E. The semistructured research questions were designed to reflect the historical context of oppression, as highlighted by DeGruy's (2017) work, which includes her theory of post-traumatic slave syndrome and the expanded ACES framework that incorporates experiences of community violence before the age of 18 (Cronholm et al., 2015; Finkelhor et al., 2013). In addition, the parenting questions aim to fill the knowledge gap concerning parenting stress (Lange et al., 2018), household trauma/abuse (Greene et al., 2020; Leite Ongilio et al., 2022), and the limited insight into the long-term consequences of adversity faced before the age of 18 (Swedo et al., 2023). The interview questions were also consistent with the conceptual frameworks established for examining the biopsychosocial model by examining the biological, psychological, and social factors contributing to the experiences of the parent participants (Engel, 1977) and family systems theory (Bowen, 1966), focusing on the generational capabilities of an individual through the lens of differentiating self from the intersecting

identities within the family unit and individual ideas from a cultural standpoint. The questions included in the interview guide were intended to capture demographic information, address the research question, and shed light on the identified gap in research related to African American parenting.

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

Participants were recruited using purposeful sampling to understand multifaceted experiences (Patton, 2014) comprehensively. A flyer was posted on social media platforms, including Facebook and Instagram, at least three times per week for six times in 2 weeks (see Appendix A). The flyer included a study summary and eligibility criteria. Individuals interested in participating could access a direct hyperlink leading to informed consent. The hyperlink forwards the potential participants to SurveyMonkey, where they completed the informed consent, which included the inclusion and exclusion criteria, the objective of the study, ethical and confidentiality measures, and the voluntary nature of the study. Once the signatures were obtained, the potential participants were prompted to complete the demographic data form (see Appendix D). Once the consent and demographic forms are completed, the researcher receives an email confirmation for review. The researcher then replies to the potential participants with a confirmation email, including the scheduling link to the Calendly website to schedule their interviews (see Appendix B) or the unmet criteria email (see Appendix C) if the criteria are unmet. Once the interview is confirmed, the participants receive a meeting confirmation email from Calendly's automated system, including the date and time of the interview, and omitting any confidential information. Also, a reminder email will be sent before the

interview using Calendly's automated system. Also, the researcher will send a reminder email, including the Zoom link (see Appendix G).

Suppose the researcher cannot obtain 10–15 participants within 2 weeks until saturation is reached through the initial social media channels. In that case, alternative recruitment strategies were implemented after 2 weeks of unsuccessful attempts. These alternative sources involved recruiting participants via LinkedIn, Walden's participant pool, and groups of mental health professionals. The same flyer initially posted on social media will also be posted on these platforms (see Appendix A). The flyer will include a study summary and eligibility criteria. Individuals interested in participating could access a direct hyperlink leading to informed consent.

Interviews were conducted using video (Zoom) or audio (Zoom or telephone), based on the participant's preference. To ensure the accuracy of the data collection, all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Each interview was expected to last between 30 and 45 min. At the end of each interview, the researcher reminded the participants of their email address in case any questions or concerns arose. At the beginning of each interview, I reviewed the consent form and answered any potential questions the participants may have had before beginning the interview. Participants were informed about their right to terminate the interview if desired. The researcher also reminded each participant of the three national crisis resources listed in the informed consent form to assist in mitigating any potential distress associated with participating in the study.

## **Data Analysis Plan**

Data was collected using informed consent and individual audio-recorded interviews with transcription via Zoom. A key element of a Focus ethnography study is setting aside time and space for rapport building. This practice allowed the researcher to cultivate trust, which led to a more thorough investigation for the research participants (Rashid et al., 2019). This strategy enhanced how participants engage with the phenomenon being examined and establishes a basis for advancing to the interview stage, concentrating on the research question within the study's context (Higginbottom et al., 2015). Each participant was assigned a number as a pseudonym to identify them while maintaining confidentiality. The process of thematic analysis was utilized to understand the data collected via the semistructured interviews. This analysis process was chosen as it offers a structure that others can efficiently utilize to duplicate the findings, as one step builds upon the previous step (Naeem et al., 2023). The six-step process established by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used. The first step in the analysis process began with organizing data by categorizing the transcripts to increase my familiarity with the data. All verbal transcribed interviews were downloaded into Microsoft Word and then uploaded into the Delve software, which is considered a computer-aided/assisted qualitative data analysis software, CAQDAS (O’Kane et al., 2019). Once the codes are established, they will be grouped into themes in the data analysis software that will represent the patterns in the data, which is the third step. Step four, as the researcher, I continued reviewing the codes and themes for accuracy until clearly defined themes were established. Step five included creating names of the themes defined, and in the last step,

I reported the findings identified (Dawadi, 2020). Data saturation was achieved once the data could not provide new themes, understanding, or study classifications while analyzing the data (Tight, 2023).

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

To ensure trustworthiness is maintained, each participant was offered the same timeframe for the interviews, the same initial questions were asked of each participant, and to eliminate any potential bias, each participant was treated with respect and care and provided with education regarding the purpose of the study and the significance of their participation. To fully understand the process of a qualitative research study, the researcher enhances trust in the results by providing a detailed plan regarding credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Korstjens & Moser, 2017).

#### **Credibility**

Establishing and maintaining credibility began by building rapport with the participants, which allowed for increased comfort and an increased desire for in-depth descriptions of their experiences (Ahmed, 2024). Ensuring the study's credibility involved a review of the data using the literature, observations from me as the researcher, and a review of the responses from the participants. As this qualitative study focused on the experiences of the participants, to maintain trustworthiness, it is necessary to utilize the transcribed recordings to maintain accuracy.

#### **Transferability**

Transferability is established once all the qualitative processes and findings are available to review, which increases the ability to be duplicated. Also, a detailed

description was captured, including the research focus, participant selection criteria, and process for creating the semistructured interview guide to enhance the ability for replication (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Utilizing a thick description to share the results will allow for an in-depth account of the identified themes to offer a clearer understanding of the findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018)

### **Dependability**

To ensure the research is reliable, an audit trail is utilized to increase the ability of reproduction by other researchers by documenting every step of the research process using dedicated writing logs focused on the decision-making process, grounded in the data analysis plan and qualitative study criteria (Korstjens & Moser, 2017).

### **Confirmability**

To maintain confirmability, I utilized a reflexivity process, allowing time and space for critical reflection concerning similarities and differences between myself and the participants to determine any possible barriers to remaining unbiased (Dodgson, 2019). Furthermore, the reflexivity process was captured while reading the transcribed interviews. This process aims to document the insight gained from the interviews while maintaining transparency (Ahmed, 2024).

### **Ethical Procedures**

Before commencing the research, participants received electronic informed consent on the SurveyMonkey website. This form outlines the study's objectives and potential risks associated with participation. Additionally, participants were informed of their right to terminate the interview at any point. The document also includes contact

information for three crisis intervention services, which participants can access if they experience distress during and after the study. Lastly, the consent form will outline the data usage, legal and ethical standards, and anonymity associated with their participation to ensure agreement is reached. Once consent was obtained, potential participants were prompted to complete the demographic data collection survey (see Appendix D). Furthermore, the recruitment process began after the Institutional Review Board received Walden University's approval number for this study, 08-26-25-1173879.

### ***Treatment of Data***

At the onset of each interview, I provided each participant with an in-depth description of the data collection process. Each response captured during the semistructured interviews involves a hand-coding process that analyzes the transcribed data and observations obtained from the interviews. The participant's name and personal information will be stored in a password-protected file on a password-protected personal computer to maintain confidentiality for 5 years (Academics: Section 7. Learning Modalities and Resources: Doctoral Learning and Resources, n.d.). The identity of the participants will remain anonymous, and the participants will be referred to by a unique number provided by the researcher.

