**Community Insights on Domestic Violence among** African Americans

**Conversations About Domestic Violence And Other Issues Affecting Their Community** 

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CITY OF DETROIT & INSTITUTE ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY

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# Acknowledgements

his report is based primarily on interviews completed with African Americans from Detroit, Michigan and examines their perspectives on the causes and consequences of domestic violence in the African American community. In addition, the report discusses their views on solutions toward prevention and reduction of domestic violence in the African American community. This was a project of the Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community (IDVAAC). IDVAAC would like to acknowledge the work of its Steering Committee members for developing, guiding and implementing the national community assessment concept: Linner Ward Griffin, Robert L. Hampton, Shelia Hankins, Esther J. Jenkins, Kelly Mitchell-Clark, William Oliver, Beth E. Richie, Joyce N. Thomas, Antonia A. Vann, and Oliver J. Williams, the Executive Director.

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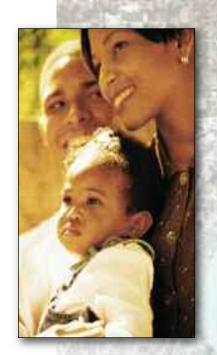
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	2
Executive Summary	4
Summary of Findings from Focus Group	5
Introduction to the Detriot Report	7
Organization of Report	7
Methodology	8
Participants	8
Across Group FIndings	9
Causes of Domestic Violence	10
Consequences of Domestic Violence	17
Solutions	18
Obstacles	21
Session Summaries From Each Group	22
Faith Focus Group	22
Children and Youth Focus Group	27
Law Enforcement Focus Group	29
Human Services Focus Group	34
Community Activist Focus Group	37
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) Focus Group	40
Summary and Recommendations	46
Closing	
References	47

### TABLES

Table 1:	Types of Violence	9
	Causes of Domestic Violence	
Table 3:	Consequences of Domestic Violence	18
Table 4:	Solutions	20
Table 5:	Obstacles	22







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**Executive Summary** 

he Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community (IDVAAC) began the Community Insights Project in 1998 to "secure information on African Americans' perceptions about domestic violence and to identify solutions to address this problem within African American communities across the country. The project seeks to inform a wider audience of the intricacies of domestic violence in the lives of African Americans, particularly in relation to other compounding social problems" (Bent-Goodley & Williams, 2004, p. 4). IDVAAC has convened focus groups in nine cities: San Francisco and Oakland, California; Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota; Memphis, Tennessee; Birmingham, Alabama; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Detroit, Michigan and Seattle, Washington. This report focuses on the unique perceptions and experiences of community members in Detroit, Michigan.

Information in this report was provided by members of focus groups drawn from various stakeholders in the black community, doing work of relevance to intimate partner violence (IPV) and other intersecting issues. Each session consisted of groups comprised of individuals working in following areas: children and youth services, human services, community activists, the faith community, GLBTQ advocates and law enforcement. The focus groups began by asking about types of violence in the black community and how they perceived IPV relative to these other acts of violence. The remainder of the discussion specifically addressed IPV: causes of IPV, consequences of that violence, possible solutions, and barriers to confronting IPV in the African American community.

This report offers useful information for practitioners, policy makers, and others interested in breaking the cycle of violence in their community. For practitioners, the report explores issues related to barriers and challenges to obtaining formal services and perceptions of formal service providers. Practitioners can use this report to better understand some of the potential issues impacting African Americans and how that uniquely intersects with domestic violence. The report also offers strategies as to how to address some of these issues on the individual and community levels. For policymakers, the report offers a number of societal and macro level issues that converge to exacerbate domestic violence among African Americans. Issues such as the need for greater funds in the area of culturally competent domestic violence services is identified but also the need for mental health and substance abuse services are also identified as critical. There is a particular focus on encouraging schools to develop policies and programs around this issue on a mezzo level. For researchers, the report offers a number of issues upon which to establish a research agenda. Understanding how historical trauma impacts domestic violence among African Americans warrants greater research, particularly as it connects with contemporary oppression and discrimination. Other areas that warrant greater attention include the connection between domestic violence in the African American community and gender roles and gender socialization, parenting practices, faith- and community-based responses to domestic violence, and effective culturally based or culturally competent approaches that include a focus on relationship building and the development of healthy communication skills.

