CREATING SAFE ENVIRONMENTS:
Violence Prevention Strategies and Programs

Executive Summary

This document was prepared by Prevention Institute.
Principal authors are:

Patti Culross, MD, MPH

Larry Cohen, MSW

Ashby Wolfe, MD

Joanne Ruby, MSW

Additional assistance was provided by: Rachel Davis MSW, Lisa Fujie Parks MPH, Elizabeth Berger, and Leslie Mikkelsen RD, MPH.

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Putting prevention at the center of community well-being

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Prevention Institute
is a nonprofit, national center dedicated to improving community health and well-being by building momentum for effective primary prevention. Primary prevention means taking action to build resilience and to prevent problems before they occur. The Institute's work is characterized by a strong commitment to community participation and promotion of equitable health outcomes among all social and economic groups. Since its founding in 1997, the organization has focused on injury and violence prevention, traffic safety, health disparities, nutrition and physical activity, and youth development.

CREATING SAFE ENVIRONMENTS:
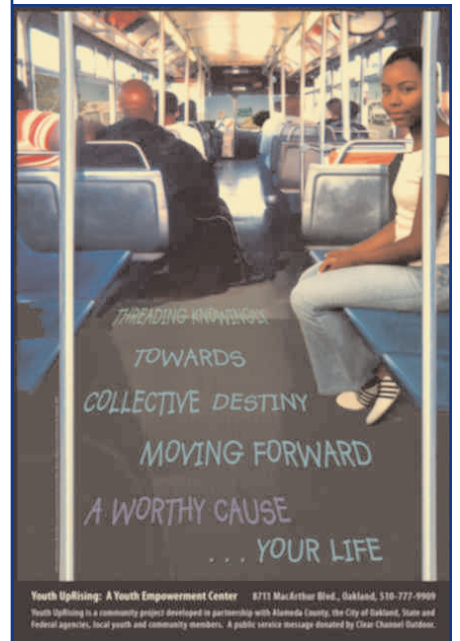# Violence Prevention Strategies and Programs

"You just can't avoid the problem. It's not going to go away. If you ignore it, it's going to get worse."

RICHMOND, CA TEENAGER, 1993

V iolence is often seen as intractable because its prevention is rarely approached with the level of commitment and attention required for long-term success, generation after generation. Violence is in fact preventable, but its prevention requires an investment of resources, people, leadership, and commitment. Violence in the United States has many dimensions and root causes and no single program can address the magnitude or all the causes of the problem. It is a complex problem that requires a comprehensive solution and participation from multiple sectors and stakeholders. An approach to violence prevention which builds on a combination of community and systemic action along with a focus on family and individuals resiliency is necessary.

This report provides an overview of promising violence prevention initiatives across the nation, with special focus on the primary prevention of violence affecting youth and adult intimate partner violence. We describe specific programs, but we also emphasize the large-scale initiatives that we feel will be more effective in responding to the scope and breadth of the problem. We particularly include programs that recognize the importance of collaboration: programs that "work and play well with others." Violence is a learned behavior. That being said, it is important to recognize not only the individual skills needed to avoid violence and prevent violent behavior, but also the community linkages required to create comprehensive solutions.

Because young people are far more often the victims of violence than perpetrators, we refer to *violence affecting youth* as an umbrella term, which encompasses violence victimization, perpetration, and witnessing. We also talk about *intimate partner violence* or *relationship violence* to describe violence within heterosexual or same-sex intimate relationships and affecting women or men. But we recognize that what is often described as intimate violence can occur among people who are only acquaintances or who do not know each other at all, as in sexual assault. Despite

the different definitions for the violence affecting youth and intimate partner violence, (and at times the turf issues between practitioners who emphasize different issues) the commonalities among the types are more important than the conceptual or definitional differences and this is even more the case when it comes to primary prevention.