### **Summary**

The chapter offered an in-depth description of the research design and its rationale, the methodology, data collection process, data analysis, the study's trustworthiness, the approach to addressing ethical issues, and the researcher's role—the focused ethnography approach, aimed at capturing participants' experiences while

emphasizing their cultural context. Additionally, examining the researcher's role in this study facilitated a more thorough investigation of the selection process and potential trustworthiness concerns. It provided a comprehensive explanation of the procedures used to comply with the IRB approval board's guidelines, including maintaining confidentiality, criteria for participation, and document storage processes. Finally, this chapter laid the groundwork for the next chapter, concentrating on the research process for data collection and analysis of interviews.

## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

This chapter will cover the results of the focused ethnography analysis conducted with 12 African American parents aged 30-55. This qualitative study explored the perceptions of African American parents who were exposed to community violence before age 18 and the potential influence of historical oppression on their current parenting. The study utilized one research question: To what degree do African American parents perceive that their experiences with hearing about stories of violence in their communities before age 18, and their racial and historical backgrounds, shape their current parenting practices? This chapter will include a total of seven additional sections, which include a description of the research setting, demographic information associated with the participants in the study, and the method used to collect data. Lastly, this chapter will explain the data analysis process, including evidence of trustworthiness and results, followed by the summary.

### **Setting**

The research study interviews took place via the Zoom platform at the end of August and the first 2 weeks of September 2025. Although all participants were allowed to utilize the phone or the video feature on the Zoom website, each participant chose to use the video feature for the audio recorder interviews. Interviews were conducted during the preferred day and time of the participant during the hours of 5 a.m.–6 a.m. and 5 p.m.–10 p.m. PST Monday–Friday, and 5:00 a.m.–10 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. To

maintain the participants' level of comfort and confidentiality, the interviews were conducted in the location chosen by the participant.

### **Demographics**

The study included 12 participants (11 women and one man) who identified as African American. To maintain confidentiality, the participants were referred to by participant numbers. They were currently parenting children aged 5-17. Additionally, all parents were exposed to violence in their communities via stories, news reports, or accounts shared by others by the age of 18. The required age range for the participants within the study was 30 to 55; however, seven of the 12 participants who volunteered for the study were between the ages of 40 and 49. All interviewees have completed at least some college, with the highest level of education being a doctoral degree; six of the 12 participants identified as married. Nine of the participants have 1-2 children, and 10 of the 12 participants have children aged 12-17.

Table 1 provides an in-depth description of the study participants' demographic information. The information included is their participant numbers, age range, gender, highest educational level, relationship status, and number and ages of children. Demographic information is captured to provide a clearer understanding of the individuals within the study. It can explain the connections between the data and the characteristics of the participants within the study.

**Table 1**

*Participant Demographics*

Participant no. <sup>a</sup>	Age range	Gender	Children's age range (years)	No. of children (ages 5-17)	Education level	Relationship status
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011	30–39	Female	12–17	1–2	College graduate	Single
012	30–39	Female	12–17	1–2	College graduate	Single
014	50–55	Female	12–17	1–2	College graduate	Married
016	40–49	Female	9–11	1–2	Doctorate	Married
018	50–55	Female	12–17	1–2	College graduate	Married
020	40–49	Female	12–17	3–4	Some college	Married
021	40–49	Female	12–17	3–4	Some college	Married
025	40–49	Female	12–17	1–2	College graduate	Single
026	30–39	Female	9–11	1–2	College graduate	Married
027	40–49	Female	12–17	1–2	College graduate	Divorced/separated
028	40–49	Female	12–17	1–2	Doctoral candidate	Divorced/separated
030	40–49	Male	12–17	3–4	College graduate	Single

<sup>a</sup> The gaps in participant numbers reflect individuals who expressed interest in the study and were assigned a participant number as a result but did not participate.

### Data Collection

The process of collecting data for this study began on 8/26/2025 after receiving approval from Walden’s IRB board. The research flyer and social media message were shared on Facebook in African American-specific parenting groups, and the general platform and Instagram platforms, and reshared for 2 weeks, followed by the flyer being posted on the LinkedIn platform. While 18 individuals initially expressed interest in participating in the study, only 12 ultimately completed the interview. Of the six individuals who did not participate, one declined the informed consent form, and five did not respond to a confirmation email requesting interview scheduling.

Each potential participant was provided with a consent form. Once the consent was agreed upon, they were prompted to provide their demographic information (see Appendix D) and email addresses. Once the researcher received complete consent, demographic information, and email address, a confirmation email was sent (see Appendix B), including a link to Calendly to schedule their interviews via Zoom. Each

participant received a reminder email (see Appendix G) a day before the scheduled interviews, which included an individualized link to join the Zoom interview. All interviews were audio recorded, and data were stored using the Zoom cloud.

The semistructured interviews using the interview guide (see Appendix E) were conducted between August 29 and September 15, 2025, on the most convenient day and time the participant chose. During each interview, the researcher utilized my home office and conducted the interviews via a password-protected computer. At the start of each interview, I introduced myself, reviewed their rights as a participant and informed consent, and asked if there were any questions, to which each participant stated no questions, confirmed their identifier number, which would identify them throughout the process, and the interviews proceeded from that point. I began by starting the audio recording using the Zoom website feature by pressing the record button, then moved to the interview questions and answered any clarifying queries about the questions being asked, while allowing the participant to answer the question fully before moving on to the next question. Two interviewees lost internet connection during the interviews, resulting in me stopping the recording temporarily and restarting it upon their return; both interruptions were under 1 min. Once each interview was completed, the recording feature was stopped. Audio recordings were downloaded from the Zoom cloud and placed in a Word document, where the researcher reviewed the audio recording and transcript for accuracy. The transcripts were then uploaded to [the https://delvetool.com/](https://delvetool.com/) website to begin coding the transcripts according to the standards approved by the IRB.

### **Data Analysis**

The data from the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis following the six-step method developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Each transcript was saved as a separate Word document and examined individually. To ensure accuracy, step 1 was implemented. I listened to the audio recordings while referencing them with the written transcripts, verifying that each response matched the corresponding question and highlighting any notable statements. During this process, some discrepancies between the transcript and the audio recording were identified due to voice tone or the pronunciation of words. After making the necessary changes to the written transcript, the audio recording was replayed, and the transcripts were reviewed again to complete the accuracy check.

After completion, all transcripts were uploaded into the Delve software using the participant number. For the second step, the interview questions, found in the interview guide (see Appendix E), were used as the initial codes, and each response was coded according to these codes. Once all responses were coded, step 3 occurred, in which I reviewed the transcripts, organized by code, and the Delve software separated each code on a single page. During this review, I noted quotes that could be significant. After making notes on each response, I immersed myself in the quotes to identify possible themes from the narratives shared in the responses. However, upon reviewing the codes, I observed that similar responses appeared across all codes. This realization prompted me to review the data from a different perspective.

In step four, I placed all similar coded responses together, and I found they aligned with the three components of the research question, leading to the development of themes. The following themes were established: (a) solid foundation (the African American racial and historical influence), (b) survival (the influence of community violence before age 18), and (c) African American parenting practices and strategies. Once the themes were established, they were reviewed again to determine if they aligned with narratives shared and provided meaning from a cultural context, which also aligns with the focused ethnography approach. Subthemes were identified based on their frequency in the transcripts associated with the theme, using the participants' words to clarify the definition of the themes and subthemes, leading to data saturation.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

Qualitative researchers are obligated to ensure trustworthiness of a study by clearly defining the process for maintaining credibility, dependability, and trustworthiness (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). Each participant was offered the same timeframe for the interviews, 30–45 min, and each interview involved semistructured questions. To ensure trustworthiness is maintained, a review of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability processes was conducted.

### **Credibility**

Credibility is characterized as a foundational aspect that began by establishing rapport with each participant by joining each Zoom session with a smile and genuine inquiry regarding their individual questions to ensure clarity of the process is obtained and a basic level of comfort is maintained throughout the interview process (Ahmed,

2024). After completion of the interviews, a process of reading the transcripts repeatedly occurred to gain a better understanding of the participants' responses while also listening to the audio recordings simultaneously to ensure accuracy, changes in voice tone, and pitch indicating potential shifts in the narrative. Additionally, I reviewed each transcript once transcripts were uploaded to the Delve software. I coded several times to ensure the information was accurate compared to the audio recording and the initial transcripts. There was also a process of deep critical self-reflection via moments of internal reflection and exploration via weekly meetings with my dissertation chair.