# Summary of Findings from Focus Group

### Historical context and contemporary discrimination are critical factors in understanding IPV in the black community.

While we often look at these two issues separately, it is also important to examine how these two issues converge to negatively impact African American relationships, in general, and domestic violence rates, in particular among African Americans.

### Community relationships and linkages are strained and have consequences for domestic violence among African Americans.

A major strength in the African American community has been identified as the communal nature and community supports that have traditionally been used as sources of support. Communities that were strained by limited resources, complex and evolving social issues, and environmental hazards contribute to domestic violence in the African American community.

### The need for defining healthy relationships and providing strategies on relationship building skills.

Participants felt that contemporary stressors make it difficult to work on building positive communication and relationship skills. They emphasized that people may not be clear on what constitutes a healthy relationship. There needs to be an emphasis on helping to facilitate and build healthy relationships.

### Rigid gender roles and damaging gender role socialization has a detrimental impact on African American relationships.

The participants felt that promoting particular roles for men, such as being the head of the household, and particular roles and stereotypes of women such as the strong independent Black women, are having a negative impact on how children are socialized, how the LGBT community is viewed, and how relationships are evolving. The participants felt that this is a critical issue to better understand domestic violence in the African American community.





### Negative and poor parenting practices influence the domestic violence experienced and perpetrated as children and adults.

The participants felt that histories of domestic violence in the family of origin



are linked to many African American's tolerance of physical violence and beliefs about appropriate disciplinary methods for children. The participants also felt that children are all too often left to fend for themselves and are socialized around gender roles and relationships through other influences, such as the media and television, instead of their parents.

### Churches should be more informed and more involved in stopping domestic violence.

Participants acknowledged the unique role and access of faith-based communities to addressing domestic violence. They felt that more needs to be done to educate church leaders

and members on this issue to motivate them to act to stem the tide of violence in their congregations and communities.

### There must be a comprehensive, culturally-appropriate and community-based response to address domestic violence.

Participants urged more culturally relevant programs that are geographically based in the black community. They emphasized that there are many community and social issues that are linked to domestic violence,; the solution must be comprehensive and inclusive of those realities.





# Introduction to the Detroit Report

L his report provides perspectives on domestic violence from community members in Detroit, Michigan. The participants thoughtful and engaging responses support our current understanding of domestic violence in the African American community, while also offering new insights into the nature and consequences of that abuse. They were a diverse group; yet, they shared a common belief that domestic violence is a critical overt and latent issue negatively impacting African American individuals, families and communities. IDVAAC appreciates their willingness to be transparent and open in their responses.

There are four clear messages that emerged from the focus groups: (1) historical context and contemporary oppression are vital to understanding domestic violence in the African American community, but not just what they individually bring but rather the cumulative impact of historical oppression coupled with contemporary discrimination, (2) gender role socialization is negatively impacting African American relationships and warrants greater attention in our response to domestic violence; (3) there needs to be a greater focus on building positive communication skills and strengthening relationship building skills; and (4) we need services that are culturally competent, community based and innovative to respond to domestic violence in the African American community. These themes were heard across each of the groups and present a call to action of the professional, policy and research communities.

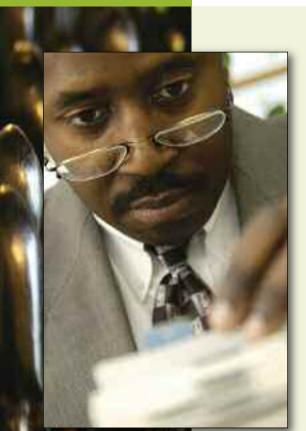


# Organization of Report

L his report is organized in aw ay that allows the reader to view the collective and the individual group level responses of the focus group participants in four core areas: (1) types of violence, (2) causes of violence, (3) consequences of violence, and (4) solutions to address domestic violence in the African American community. Two of the groups also identified obstacles and barriers to addressing domestic violence in the African American community. The responses are uneven in different groups based on the flow of the group discussion. For example, some groups focused more attention on the causes of

domestic violence and less time on other areas of the discussion. This is the nature of the focus group process and can be seen in the amount of content in different areas of the report. However, each group offered responses in the four core areas.