This paper also emphasizes *primary* prevention, taking action *before* the injury occurs, but many programs and initiatives are a mix of primary prevention, intervention, and even suppression. Primary violence prevention works to preclude violence and is distinct from approaches that attempt to modify the behavior of individuals who may already be violent. Too often these efforts are all described as prevention by some practitioners

THE ORIGINS OF VIOLENCE

Violence affecting youth and intimate partner violence cannot be viewed in a vacuum, as experiences limited to individual victims and perpetrators. While violence is a behavior so it ultimately is an *individual* issue, there is no question that it is a learned behavior which begs the question of where and how it is learned. The root causes of violence include conditions such as poverty and economic inequity, oppression, and poor mental health. When these factors are present in environments, powerlessness and isolation are common and the likelihood of violence increases. Low income communities, people of color, women, and youth all are disproportionately affected by varying types of violence due to the interplay of these root factors.[1,2]

According to the World Health Organization, social and cultural norms that give priority to parental rights over child welfare and that entrench male dominance over women and children help to create a climate in which violence is encouraged. Conversely, health, economic, educational and social policies that promote economic and social equality between groups in society inhibit violence.[3]

RISK AND RESILIENCE FACTORS

In general, risk and resilience (also called protective) factors impact the way individuals and their communities interact. Risk factors for violence are defined in general as characteristics or circumstances that increase the likelihood of an individual, family or community being affected by, or perpetrating, violence. There is wide variety in the ways that risk factors influence violent behavior, but it is clear that an *accumulation* of risk factors in combination, frequency and/or severity will influence whether violent behavior, problems or habits develop.[4] Examples of risk factors include poverty, witnessing violence, and gender stereotypes. Resilience factors have received less attention but they are believed to also influence individual tendencies towards violence. Resilience factors are generally defined as those that influence the capacity of an individual to develop positively despite harmful environments and experiences. The effects of these factors in producing healthy outcomes are seen at many levels within a community. Fostering resiliency improves

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positive outcomes for youth because they then become assets to communities.[5] Examples of resilience factors include positive relationships, good mental health, and access to services.

Effective violence prevention must attend to both reducing risk factors and building resilience factors. Too often discussions of risk factors focus only on the individual or family and a history of violence increasing the likelihood of all types of violence. Similarly discussions of resilience do not pay attention to the importance of enhancing community assets. The idea that the community not the individual is the unit of analysis would merit further consideration.

SOCIAL NORMS

Because violence is a learned behavior, violence prevention efforts should address social norms. Norms are the community standards that influence and provide a model for behavior.[6] In fact, norms are among the most powerful societal and community influences that shape behavior. More than just habits, norms are often based in culture and tradition. They are the attitudes, beliefs, and standards of a group of people, and any number of norms can influence the development and perpetuation of violence. The norms that are particularly relevant to intimate partner violence involve male and female gender stereotypes and socialization, power control, and the belief that intimate relationships are entirely private, precluding interference by outside individuals.

While these particular norms focus on intimate partner violence, it is likely that the same gender roles and power issues play out in street violence, although less well defined. In fact the Institute of Domestic Violence in the African American Community connects the two by explaining that intimate partner violence is a part of a continuum of violence that links the community to the family. Violence inside the home coexists with and mirrors violence outside the home, with linkages between stressors inside and outside the home and violence witnessed, linked to violence committed. In this context, racism and social oppression contribute to and influence dynamics of all forms of violence: "Whether in the form of restricting economic opportunities, marginalizing the unique cultural aspects of African Americans' lives or perpetuating negative racial stereotypes, social oppression and racisms [fuel] a hopelessness that contribute[s] to violence in the community."[7]

Policies, practices and norms that promote male dominance interplay with those that promote dominance, or "power over" in other forms, including dominance based on race, class, and ability. Where there is socially enforced hierarchies of power, there is the risk that such power can be used to control and violate others, or to sanction such violence. For example, in relationships in which one partner lacks legal immigration status, often a female, and the other partner and/or family members do, the power differential created increases the risk of abuse of such power.

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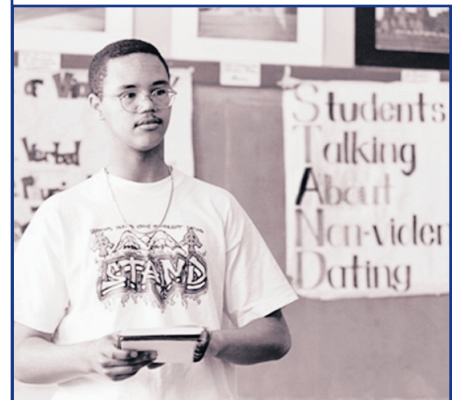
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THE PRIMARY PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE: PROMISING PRACTICES

The programs in this report are organized by their approach to prevention to help present them in a clear and concise manner. It is important to note however, that this categorization of programs is an approximation since violence prevention programs and initiatives tend to consist of a mix of interventions for a setting or population. Therefore, most of the following programs spill out of their categories because they offer different types of services for multiple populations, or different approaches for the same population. In addition, the programs we highlight are meant to be examples. We recognize that many cities large and small, domestic and international have interesting and compelling programs. We do not pretend to present a comprehensive list. Our intention is to present interesting and promising approaches and to give a few examples. Although we mainly focus on primary prevention strategies, the programs listed in the paper can reach youth at many different times of violence exposure or engagement.