### **Transferability**

*Transferability* describes the capability of the research study being applied to another format or duplicated (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). To establish transferability, a detailed description of the aim of the research, the setting for the interviews, and the demographic backgrounds of the participants was documented. Also, direct quotes from the participants were noted to gain a deeper understanding of the cultural perspective from the viewpoint of an African American parent and to determine if the results can be duplicated in an alternative setting.

### **Dependability**

A well-organized system was maintained through review to obtain dependability. I adhered to the process formulated in Chapter 3 regarding collecting data and the strategy for recruiting participants, including following the interview guide to ensure all questions were asked in a manner that aligned with the research question. Furthermore, the IRB approved the process to ensure ethical standards were upheld.

### **Confirmability**

The process of reflexivity was used to maintain confirmability and eliminate any potential bias or assumptions (Dodgson, 2019). This process was upheld by ensuring each transcript and recording, and data received and reviewed, was confirmed by maintaining all documents in the stored files on the password-protected computer to ensure the data captured is from the direct quotes of the participants and free of bias.

### **Results**

The goal of this focused ethnography study was to explore the perspectives of the experiences of African American parents regarding violence in their communities, historical oppression, and parenting. The research question guiding this study was, To what degree do African American parents perceive that their experiences with hearing about stories of violence in their communities before age 18, and their racial and historical backgrounds, shape their current parenting practices? The results of this study were formulated using the thematic analysis process. This process included the six phases of data analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006) and followed by the 16-item checklist by Ahmed et al. (2025), which ensures the analysis is precise.

All participants identified sources of support that contributed to their parenting practices. Specifically, the primary source of support cited was a strong sense of community, encompassing family and social networks. Nine of the 12 participants (016, 021, 020, 027, 026, 025, 018, 011, and 028) emphasized the essential role of family and friends in fostering a supportive environment for parenting. The three unifying themes and six subthemes derived from the data shed light on the influence of historical

oppression, exposure to community violence during childhood, and the parenting strategies shaped by both personal and intergenerational experiences. By immersing myself as the researcher in the stories shared by the participants and using direct quotes via the interview transcripts, I gained insight into the everyday experiences shared by the participants. These findings provided invaluable insight into the parenting practices of these African American participants from a cultural lens. Lastly, to organize the themes and subthemes, tables were created using Microsoft Word that list the theme, subtheme, and number of participants who identified with the theme.

The analysis of the interviews revealed a total of three themes and nine subthemes. The first theme and its three subthemes illustrate the perspectives of the participants regarding how the African American community has endured intergenerational traumatic experiences, including slavery, racism, and discrimination, resulting in pain and suffering often passed down through family stories and behaviors. The secondary theme, with three subthemes, focuses on the stories of violence in the community that are heard through stories, news reports, or accounts shared by others, highlighting the psychological, emotional, and physical levels of safety experienced. Lastly, the third theme, including three subthemes, explores how African American parents rely on community, family, and cultural support gained through present and childhood experiences that influence the parenting journey. Each theme and subsequent subtheme are captured separately via Tables 2–5.

**Theme 1: Solid Foundation (the African American Racial and Historical Influence)**

This is the first theme identified and captured via the racial and historical influences endured within the African American community. This theme is defined by the parents' perspectives and experiences from the vantage point of the African American communities. These experiences involve intergenerational trauma, including slavery, racism, and discrimination, resulting in pain and suffering often passed down through family stories and behaviors. As shared by P028,

My grandmother was married, and her husband was getting onto the Greyhound and riding out of town. They stopped the bus, and the Klan got him off the bus. They beat him to a pulp and threw him off a bridge. Now that I am in a predominantly White neighborhood, my daughter she is one of the very few minorities that's in her community and school. That influence of the absolute hatred that does exist, I know that's an older time, but in the climate that we're in today, with so many I would call mega minions raging war on different communities. It's really, really difficult for me to let those old images and perspectives go when it seemed like it's rearing its ugly head. So that cultural influence of a latter time that seems to be resurfacing is very influential. - P028.

The sentiment is also shared by P018:

You often can't trust the police. You often have to be wary of police that are supposed to be there to help you. So then, when you can't trust the police and they're there to help you, then you don't have the protection that you need, and I have had many days to sit my child down and say, 'You can't embrace certain

things that you would think you should be able to embrace.’ There are some things that we can't do as African Americans that other people can do.

Participants consistently demonstrated a keen awareness of intergenerational trauma within the African American community, recognizing the lasting effect of historical and familial experiences. While all participants identified strengths surfacing from these experiences, the interpretations for the source of those strengths varied. For instance, P030 attributed their parenting strength to the legacy of slavery, whereas P021 emphasized ancestral courage as a foundational influence. Additionally, several participants, particularly 020, 011, and 028, described acquiring strength from the lived experiences and stories shared by or regarding their grandparents. Others, including five of the 12 participants (016, 026, 025, 012, 027), highlighted the transmission of strength through the lens of their parents’ accounts of childhood trauma. Notably, only two participants (016 and 018) explicitly reflected on their experiences by identifying both strengths and challenges. However, none of the participants focused solely on challenges, suggesting a central emphasis on the relationship towards awareness and resilience within their accounts of parenting.

### ***Subtheme 1: My Faith Will Bring Me Through***

Six out of 12 participants identified a religious or spiritual component to their emotional support. Five (020, 030, 026, 018, 027) indicated their connection to the church, whereas one (016) expressed a belief in a higher power as opposed to organized religion. This understanding highlights the varying possibilities of utilizing faith to gain parenting wisdom. This subtheme is further realized through the participants, as 016

shared, “I am a Christian. I believe that God is in control of everything, including me. He loves me. He loves my child. Moreover, I ultimately rely on God to help me parent my child to do my best.” Furthermore, P018, “I came from a very strong family structure. My father's a pastor, my mother's an evangelist, and that is primary in our family and culturally, I was in an African American church. I felt very supported in that church.” Also, as stated by P014, “my mother became a single parent, but they always raised us with, I would say, Christian values.”

### ***Subtheme 2: Compassionate Wisdom and Legacy***

Parenting among some of the participants is guided by traditions rooted in love, structure, and consistent communication. As parents reflected on their roles, a commitment to dedicating time and attention to nurturing their children emerged. This subtheme was reinforced through the experiences of the participants, illustrating how intentional messaging and emotional investment are foundational elements in their parenting practices. As P030 noted, “Seek purpose. If you don't seek purpose, you have already failed.” Additionally, P021 stated, “We try to like lean into whatever he needs in that moment to, you know, acknowledge and validate whatever it is that he is going through.” No matter the outcome, the love shown is unconditional, P030, “I just keep on giving them unlimited guidance, unlimited guidance. And I have to remind myself, don't give up. And I tell them all the time, I don't care how bad it may seem. I don't care how mad you may think I'm going to get. I will not give up on you. It's not in my energy. You will not be a statistic. You will not be a repeated failure. It's just not going to happen.”

Also, as stated by P027, “I just step back, listen, give them the opportunity to live their truth, speak their truth, and then impart wisdom into them.”

***Subtheme 3: Intergenerational Hyperawareness and Protection***

African American parents are responsible for shielding, educating, and empowering their children to exceed, despite adversity. This multilayered approach towards guidance is realized through the community's influence, and amplified through a cultural expression, “it takes a village” (P026, P030, P025), which emphasizes the importance of the community banding together to help all its members. As shared by P025, “We try to teach him and be intentional about letting him know the things that have happened to Black Americans but also let him know that he still has a seat at the table.” P011, “I’m his unwavering advocate when needed, in cases where he's adamant that he either has done something or hasn't done something, being the person that he knows will believe him, until there's like evidence to the contrary.” P014, “giving them the space to feel, but also teaching them to talk through and to really take an inventory of what they're feeling and what's causing the feeling, but also how to verbally express that because sometimes we feel things and don't have the words for it.”