# Methodology

Τ

L he methodology for the project has been consistent with previous groups (Bent-Goodley & Williams, 2004). Individuals, identified through a snowball sampling method, participated in one of six focus groups, based on their background or interests. The groups, which varied in size from 5-6 to 12+ members, included Children and Youth, Human Services, Community, Activists, Faith Community,

GLBTQ Advocates, and Law Enforcement. The focus groups were facilitated by IDVAAC Steering Committee members and consultants using the same set of semistructured interview questions. Each focus group was audiotaped after obtaining informed consent to participate. The data was analyzed by an independent researcher following the receipt of written transcripts. Data is analyzed and reported for each focus group and summarized across the all six groups.

# Participants

here were a total of 52 participants in the six focus groups, with an average of 8.6 members per group. All of the participants identified themselves as Black, African American or Afro American. The average age of the participants was 46.9 with the age range between 20-78 years of age. The majority of the participants were women (n=35; 67%) and the remaining participants (n=17; 33%) were men. The average length of time in their current roles was 12.95 years with a range of 1-40 years of service. The majority of the participants lived in the Detroit area (n=43; 83%) and the remaining participants resided in the metropolitan Detroit area (n=9; 17%). The average length of time the participants lived in the Detroit area was 39 years with a range of 7-75 year. Nearly one-third (n=16; 31%) had some college experience or a MA degree (n=16; 31%). Fifteen percent (n=8) had a BA degree. Thirteen percent (n=7) completed high school. Eight percent (n=4) had a PhD and one person (2%) had a JD degree.

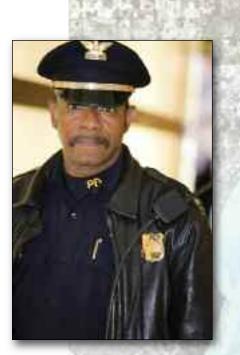
# **Across Group Findings**

### **Types of Violence**

The following types of violence were identified: (1) family violence, which included verbal abuse, physical abuse, making threats, elder abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, child sexual abuse, spiritual abuse, sibling abuse, child abuse, spousal abuse, mental abuse, medical abuse, economic abuse, partner abuse, male on male abuse, abandonment, and neglect; (2) community violence, which included school violence, property crimes, shootings and gun violence, beatings, murders, sexual assault, rape, carjacking, torture, youth violence, and black-onblack violence; and (3) social violence, which included homophobia, economic abuse, drug related abuse, media violence, institutional and economic

disenfranchisement, alcohol abuse, and gambling.

While the participants were clearly able to identify diverse types of violence, they had difficulty ranking domestic violence in comparison with other types of violence and social issues. For the two groups able to rank domestic violence with other forms of abuse, they identified child abuse as being particularly devastating. However, the other three groups felt that domestic violence is not taken as seriously as other forms of abuse and that it is a sub problem of many other social ills. They felt strongly that domestic violence is often not acknowledged or recognized as problematic in relation to



Family violence	<ul> <li>Verbal</li> <li>Physical</li> <li>Threats</li> <li>Elder abuse</li> <li>Emotional abuse</li> <li>Sexual abuse</li> <li>Child sexual abuse</li> <li>Spiritual abuse</li> <li>Sibling abuse</li> </ul>	Male on male abuse
Community violence	<ul> <li>School violence</li> <li>Property crimes</li> <li>Shootings</li> <li>Beatings</li> <li>Murder</li> <li>Sexual assault</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Rape</li> <li>Carjacking</li> <li>Torture</li> <li>Gun violence</li> <li>Youth violence</li> <li>Black-on-black violence</li> </ul>
Social violence	<ul> <li>Homophobia</li> <li>Economic abuse</li> <li>Drug related abuse</li> <li>Media violence</li> <li>Institutional disenfranchisement</li> </ul>	<ul><li>Gambling</li><li>Suicide</li><li>Intentionally infecting</li></ul>

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other social ills but that, if one carefully examines the situation domestic violence is often present and fueling the problem even further. They concurred that domestic violence is often not identified but is pervasive and a silent factor in relation to other social issues, particularly substance abuse issues and other forms of family violence. In addition, the participants felt that one could not separate family and community violence from social violence. They felt that the connection between social violence was clearly linked to other types of violence, particularly media violence and the institutional and economic disenfranchisement of African Americans. They felt that media violence, including the violence seen on television, heard from music, experienced through videogames, and viewed in newspapers and magazines, fed into family and community violence, creating destructive stereotypes of the African American community.