The nine violence prevention approaches are described below. In addition, **TABLE 1** at the end of this paper categorizes the programs contained within these approaches as primarily addressing violence affecting youth or intimate partner violence, or focusing on some components of both areas:

1. **COMPREHENSIVE GOVERNMENT-LED INITIATIVES:** Government's involvement in violence prevention is important for several reasons. First, government agencies have ongoing projects and programs that address violence to build upon – especially within law enforcement, schools, and at times health. Second, governments are the stewards of public funds. As such, they have access to larger financial resources that any other individual community source. Third, because violence is a "result' or sequellae" of other issues as much as it is a problem itself, government has the capacity to deal with these underlying issues, e.g., jobs, literacy, and community development. It can lead efforts that are multi-sectoral and requiring the participation of many different agencies. Effective government-led violence prevention initiatives generally will include participation from nonprofit organizations, businesses, faith groups, educational institutions and other community stakeholders. There is usually resident participation through focus groups or committee representation.

2. **GANG VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION PROGRAMS:** The primary prevention of gang violence includes many things such as youth development, economic development, or community development because they all provide more positive activity for youth than gang involvement. In marginalized communities with few legitimate opportunities for success, gangs can fill the void. Frequently gang violence initiatives combine primary prevention with more downstream approaches because they aim to mitigate some of the underlying causes of violence (e.g., providing economic opportunities for youth and their families) while also working with youth who might already be involved in gangs.

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3. **YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS:** Youth development is an approach that helps youth become socially, morally, emotionally, physically, and cognitively competent. While less specifically pointed at violence prevention per se, it nevertheless is a significant element of violence prevention strategies. Youth development strategies build internal and external assets in youth, helping them to develop characteristics that are necessary to prevent serious problems such as violence, teen pregnancy, and dropping out of school. When youth receive the supports and opportunities for growth in a caring environment, they experience significant improvements in academic achievement and school success. Youth development can be integrated into any setting including schools, after-school programs, and government and community-based programs.

4. **YOUTH DRIVEN, YOUTH LED PROGRAMS:** Youth driven, youth led programs easily could be considered a subset of youth development programs. We separated them from youth development because several of our interviewees mentioned these specific types of programs as an emerging approach to preventing violence affecting youth.[8] A youth led organization or project is *"one in which the youth constituents decide what gets done and how it gets done."* None of our interviewees were really sure what these programs should look like or what their impacts might be, but they were convinced that the programs have promise.

5. **SCHOOL-BASED PROGRAMS:** While the Foundation's primary interest does not lie in school-based approaches, we included a few programs because they are probably the largest set of prevention programs, have the most extensive evaluation, may be the basis for broader community efforts, and typically are where community members go first when trying to develop a broad initiative. Since children spend so many hours in school throughout their lives, programs in the school setting have the potential to have a strong impact on their attitudes, knowledge, and beliefs about violence, and on violent behavior. An environmental scan of programs focusing on violence affecting youth would be incomplete without mention of school-based programs.

6. **MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAMS:** These programs are important in the primary prevention of both violence affecting youth and intimate partner violence. Experiencing or witnessing violence can contribute to mental health problems, especially post-traumatic stress disorder. Mental health violence prevention programs recognize the intrinsic relationship between good mental health and preventing violence that affects young people.

7. **INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT PREVENTION:** the primary prevention of intimate partner violence and sexual assault is an emerging area. Traditionally the responses to IPV and sexual assault have mostly focused on after-the-fact treatment, as at shelters, and criminal justice system responses. An expanded focus on primary prevention in this area has created a need for strong collaborations and innovative programs.

8. **COALITION AND COLLABORATIONS:** Coalitions will not in and of themselves reduce violence, but they can be potent tools in creating community change. Many of the initiatives and programs described in this paper participate in collaborations, but others that also stand out are led by the faith community or survivors of violence.

9. **TRAINING AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT:** Professional, practitioners and community based leaders often struggle with how to effectively address primary prevention of violence and without training or technical assistance new initiatives consistently make similar mistakes. Common mistakes in violence prevention programming include, insufficient understanding of primary prevention, a tendency to focus on after-the-fact solutions and secondary prevention, and poor implementation. Although overcoming such concerns often lacks sufficient financial support, several notable programs have been created that offer training and leadership development to provide assistance.