The first overarching theme, along with its three corresponding subthemes, explores the influence of intergenerational trauma within the African American community. This theme highlights how the collective experiences of slavery, systemic racism, and persistent discrimination have not only shaped historical realities but continue to influence contemporary family dynamics and parenting practices. These inherited wounds often manifest through emotional pain, behavioral patterns, and cultural

narratives transmitted across generations. Ultimately, this theme illustrates the complex relationship between historical trauma and cultural continuity, emphasizing how African American families navigate inherited wounds while striving to preserve identity, dignity, and hope for future generations. Table 2 shows the number and percentage of participants whose interview responses corresponded with Theme 1.

**Table 2**

*Number and Percentage of Participants Aligned With Theme 1 and Its Subthemes (N = 12)*

Theme	Subtheme	No. of participants	% of participants
Solid foundation (the African American racial and historical influence)	My faith will bring me through	6	50
	Compassionate wisdom and legacy	9	75
	Intergenerational hyperawareness and protection	6	50

### **Theme 2: Survival (The Influence of Community Violence Before Age 18)**

Theme 12 highlights the influence of being exposed to community violence before turning 18. The narratives of violence are explored through personal stories, news reports, or accounts from others. This exposure is considered from psychological, emotional, and physical safety perspectives. Although the study focused on the exposure, as evidenced by hearing stories, there was also a disclosure that they witnessed violence in their communities (P028, P016, P014, P026, P021, and P30). Participants P030 and P016 both disclosed growing up in public housing, also known as “the projects,” and reported not only hearing about violence but also witnessing violence in their communities during childhood. Their responses also reflected patterns identified across

the broader dataset, aligning with nine of the 12 participants who described violence as normalized, eight who reported feeling protected during childhood, and a shared aspiration among many to move beyond their communities. However, a notable difference emerged through their retrospective responses. P016, a woman, expressed anxiousness through the lens of “vicarious trauma.” In contrast, P030, a man, shared “I never felt unsafe” from a retrospective standpoint, and within present-day experiences of going into potentially violent communities. This contrast deepens our understanding of gender-specific emotional and psychological impacts associated with childhood exposure to community violence, highlighting an area that warrants further investigation. Additionally, Participants 027 and 028 noted how gaining restful sleep in their communities can be challenging. This contrasts with their childhood environment, as the current environment is much quieter, resulting in uneasiness while attempting to rest, as P027 shared getting her best sleep when in her childhood home.

***Subtheme 1: Violence Was Just a Normal Occurrence***

Violence occurs within the community often and occurs between community members, rivaling communities, and police towards members of the community. The participants expressed constantly hearing gunshots, resulting in an automatic response to lie on the floor for safety (P011 and P014). Frequent police presence and witnessing police inflicting violence on members of the community caused a fear of police instead of calmness, resulting from a shared understanding that the police were there to help (P026 and P018). Nine of the 12 participants (011, 016, 021, 014, 027, 012, 030, 026, and 018) aligned with this subtheme, noting that although they were frequently exposed to

violence, its regularity rendered it a normalized aspect of daily life within their communities. As shared by P011, “It was a constant exposure. It was like, oh, it's Tuesday.” Also shared by P012, “hearing about it definitely has desensitized me a little bit.”

### ***Subtheme 2: We Were Protected***

Several participants who described exposure to violence growing in their communities as a regular occurrence also shared that they felt protected by the members within the same community (P016, P021, P011, P016, P025, P027, P028, and P026). This distinction speaks to the importance of community values and the extended family connections in many African American communities. Despite the prevalence of violence, participants shared an active commitment to shield those who lived in the community from being harmed. P016, “It was like a big family, big community, a big family. So, I can go anywhere and know that I would be cool because Auntie so and so is going to call or even Mr. So and so is going to be like, get your behind back down there, so it was like, I always had people watching and looking out.” Also shared by P021, “But one thing I will say is that growing up, I knew the drug dealers because they looked out for us. You know what I mean? Like it was, it was still a sense of community.” Also, as P025 shared, “I found that it was more helpful to befriend the people who were a little bit more violent.”

### ***Subtheme 3: Am I Really Safe?***

A retrospective reflection by the participants revealed an unawareness of how to characterize their emotional responses to childhood exposure to community violence, or

whether an emotional response existed (P016, P026, P028, and P014). As they recalled their childhood experiences, several participants shared emotional responses, such as sadness, discomfort, and anxiety (P018, P020, P028, and P016). Notable experiences related to this theme are that although in childhood the emotional response was not recognized in adulthood, they can now identify what their experiences were, in fact, anxiousness. Also, although (P014 and P030) did not assert their desire to move out of the community to be associated with an emotional response resulting from the violence, further exploration may reveal additional information regarding the influence of their experiences. This subtheme is further realized through the words of the participants. P028 stated, “Those images are real, and those memories, they never really go away, that constant crime-ridden neighborhood that sticks with you.” P021 also noted, “I can remember being like a young teenager and feeling like I was gonna die when I was 18. I don't know why. I'd never been shot, never been in no, you know, life or death fight or nothing like that. But it was just kind of like violence was around so much.” Table 3 shows the number and percentage of participants whose interview responses corresponded with Theme 2.

**Table 3**

*Number and Percentage of Participants Aligned With Theme 2 and Its Subthemes (N = 12)*

Theme	Subtheme	No. of participants	% of participants
Survival (the influence of community violence before age 18)	Violence was just a normal occurrence.	9	75
	We were protected.	8	66.67
	Am I really safe?	6	50

### **Theme 3: African American Parenting Practices and Strategies**

African American parents in the study expressed a common commitment to utilize their childhood experiences as a source for creating a foundation for their own parenting, through communication (P030, P028, P027, P014, P012, P026, P025, P021, and P020). These individuals have made a conscious choice to use the adverse experiences of their childhood to incorporate vulnerability, openness to discuss challenges to inform change, and emotional expression shared verbally and through physical touch (warm hugs). While (P018 and P011) shared that their parenting practices are an extension of the parenting they received, rather than a complete shift from their generational parenting practices.

A strong commitment to emotional regulation through intentional strategies was reported by seven of the 12 participants. Five participants (P020, P012, P011, P014, and P030) identified therapy not only as a tool for personal growth but also as a means to support their children. In addition, six participants (P021, P020, P018, P011, P014, and P012) emphasized the importance of talking through challenges as a coping strategy and a method for fostering change. These therapeutic and communicative approaches were especially prevalent among participants parenting adolescents aged 12–17, suggesting a potential shift in parenting strategies as children reach their teenage years.

#### ***Subtheme 1: Your Voice Matters***

Participants commonly observed that their parents/ caregivers ultimately made the decisions, as shown by the lack of opportunity to question these decisions and the

absence of an opportunity to discuss or reconcile relationships after conflicts (P030, P027). In contrast, participant P026 noted that while there were efforts to listen, their parents might have lacked the necessary skills to provide strategies. This realization does not imply a lack of willingness but rather highlights an inability to offer what the participant desired, resulting in an experience of not feeling heard, and reinforcing the desire to ensure their children's voices are acknowledged. Childhood and historical experiences of silence influenced certain aspects of parenting. Using these experiences as motivation, parents consistently strive to encourage their children to express themselves openly. P025 stated, "I didn't have a voice, and I think that impacted me negatively. I definitely want her to learn how to be an independent adult. Learn how to make decisions on her own. Honestly, learn how to navigate the world as a Black woman." P011 also shared, "I have made an intentional decision to allow my kid to ask me why and ask for his input on decisions that influence him." P021 expressed that the aim is not to disregard the value of historical experiences but to implement beneficial changes for their families. "My goal was to always lean into kind of culture, but in a healthy way."