## **Causes of Domestic Violence**

L he causes of domestic violence were wide and varied. "For the purpose of this report, cause is defined as a condition, occurrence, or circumstance that was identified by focus group



members as directly resulting in domestic violence" (Bent-Goodley & Williams, 2004, p. 11). There were a number of causes identified across the groups. These causes were grouped into 12 categories: poor mental health, substance abuse, societal influences, parenting

practices, the church response, lack of relationship skills, gender roles and socialization, lack of education about domestic violence, the silence of abuse, structural issues, the historical context, and fewer resources.

### **Poor Mental Health**

The participants felt that unaddressed mental illness is adding to domestic

violence. Each of the groups felt that African Americans continue to feel like they are considered "crazy" if they reach out for help. With very limited mental health services available in African American communities, the lack of access fuels the inability and resistance to receive mental health services. The participants felt that mental illness that goes unchecked and without attention leaves women more vulnerable to experience abuse and men more likely to consider abuse as an option. The stereotypes surrounding those that get mental health services and counseling is still alive and well. The participants felt that African Americans continue to feel that mental health and counseling services are a taboo. This feeling puts people in a position where they continue to experience mental health issues and are fearful of addressing it because of the negative perceptions of others. The participants also felt that low self-esteem and self-worth fueled domestic violence. in that women with low self-esteem were more likely to experience domestic violence.

#### Substance Abuse

Substance abuse was viewed as a major issue related to domestic violence. The participants made it clear that the drugs in the African American community now are very different from the drugs of choice 30 years ago. Drugs used 30 years ago did not result in the high levels of violence that are resulting from the types of drugs that people are using now. They felt that it is critical to find new responses to these drugs and what they do to people. Old approaches to address drugs from a different time fuel the fire of abuse. In addition, the participants felt that some have started to use drug abuse and alcohol abuse synonymously but that the strategies to address drug abuse and alcohol abuse need to be different.

### **Societal Influences**

Domestic violence does not take place in a vacuum but is part of wider issues, particularly as it relates to the African American community. The participants all identified media violence and negative media images of African Americans as being a part of the problem. They felt that our children are exposed to high levels of violence through the media that are often glorified and that these images both create stereotypes and train children to think that problems and issues are resolved with violence. In addition, they felt that media portrayals feed into negative stereotypes about African Americans that make it challenging to reach out for help, for fear of affirming these negative portrayals. An additional societal influence identified was the abuse of political power. The participants talked about how abuse and violence begins from the top down. They asserted that various abuses of political power, via what gets funded to who gets promoted or hired for a particular position, creates

an environment of abuse and exploitation that filters down into the lived experiences of people from different class environments. Another societal influence identified was economic disenfranchisement. Economic disenfranchisement was not limited to unemployment but also included issues of underemployment. The participants agreed that limited economic and employment opportunities create a sense of frustration and hopelessness that begins to be taken out on each other versus addressing the systematic forces at play. Barriers to employment and



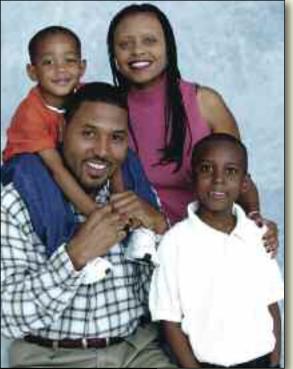


advancement were part of the issues surrounding economic disenfranchisement. The participants felt that "nepotism" creates an environment where the best qualified candidate is not always selected and where people are not often afforded an opportunity because they are not connected to those in power. They also identified stereotyping of African Americans, both in terms of cultural characteristics and LGBT issues, as a major societal influence not often addressed.