OVERARCHING ISSUES

Based on our interviews with national researchers, program staff, advocates, and Prevention Institutes' own perspectives, a number of overarching issues emerged. Clearly at this point there is a vacuum in terms of broad-scaled support for violence prevention. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation could play a significant role in supporting necessary prevention efforts and in advancing the field.

1. Strategy development is needed to ensure maximum effectiveness.

The complexity of violence underlies the need for a strategic approach, which is the key to determining priorities, maximizing discrete efforts and ensuring that they build on each other. The term strategy refers to an analysis of the issue, delineating a final goal, defining what steps need to be taken and by who, and finally, executing the plan. It leads to better outcomes by promoting approaches that are well coordinated, responsive to local needs and concerns, and build on best practices and existing strengths. Further, the process of strategy development builds a shared understanding and commitment and enables participants to work out the relationships needed to enhance the likelihood of success.

2. Infrastructure for preventing violence that affects youth is vital.

Since no one program can be all-encompassing, there is great value in multi-component initiatives. In fact, violence prevention efforts "require a comprehensive effort from all segments of the community, beginning with the individual and involving education, community action, social support, and competency building."[9] This requires the appropriate infrastructure, including support for staffing; ongoing coordination and collaboration; and improved data systems to enhance access, facilitate data sharing, and answer questions that will promote the most effective violence prevention efforts. While these are critical, they are rarely adequately funded which minimizes effectiveness.

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3. Violence prevention programs should have certain key characteristics.

Some important program characteristics emerged through interviews and in our own thinking when considering the primary prevention of violence. For example, primary prevention programs should strive to both reduce risk factors and increase resilience factors. Many of these characteristics are often forgotten in program development although they greatly contribute to the success of programs.

4. Training initiatives would enhance violence prevention skills.

Practitioners, service providers, program directors and elected officials need skills to prevent violence. Cross-disciplinary training builds a common language, fosters understanding about different roles, and builds necessary skills. Training topics should include a public health approach to violence prevention, risk and resilience factors, interdisciplinary collaboration, behavioral and gender norms, best and promising practices, violence-specific topics (e.g., sexual assault, gang violence, etc.) advocacy, working with the media, engaging youth, community engagement, and leadership development. An overall training approach could include a combination of in-person and distance learning opportunities.

5. Similarly, technical assistance would strengthen the field.

Communities and providers grapple to harness their strengths and capacities to develop effective initiatives and achieve the success they set out to attain. They want to know about best practice. Technical assistance can be a valuable component to help them overcome barriers to success which include, though are not limited to a lack of a focused, shared vision; lack of knowledge and skills to change community environments and norms; challenges related to building multidisciplinary partnerships and collaborations; and challenges in putting it all together in context. There are also elements specific to violence prevention, such as developing effective strategies, implementing effective violence prevention programs, engaging youth, and advancing the elements of the violence prevention roadmap.

6. Support for the primary prevention of violence affecting youth and intimate partner violence must be prioritized.

Violence is among the leading causes of death for many in urban populations and many more are affected by it with the loss of family members and living in fear on a daily basis. However, we have not given adequate attention or resources to the issue. Making prevention a bigger priority would not only reduce needless suffering, but would also support a number of other positive outcomes, including improving academic success and work performance, reducing the costs associated with after-the-fact interventions, such as in the criminal justice system, and reducing fear for residents in households and neighborhoods with violence and communities in general.

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7. Appropriate evaluation is key.

Evaluation is a critical component of ensuring that efforts are effective and addressing the identified need; therefore adequate resources should be put into evaluation efforts. Good evaluation will increase the viability of programs and approaches by demonstrating effectiveness and establishing credibility. Those responsible for assessment need evaluation guidelines as well as technical assistance and resources to conduct evaluations. In developing evaluation guidelines, the appropriate level of resource should be considered. For example, proven programs need only be evaluated for fidelity and fiscal management, while new programs need more scrutiny to ensure they are achieving the desired outcomes. Finally, evaluation methodology has not caught up entirely with the understanding that violence prevention efforts must be comprehensive to be effective. To the extent possible, evaluation should consider the overall context and not demand only linear programming.

8. The research and knowledge base for preventing violence that affects young people and intimate partner violence must be furthered.