### ***Subtheme 2: Intentionally Breaking Cycles***

In this study, parents showed a purposeful effort to change traditional parenting methods by intentionally adopting new strategies for discipline, communication, and emotional involvement. A common theme among the participants was the deliberate shift away from physical punishment, which they often associated with historical trauma from slavery and recognized as ineffective in their own family dynamics. For instance,

Participant (020) discussed the link between corporal punishment and its historical background, expressing a wish to move away from practices that cause harm.

Another key element of this generational change was the conscious choice to move away from frequently used expressions within some African American families, often meant to inspire, but which led to emotional and psychological stress. P028 pointed out this issue, mentioning statements like “Wipe your tears, there’s no room for weak women,” while participants (027 and 012) shared similar concerns with the phrase, “Whatever happens in this house stays in this house.”

Although these expressions are culturally familiar, participants recognized them as contributing to silence and emotional regression cycles. In response, several parents committed to creating emotionally supportive environments for their children. P028 illustrated this change, saying, “I love to give words of affirmation. That's so important. The world is so ugly. We're called so much when we leave the house. There's so much negativity. So, being able to pour into them at random moments in the house, I just shout out, I love you guys.” This deliberate use of positive reinforcement and emotional validation reflects a broader effort among participants to break harmful generational patterns and foster nurturing, communicative, and emotionally safe family settings.

### ***Subtheme 3: We’re Gonna Be Alright***

Despite the environmental adversity realized through community violence and the historical trauma transmitted generationally, the African American parents who participated in the study share a mutual awareness and reliance on their families, community, and culture, which has and continues to serve as an anchor that has carried

these individuals along their parenting journeys and has contributed to the parenting behaviors and patterns used to parent their children. Their messages of fortitude are shared via their own words, (P012), “We’re very resilient as a people. My kids have watched me like fall, get back up, because there's no, like, you can't just stay down.” Similarly, shared by P025, “I have a good village, a good community. So that has impacted how I parent. I think it's a balance. I think my village and how they have raised me set a foundation.” Table 4 shows the number and percentage of participants whose interview responses corresponded with Theme 3.

**Table 4**

*Number and Percentage of Participants Aligned With Theme 3 and Its Subthemes (N = 12)*

Theme	Subtheme	No. of participants	% of participants
African American parenting practices and strategies	Your voice matters.	5	41.67
	Intentionally breaking cycles	7	58.33
	We're gonna be alright.	6	50

### Summary

As shared in this chapter, the research results highlighted the themes and subthemes formulated for this population via the responses shared during their interviews. By utilizing their cultural influences, as evidenced by community, family, close loved ones, and resources, they have been able to assist in overcoming significant barriers. This qualitative study examined their stories by incorporating their perspectives on their experiences from historical, childhood, and current lenses to gain a deeper understanding of how they view these barriers, have overcome them, and as a culture

have incorporated nuanced behaviors and strategies to utilize along their parenting journeys.

The thematic analysis conducted in this study discovered three overarching themes and nine corresponding subthemes that collectively encapsulate the lived experiences and perspectives of African American parents. The first theme, solid foundation (the African American racial and historical influence), comprises three subthemes: (1) *My Faith Will Bring Me Through*, which highlights the expression of faith-based values in parenting; (2) *Compassionate Wisdom & Legacy*, emphasizing the role of cultural traditions rooted in love, structure, and consistent messaging; and (3) *Intergenerational Hyperawareness & Protection*, reflecting the intentional efforts of parents to educate and empower their children in the face of systemic challenges.

The second theme, survival (the influence of community violence before age 18), explores the psychological and emotional impact of early exposure to community violence. This theme includes the following subthemes: (1) *Violence Was Just a Normal Occurrence*, describing the normalization of frequent violent events; (2) *We Were Protected*, illustrating the community-level efforts to offer safety to the children; and (3) *Am I really safe?*, which captures the emotional responses and heightened sense of awareness from childhood experiences of violence.

The third and final theme, African American Parenting Practices and Strategies, deepens our understanding of culturally grounded approaches employed by parents. Its subthemes include: (1) *Your Voice Matters*, addressing the importance of fostering self-expression in children; (2) *Intentionally Breaking Cycles*, which reflects a conscious shift

toward more progressive parenting methods; and (3) We are Gonna Be Alright, highlighting resilience and the continual influence of community and familial support.

These themes collectively represent the narratives shared by participants and the multidimensional influences shaping their parenting practices. Chapter 5 will elaborate on these findings by interpreting them with existing literature and the conceptual frameworks guiding this study. Additionally, this chapter will present recommendations for future research and discuss the limitations encountered during the study.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative study using a focused ethnography approach was to explore African American parents' perceptions of how early exposure to community violence (prior to age 18) and the influences of historical oppression shape their current parenting practices. The process of thematic analysis was used to analyze the Semistructured interviews, conducted with 12 participants, to gain an in-depth perspective of their experiences on the influences on this phenomenon. The findings from this research study included three themes: (a) solid foundation, (b) survival (the influence of community violence before age 18), and (c) African American parenting practices and strategies. There were also nine subthemes: 1a) My Faith Will Bring Me Through, 2a) Compassionate Wisdom & Legacy, 3a) Intergenerational Hyperawareness & Protection, 1b) Violence Was Just a Normal Occurrence, 2b) We Were Protected, 3b) Am I really safe?, 1c) Your Voice Matters, 2c) Intentionally Breaking Cycles, and 3c) We are Gonna Be Alright align with their themes.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

The results of this research enhance the current understanding of the lived experiences of African American parents, particularly as these experiences are influenced by historical oppression, community violence in childhood, and their influence on parenting behaviors. The primary research question driving this study was, To what degree do African American parents perceive that their experiences with hearing about

stories of violence in their communities before age 18, and their racial and historical backgrounds, shape their current parenting practices?

Previous studies on ACEs have primarily focused on quantitative data collection, which, while recognizing the existence of a research issue, often lacks deeper insight into the complex lived experiences of those affected. Before this study began, a notable gap was identified in the literature regarding culturally specific experiences of adversity, particularly among African American communities (Maguire-Jack et al., 2020). This study aimed to fill this gap by highlighting the voices and perspectives of African American parents from a qualitative perspective.

Using a focused ethnographic approach enabled a culturally grounded analysis of the participants' narratives, shedding light on how their subcultural identities influenced their understanding of past and present experiences. The study involved African American parents aged 30–55 years, each with children between 5 and 17 years old, all of whom had encountered community violence before the age of 18.

### **Theme 1: Solid Foundation (the African American Racial and Historical Influence)**

The first major theme that emerged from the data, solid foundation, reflects the enduring influence of historical oppression and intergenerational trauma on the parenting practices of African American participants. This theme illustrates how parents draw upon cultural, spiritual, and community resources to foster resilience and protect their children in the face of adversity. The theme is further described into three subthemes: (1) My Faith Will Bring Me Through, (2) Compassionate Wisdom and Legacy, and (3) Intergenerational Hyperawareness and Protection.

***Subtheme 1: My Faith Will Bring Me Through***

Participants consistently emphasized the importance of faith and spiritual practices in their parenting approaches. Faith was described as a coping mechanism and a guiding principle in decision-making and child-rearing. One participant (P018) articulated this reliance on spirituality:

“We pray, right? I think prayer is essential. We don't know everything. We don't know the future, so how do we make decisions by ourselves when we don't know all of what's going to happen in the future?”

This sentiment reflects a broader cultural tradition in African American communities, where spirituality is a source of strength across generations.

***Subtheme 2: Compassionate Wisdom and Legacy***

The transmission of wisdom through lived experience and intentional modeling emerged as a key parenting strategy. Participants described how they actively shared lessons with their children, preparing them to navigate life independently. As P018 explained:

“I support him by example and by showing him what he needs to do to make his own decisions, because I won't always be there and he has to be able to make good decisions on his own without me.”

This approach underscores the importance of legacy and the role of parents as cultural educators within the family unit.

### ***Subtheme 3: Intergenerational Hyperawareness and Protection***

Participants demonstrated a heightened awareness of the risks and systemic challenges their children may face, shaped by their own early exposure to community violence and racial experiences. This hyperawareness is translated into protective parenting practices aimed at shielding children from harm while equipping them with tools for resilience.

#### ***Connection to Existing Literature***

The findings of this theme align with and extend existing literature on historical oppression and resilience among African Americans. Prior research has documented the effects of racism, discrimination, and the legacy of chattel slavery, and how African Americans have developed strategies to overcome these challenges (DeGruy, 2017; Merrick et al., 2019; Phelan & Link, 2015; Scott-Jones & Kamara, 2020). This study contributes to the existing body of literature by providing a culturally grounded versatility within their parenting practices. As illustrated in Subtheme 2, Compassionate Wisdom and Legacy, the findings illuminate the significance of deep self-reflection as a means to determine which generational lessons they wish to preserve and which to transform. This reflective process not only promotes the transmission of family wisdom but also empowers individual parents to redefine their approaches in ways that feel most authentic to their family unit.

### **Theme 2: Survival (The Influence of Community Violence Before Age 18)**

The second emergent theme, survival (the influence of community violence before age 18), explores the influence of participants' exposure to community violence

prior to the age of 18 and its influence on their parenting practices and psychological development. This theme is organized into three subthemes: (1) Violence Was Just a Normal Occurrence, (2) We Were Protected, and (3) Am I Really Safe?

***Subtheme 1: Violence Was Just a Normal Occurrence***

Participants described early exposure to violence as a normalized aspect of their childhood environments. This normalization often masks the severity of their experiences, leading to challenges in recognizing experiences of trauma in childhood.

One participant (P016) reflected:

“I didn't realize that what I went through as a child wasn't typical for everyone. Like, when you hear gunshots, you instinctively know how to get down, hide under the bed, stay low. You know what I mean? It wasn't fear; it was just, oh, okay, we need to get down.”

This narrative illustrates how repeated exposure to violence can desensitize individuals, shaping their behavioral responses and perceptions of safety from a young age.

***Subtheme 2: We Were Protected***

Despite the prevalence of violence, several participants recalled efforts by caregivers and community members to shield them from harm. Though ineffective in eliminating exposure, these protective strategies contributed to a sense of family and community resilience. Participants emphasized the importance of these protective efforts in shaping their parenting philosophies, particularly in providing emotional support for their children.

### ***Subtheme 3: Am I Really Safe?***

A recurring theme among participants was a heightened sense of anxiousness and hyperawareness, often rooted in early experiences of jeopardizing their safety. This hyperawareness extended into adulthood and influenced parenting decisions, particularly regarding safety and social interactions. One participant (P021) noted: “You had to be aware of your surroundings and just kind of be careful and cautious of who you even hung around, because guilt by association was a thing.” This statement reflects the psychological consequences of community violence and the strategies developed to navigate social environments perceived as threatening.

### ***Connection to Existing Literature***

This study contributes to the growing body of research on ACEs, conceptualized initially by Felitti et al. (1998) and expanded by Finkelhor et al. (2013) and Cronholm et al. (2015). While prior studies have focused on the long-term psychological and physiological effects of early trauma, this research adds a culturally specific lens by amplifying the voices of African American parents who have endured community violence.

The findings align with recent research by Gillum et al. (2024), which highlights the disproportionate exposure of African Americans to community violence compared to their White counterparts. Through participants’ narratives, this study deepens the understanding of how historical trauma and environmental adversity inform culturally grounded parenting strategies and resilience within African American communities.

Moreover, the emotional and psychological effects of early exposure to community violence were evident in the responses of six of the twelve participants. Four participants (018, 020, 028, and 016) reported experiencing anxiety, sadness, and trauma-related responses. Additionally, two participants (012, 016) described a sense of desensitization to violence, while one participant (021) identified heightened hypervigilance stemming from these early experiences. These findings highlight the complex relationship between environmental adversity and mental health symptomatology, emphasizing how these interconnected factors influence parenting practices centered on safety, awareness, and emotional fortitude. Moreover, the results provide an alternative perspective to existing literature, suggesting that exposure to adversity often leads to rigid or overly protective parenting behaviors (Shen & Wu, 2024).

### **Theme 3: African American Parenting Practices and Strategies**

The third emergent theme, African American parenting practices and strategies, explores how exposure to community violence prior to age 18 and the intergenerational transmission of historical oppression have shaped the parenting approaches of African American participants. This theme is organized into three subthemes: (1) Your Voice Matters, (2) Intentionally Breaking Cycles, and (3) We're Gonna Be Alright.

#### ***Subtheme 1: Your Voice Matters***

Participants emphasized the importance of open communication within the family unit, particularly in creating space for children to express themselves and process challenges. This approach reflects a shift from silence that was present in previous

generations towards intentional dialogue and emotional validation. Parents encourage their children to speak openly about their feelings, experiences, and concerns, promoting emotional awareness and resilience.

### ***Subtheme 2: Intentionally Breaking Cycles***

A common strategy among participants was intentionally disrupting harmful generational patterns. This included seeking therapeutic support, practicing emotional regulation, and implementing parenting techniques that differed from those they experienced in childhood. Several participants (P020, P012, P011, P014, and P030) reported engaging in therapy for themselves and their children to promote mental wellness. These efforts reflect a conscious commitment to healing.

### ***Subtheme 3: We Are Gonna Be Alright***

Despite their adversity, participants expressed a strong sense of hope and determination. This subtheme captures the optimism and affirmations passed down through generations, often rooted in cultural pride and spiritual resilience. One participant (P014) shared: “My parents were excellent because they always instilled in us that you could be greater than what you are now, that you do not have to be a product of your environment.” Such affirmations were foundational to the participants’ parenting practices, promoting messages of self-worth and determination.

### ***Connection to Existing Literature***

This study expands upon existing research that has primarily focused on the challenges faced by parents who experienced adversity before age 18. Prior studies have documented difficulties in emotional regulation (Leite Ongilio et al., 2022), stress

management (Lange et al., 2018), and the development of practical parenting skills (Hanetz-Gamliel & Dollberg, 2022). In contrast, the present findings highlight the intentional strategies implemented by African American parents with their children.

The parenting practices identified in this study were largely shaped by lessons learned during childhood, whether through direct interactions with family and community members or through retrospective reflection aimed at developing more intentional approaches to parenting. Notably, five participants (P011, P012, P014, P020, and P025) reported engaging in therapy as a proactive parenting strategy. Six participants (P020, P016, P025, P014, P030, and P011) emphasized the importance of open communication with their children, while three participants (P025, P027, and P020) incorporated the use of positive affirmations. Collectively, these strategies reflect a deliberate effort by African American parent participants in this study to transform past adversity into sources of strength, cultivating environments that prioritize healing, resilience, and empowerment.

### **Connection to the Conceptual Framework**

The findings of this focused ethnographic study align with Engel's (1977) biopsychosocial model, which emphasizes the interaction among biological, psychological, and social factors in shaping human behavior. This framework provided a multilayered structure for interpreting participants' narratives, particularly as they reflected on their parenting practices in the context of early exposure to community violence and intergenerational trauma. As Borrell-Carrió et al. (2004) noted, the

biopsychosocial model allows for a review of the complexities of one's experience to gain a holistic understanding of their experiences.

P018 captured the essence of this reflective process, stating: "You cannot really do anything with the issue until you understand it, so we need to outline it clearly." This statement underscores the importance of self-awareness in shaping parenting strategies. The integration of Hampton-Anderson et al.'s (2021) cultural framework further enhanced the analysis of the participants' reflections from an African American context. Participants' narratives revealed how cultural identity, shaped by family and community experiences, intersected with historical trauma and environmental adversity to inform parenting decisions.