The very nature of effective violence prevention—multi-faceted and comprehensive—makes research and evaluation comprehensive. But with a growing cry for evidence based efforts, and to ensure that limited resources are being directed in the most appropriate ways, there is a need to support and develop research efforts that reflect and capture the nature of what works, including capturing the wisdom of practitioners, community engagement, and how to change environments and norms in support of safety and violence prevention outcomes. Also, while primary prevention efforts have been well established in traditional youth violence prevention, they are less established in the areas of intimate partner violence, dating violence, and sexual violence. Convening forums, commissioning papers, and funding pilot initiatives could support conceptual development and the knowledge base in this area.

9. Efforts must emphasize sustainability.

Violence prevention efforts should be sustainable over the long term. The instability of funding is a common cause of program failure. Instability of school funding is a problem, particularly with the focus now more on reading and math. Sustainability is also the biggest challenge facing programs such as street-level programs and rapid response to violence (i.e., Boston and Chicago *Ceasefire* programs). There were many programs developed in the late 1980's and early 1990's which disappeared with a decrease in funding across the country. Sustainability requires a committed strategy to funding and supporting efforts to sustain violence prevention through supporting meaningful sustainability planning of grantees, supporting more sustainable funding streams at federal and state levels, and developing business sector engagement in the issue.

ENDNOTES

1   Krug E, LL Dahlberg and JA Mercy, et al, editors. World Health Organization. *World Report on Violence and Health.* WHO. Geneva, Switzerland. 2002.

2   Cohen and Swift, 1993.

3   Krug E, LL Dahlberg and JA Mercy, et al, editors. World Health Organization. *World Report on Violence and Health.* World Health Organization. Geneva, Switzerland. 2002

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6   Cohen L and J Erlenborne. *Cultivating Peace in Salinas: A Framework for Violence Prevention.* City of Salinas, CA: 1999.

7   Williams, OJ and CY Tubbs. 2002. Community Insights on Domestic Violence Among African Americans: Conversations About Domestic Violence and Other Issues Affecting Their Community. Retrieved from www.dvinstitute.org/comm_assess/idvaac.sanfran.pdf on May 2, 2006.

8   Personal communication, Howard Pinderhughes 3/23/06, Victor Colman, 3/27/06, and Emily Ozer, 3/28/06

9   Hampton RL, Jenkins P, Gullotta TP, eds. *Issues in Children's and Families' Lives.* Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications; 1996; *Preventing Violence in America.* Vol. 4: 201.

TABLE 1: PROMISING VIOLENCE PREVENTION INITIATIVES AND PROGRAMS

These programs are categorized as addressing violence affecting youth or intimate partner violence, or focusing on some components of both areas. With some programs, the priority focus is designated with "P".

PROGRAM APPROACH	PROGRAM NAME	VIOLENCE AFFECTING YOUTH	INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE
Comprehensive Government-led	Alameda County Blueprint	P	X
	Blueprint for a Safer Philadelphia	X	
	Illinois Violence Prevention Authority	X	X
	Minnesota Sexual Violence Prevention Action Council		X
	National Crime Prevention Council	X	
	UNITY	P	X
Gang violence prevention	Calles	X	
	Ceasefire Chicago	X	
	Homeboy Industries for a Future	X	
	Inter-City Gang Prevention Network	X	
	Youth Alive	X	
Youth development	After School Matters	X	
	Barrios Unidos	X	
	New Mexico Forum for Youth in Community	X	
	Youth Uprising	X	
Youth driven	Movement Strategy Center	X	X
School-based	Community Works/California	X	X
	GET.A.VOICE(tm) Project	X	X
	I Can Problem Solve	X	X
	PeaceBuilders(r)	X	
	Perry Preschool Project	X	X
	Safe and Drug Free Schools/Wichita	X	
Mental health	Child Witness to Violence Project	X	X
	Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in the Schools (CBITS)	X	X
	Living in a Nonviolent Community Program (LINC)	X	X
Intimate partner and sexual violence	manalive		X
	Men Can Stop Rape		X
	Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape (PCAR)		X
	SafePlace		X
	Wingspan		X
Coalitions	Kehilla Community Synagogue		X
	Not Even One	P	X
	The Survivors Network	X	X
	Survivors Network of Minnesota		X
	Million Mom March	X	X
	Family Justice Centers		X
Training	Institute for Community Peace	X	X
	Partnerships for Preventing Violence	P	X
	Prevention Connection		X