The study's findings were organized into three primary themes and nine subthemes interpreted through psychological, biological, social, and cultural factors (Lehman et al., 2017; Hampton-Anderson et al., 2021). Psychologically, participants demonstrated heightened emotional awareness and resilience. Biologically, the mental health implications of trauma were identified through the reported symptoms of anxiety and emotional dysregulation. Socially, participants emphasized the importance of community traditions, protective practices, and relational dynamics. Culturally, the findings illuminated the intergenerational transmission of trauma and strength, offering insight into how African American parents navigate adversity while promoting empowerment and healing.

### *Family Systems Theory*

In addition to the biopsychosocial and cultural frameworks, the findings are also consistent with Bowen's (1966) family systems theory, which states that individuals are fully understood through the context of their family dynamics. Families are described as interconnected systems, with behaviors, beliefs, and relational patterns transmitted across generations. This theoretical lens was particularly relevant in understanding participants' efforts to change their parenting practices based on their childhood experiences.

While six participants (P020, P016, P025, P014, P030, and P011) emphasized the importance of fostering open communication, five participants (P025, P012, P016, P027, and P026) highlighted the value of encouraging emotional expression within their families, which intentionally counters childhood environments where such expression was not a common occurrence. For example, P012 described a purposeful repositioning from the parenting they received, stating that their parenting style was intentionally different, highlighting a generational shift in parenting dynamics.

Moreover, the concept of differentiation of self (Bowen, 1978) was evident in participants' narratives, as they sought to establish emotional autonomy while maintaining strong family bonds. P014 shared a commitment to being a primary source of emotional support for their children while maintaining a sense of connection to the family unit. Together, the biopsychosocial model and family systems theory provide a comprehensive conceptual foundation for interpreting the lived experiences of African American parents. These frameworks illuminate the interaction between trauma,

resilience, cultural identity, and relational transformation, offering a thorough understanding of parenting in connection with adversity.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Although this study offers an enlightening perspective into the lived experiences and parenting practices of African American parents exposed to community violence and historical oppression, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, despite efforts to recruit a diverse participant pool through broad outreach on social media platforms, the sample was predominantly composed of African American women, with only one male participant. This absence of men in the study may have limited the perspectives of African American fathers. As a result, the findings may be more representative of maternal perspectives and may not fully capture the nuances of fatherhood within this cultural context.

Second, the age range of participants was restricted to individuals between 30 and 55 years old. While this range was selected to capture parents' experiences with school-aged children, it may have excluded the voices of younger parents in their twenties, whose parenting strategies and perceptions may differ from the current participant group. Third, the study limited the age range of the children whose parents participated, focusing primarily on those with children between the ages of 5 and 17. Although some participants reported parenting children younger than five or older than seventeen, the study's design did not fully explore these age groups' unique parenting challenges and strategies. Furthermore, the findings may not capture the experiences of all African American parents, particularly those with infants, toddlers, or young adult children.

As noted in Chapter 1, several anticipated limitations were effectively mitigated during the research process. Participant recruitment, conducted exclusively through social media platforms, was successful and provided a sufficient sample size without complications. Additionally, concerns regarding participants' recall of historical events and childhood experiences were unfounded; each participant provided rich, detailed narratives that offered meaningful insight into their lived experiences. However, while retrospective accounts were valuable in capturing participants' perceptions and meaning-making processes, the absence of data triangulation presents a methodological limitation. Although the study prioritized subjective interpretation and personal reflection, the reliance on self-reported data potentially limits the ability to verify the accuracy of participants' accounts. Nonetheless, the depth and consistency of the narratives suggest that the findings remain credible and relevant within the scope of qualitative inquiry.

### **Recommendations**

The recommendations for future research are informed by the current study's findings, reflective insights from the researcher, limitations identified during the research process, and suggestions offered by participants during the interviews. These recommendations aim to deepen the understanding of African American parenting experiences and extend the scope of inquiry into family relationships. Future studies may benefit from a more focused exploration of the influence of generational trauma on interpersonal relationships, including family, romance, and broader societal engagement. Considering the intergenerational transmission of trauma and resilience highlighted in

this study, examining how these factors shape relational patterns might offer valuable insights into both strengths and challenges within African American communities.

Additionally, as I, as the researcher, am also a practicing mental health therapist with lived experiences that are comparable in some ways with the participants, future research could investigate the self-care processes used by researchers who engage in trauma-informed qualitative inquiry. Such a study could explore the emotional implications of researching sensitive topics and the strategies used to maintain psychological well-being before, during, and after data collection.

Expanding the demographic range in future studies may also enhance the understanding of the findings. Including younger parents (ages 20–30), teen parents, and parents of children ages 0–5, as well as those parenting young adults (ages 18–24) who continue to receive support, could provide a broader understanding of parenting across developmental stages and generational groups. Furthermore, a targeted study focusing exclusively on African American fathers may offer critical insights into gender specific areas of parenting. Such research could illuminate potential differences in parenting approaches and emotional expression and provide more in-depth perceptions of community and historical influence between male and female parents.

### ***Research Participant Recommendations***

Participants offered suggestions for future research that could potentially enhance parenting knowledge. For example, P030 emphasized the importance of understanding family structure, stating, “An interesting fact to know is whether the participants had a two-parent or one-parent household.” While the current study collected key demographic

data, incorporating information about participants' childhood family dynamics could provide a deeper context for interpreting their parenting practices. Participants 025 and 028 highlighted the potential psychological influence of social media exposure, particularly in relation to historical and community trauma. As P025 noted, "Social media can be so triggering for people with such a high background of crime and violence in their community or historical traumas passed down." The constant exposure to violent videos, whether through news reports or videos of police brutality, may have a heightened potential for secondary trauma. This suggests a need for future research examining the influence of social media on individuals with histories of trauma, particularly within African American communities.

P018 offered a noteworthy perspective on the positive influence of international travel, stating, "It was not until I left the U.S. that I realized I do not have to be judged by my ethnicity." This insight points to the potential value of exploring different cultures by traveling outside the United States, which can influence the well-being and development of African American families. Additionally, P025 emphasized the importance of addressing family secrets and potential safety concerns by stating, "It is not always just stranger danger but making sure that some of the things that occurred and the secrets that were kept do not continue beyond myself and my children." This statement sheds light on the need for research focused on strategies for improving opportunities for open communication within families, particularly around potential challenging topics, and exploring potential tools to enhance safety in environments.

Finally, P012 reflected on the potential benefits of seeking resources from a cultural lens, noting,

Something that I think about when I am conceptualizing the impact of intergenerational trauma and parenting for African American families is how open, if at all, they have been to utilize outside resources, because of the saying, what happens in this house stays in this house.

Future researchers could explore identifying the best resources to meet the needs of individuals while considering their cultural and intergenerational influences.

### **Implications**

The findings of this study offer meaningful implications at the individual, community, and policy levels, contributing to a broader understanding of African American parenting in the context of historical oppression and community-based violence exposure before age 18.

#### **Individual-Level Implications**

At the individual level, the study underscores the importance of self-awareness among African American parents. Participants demonstrated a growing recognition that their current parenting challenges are not solely the result of personal weakness but are also shaped by broader historical and community-level influences. Warne and Lajimodiere (2015) noted that parents who experience environmental adversity often experience similar outcomes. This awareness sheds light on a more compassionate understanding of parenting behaviors, encouraging self-reflection and intention-based strategies.

**Community-Level Implications**

The findings highlight the value of culturally grounded support systems at the community level. Participants emphasized maintaining community bonds through shared traditions, events, and culturally affirming activities. These practices reinforce cultural identity and serve as protective factors that promote collective healing and resilience. Community-based initiatives that prioritize cultural connection and intergenerational dialogue may serve as essential resources for families navigating the effects of trauma and systemic inequities.

**Policy-Level Implications**

From a policy perspective, the study supports increased investment in culturally responsive and trauma-informed services. The findings advocate for funding allocation toward programs tailored to African American families lived experiences, including mental health services, parenting support initiatives, and community-building efforts. Additionally, the study underscores the importance of training service providers in cultural humility and responsiveness to ensure that interventions are effective and respectful of cultural values and histories.

**Theoretical Implications**

The integration of Engel's (1977) biopsychosocial model and Bowen's family systems theory (1966), applied through a cultural lens, provided a comprehensive framework for interpreting the study's findings. The biopsychosocial model facilitated an understanding of how biological, psychological, and social factors influence parenting

behaviors. At the same time, the family systems theory illuminated the intergenerational transmission of relational patterns and coping strategies.

Implementing these frameworks from a culturally responsive perspective allowed for a deeper exploration of how African American parents navigate the complexities of historical trauma, community violence, and systemic inequities within their parenting. The findings affirm the necessity of these conceptual models in capturing the multifaceted nature of parenting within marginalized communities and suggest their continued relevance in future research and practice.

### **Conclusion**

This focused ethnographic study offered a detailed and insightful exploration of the influence of violence, intergenerational trauma, and parenting practices in African American communities. By analyzing participants' stories, the research highlighted how exposure to community violence before age 18 and historical intergenerational trauma through experiences such as slavery, systemic racism, discrimination, and other oppressive behaviors continues to influence the experiences and parenting methods of African American families.

For many generations, African Americans have navigated societal systems that have silenced their voices, overlooked their contributions, and hindered their access to equality and recognition. Participants in this study shared personal accounts of pain, suffering, and trauma from their childhood environments, while also expressing the weight of inherited burdens passed down from their families and cultural histories. These

burdens, however, were not only sources of distress but also a source of resilience, intentionality, and strength-based parenting.

The parenting strategies described by participants reflect a conscious effort to make changes regarding historical and current adversities. Their behaviors demonstrate a commitment to nurturing, protecting, and empowering their children. They are often guided by a deep understanding of the community and cultural forces that have shaped their development. As illustrated by (P028), sharing personal stories becomes a powerful means of healing and transformation. Amplifying these voices is necessary not only to acknowledge the lasting impact of historical trauma but also to celebrate the legacy of pride, cultural heritage, and community resilience that characterizes African American parenting.

This study emphasizes the need to move beyond an understanding of survival toward a process of incorporating thriving principles, where African American families are empowered to reclaim their narratives, promote healing, and pass on cultural traditions that strengthen current and future generations. The insights from this research contribute significantly to the broader conversation on trauma, resilience, and culturally responsive parenting, providing a foundation for ongoing exploration and advocacy.

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## Appendix A: Interview Guide

### **Introduction Statement**

Before we start, I would like to express my gratitude for your involvement in this research study. This interview aims to explore how personal history, family background, and community experiences, particularly those related to exposure to community violence before the age of 18, and potential generational trauma among African Americans, might shape your parenting. Your insight will contribute to a deeper understanding of the strengths, challenges, and resilience strategies parents use within the African American community.

Please remember that participation is voluntary, and you can stop the interview anytime. Your identity will remain confidential, and your responses will only be used for research. Do you have any questions before we begin?

If you do not have any further questions, let us begin.

### **Interview Questions**

1. Can you share three qualities that describe your parenting?
  - 1a. What family, community, or cultural experiences have influenced your parenting?
2. How did hearing about these accounts of community violence affect you emotionally or psychologically at the time?
  - 2a. Did these stories influence how safe you felt in your community?

The concept of intergenerational trauma in the African American community considers the pain and suffering from experiences like slavery, racism, and

- discrimination, often passed down through family stories and behaviors. Reflecting on this concept, how has intergenerational trauma influenced your parenting?
3. From your perspective, how have these experiences strengthened or created challenges in your parenting?
    - 3a. When parenting becomes challenging, what strategies do you use to handle these stressful experiences?
    - 4a. What support has been most beneficial during your parenting journey (i.e., cultural, community, family)?
  5. How do you support your child(ren) when they are feeling distressed or overwhelmed?
    - 5a. In what ways does the support you give your children reflect the support you did or did not receive during your own childhood?

### **Closing Statement**

As the interview is coming to a close, I want to thank you for sharing your experience, as your voice is an invaluable part of this research. Is there any additional information you want to share that we have not covered yet? If you have any follow-up questions/concerns or want a summary of the findings once the study is complete, please email me. If needed, remind you of the three national crisis resources in the Informed Consent.

## Appendix B: Recruitment Flyer

## ARE YOU AN AFRICAN AMERICAN PARENT?



**Seeking 10-15 volunteers who:**

- Identify as an African American parent( mother or father)
- Before turning 18, heard about or learned of incidents of community violence through stories, news reports, or accounts shared by others
- Between the ages of 30-55
- Mother or Father of a child aged 5-17

 *We Need Your Voice to participate in a research study!*

**About the study:**  
This is a new study focused on exploring the perspectives of African American parents who heard about violence in their communities before age 18 and the potential influence of historical oppression on their current parenting.

**Participation includes:**

- One 30-45 minute interview via phone or video(Zoom)
- All interviews will be audio recorded
- To protect your privacy, all Interviews will use a fictitious number to maintain your confidentiality.



**Are you interested?**  
Please copy the link to begin  
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/37BTSWK>

### Appendix C: Social Media Invitation

There is a new study focused on exploring the perspectives of African American parents who heard about violence in their communities before age 18 and the potential influence of historical oppression on their current parenting.

For this study, you are invited to describe your experiences with parenting, historical trauma, and stories regarding violence in your community.

About the study:

- One 30–45-minute interview via phone or video (Zoom)
- All interviews will be audio-recorded
- To protect your privacy, all interviews will use a fictitious number to maintain your confidentiality.

Volunteers must meet these requirements:

- Before turning 18, heard about or learned of incidents of community violence through stories, news reports, or accounts shared by others
- Between the ages of 30-55
- Mother or Father of a child aged 5-17
- Identify as an African American parent (mother or father)?

This interview is part of the doctoral study for a Ph.D. student at Walden University. Interviews will take place during September.

Please message me privately if you have any questions. Please note: To avoid any possible conflict of interest, study participants must not have any prior relationship with the researcher.

If you are interested in participating, please click on the hyperlink to complete the consent form <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/37BTSWK>.

### Appendix D: Demographic Questionnaire

This process of collecting demographic data will help us gain a better understanding of your background.

1. How many children do you have living in your home between the ages of 5 and 17? What are the current ages of your children living in the home between the ages of 5 and 17?
2. What is your current age range: 30-39, 40-49, 50-55?
3. What is your highest level of education?
4. How do you identify in terms of gender?
5. What is your current relationship status (e.g., married, single, partnered)?

## Appendix E: Interview Confirmation

Dear [Participant's Name],

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the audio-recorded virtual Zoom interview for my study on the parenting practices of African American parents. Please click on the hyperlink to schedule your 30–45-minute interview

<https://calendly.com/d/cv95-hym-xyx/research-study-interview>

One day before your scheduled interview, you will receive a reminder email including the Zoom link for your interview.

**Confidentiality**

You are being assigned a participant number of (number). This number will be utilized throughout your participation in the research study to maintain your confidentiality.

Please indicate your preferred interview mode.

Video

Phone

**Reminder**, only your audio will be recorded during the entire interview.

If you have any questions or need to reschedule/cancel, please contact me at [Ganiya.adediran@waldenu.edu](mailto:Ganiya.adediran@waldenu.edu).

Thank you again for your time and willingness to participate!

Respectfully,

Iyabo Adediran

## Appendix F: Interview Reminder Email

Dear [Participant's Name],

This email will serve as a reminder that your interview is scheduled for [insert date and time] for approximately 30-45 minutes.

Please log in 5 minutes earlier at the link below:

[insert Zoom link]

If you have any questions or need to reschedule/cancel, please contact me at [redacted].

Thank you,

Iyabo Adediran

## Appendix G: Unmet Criteria Email

Dear [Participant],

Thank you for showing an interest in participating in the interview for a study on African American parenting practices. Unfortunately, you did not meet the criteria for participation in the study. However, I sincerely appreciate your consideration and willingness to participate in my study. If you have any questions, please contact me at [Ganiya.adediran@waldenu.edu](mailto:Ganiya.adediran@waldenu.edu).

Respectfully,

Iyabo Adediran