### **Parenting Practices**

The issues around parenting practices were discussed in each group. The participants identified several issues related to poor parenting practices that had implications for IPV: discipline and child rearing practices, poor parental supervision, child formation, placing boys in the position of being men or acting as a partner in the home. The participants felt that old practices of physically spanking



and hitting children as a form of discipline contributes to the idea that using violence is acceptable and expected in intimate relationships. They felt it creates the perception that those that love you can and should inflict physical pain on you when you do something wrong. The participants felt that this issue requires greater examination and discussion in the African American community as an issue that is long past its time and needs to be changed if we want to get serious about stopping

the violence in our community. The participants also felt that limited parental supervision due to parents having to work a number of jobs to take care of their families has great implications for leaving children unattended without constructive options in the community. Tied with communities that are no longer bonded, children are often left to fend for themselves. The participants felt that child formation, the development of African American children, is not taken seriously enough in the African American community and that there needs to be greater opportunities to positively socialize our children and provide them with a diversity of positive experiences that exposes them to a wider variety of options available to them. The participants felt that African American children are often not socialized to really see beyond their situation, creating frustration, anger and an inability to positively function as adults. There was great discussion in three of the groups regarding how some single mothers rely on their sons as partners and treat them as men as opposed to allowing them to be boys. They talked about the term "little man" and how it is used to strip boys of their childhood before they are developmentally able to perform the function of a man. This confusion leads to frustration, resentment, and sometimes criminal activity. Again, this issue was linked to changes within African American communities, where many African American communities have relatively few men to provide positive role models and where the supports within the community are so strained or nonexistent that these functions are no longer performed by extended family and community members.

### **The Church Response**

The church response was regarded as a cause of domestic violence, particularly as it relates to the limited involvement of churches with this issue, lack of awareness about domestic violence, and the use of scripture as a tool to reinforce woman abuse and male domination. The participants felt that African American churches have been too silent on this issue. They felt that the lack of involvement of African American churches to take this issue on has allowed the issue to continue to fester. In addition, they felt that, for those African American churches that do preach or provide counseling on this issue, that too many are using scripture as a means of disempowering women. Scripture is often used to reinforce male domination and the full scripture is not being considered or has a limited contextualization that serves to reinforce the position and stature of men in the church. They felt that this is particularly true as men are often being recruited to join or be more active in churches. They felt that the focus on men may have led to a devaluing of the women that have been in the pews supporting the churches for years.

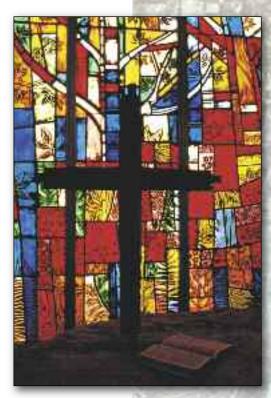
### Lack of Relationship Skills

The participants felt that there was a real problem with a lack of relationship skills. They stressed that people don't know how to treat each other within the context of a healthy, positive intimate relationship. One of the groups talked about how a person has to go through various classes and training in order to receive a driver's license but had to go through nothing to make the lifelong commitment of marriage. They felt that there needed to be a greater investment in teaching positive communication skills, providing alternatives to violence, and teaching anger management within the context of an intimate relationship. They felt that there should be more opportunities for women and men to receive training on how to build a positive and healthy relationship within a cultural context. In addition, they felt that economic and employment considerations often make it difficult to really invest in the relationship, which creates problems with maintaining and strengthening the relationship. There is a need for greater discussion of how to develop stronger relationship skills and to help identify what a healthy relationship looks like.

### **Gender Roles**

Gender roles and socialization of gender roles was regarded as another cause of domestic violence. The participants felt that sexrole stereotypes of men and women have taken a very negative toll on African American relationships. The participants felt that rigid sex-role expectations of what men do and how they act and what women are expected to do has created very rigid ideas of what it means to be a man and a woman in the

African American community. The participants felt that this contributes to violence as men are expected to be the dominant figure in the home and that women are increasingly being socialized to be strong and independent at the same time. These mixed and potentially conflictual messages are seen as fostering conflict. The participants felt that singlemotherhood in itself was not a cause of violence. Instead, they stated that singlemotherhood 30 years ago was not as damaging to the African American community because of the supports provided by the extended family and the community to raising the children, using the village concept. However, with fewer extended family and community supports, being a single-mother provides real challenges in the contemporary environment.







# Lack of Education and Awareness

The participants emphasized that there is limited education and awareness about domestic violence in the African American community. They felt that many people do not even know when they are experiencing abuse or when they are perpetrating abuse. They felt that more needed to be done to provide greater awareness of this issue in the African American community, in addition to providing viable alternatives to the use of violence. In addition, there was consensus across the groups that more should be done within the school system to teach children, beginning at early ages, about domestic violence and how to



avoid and respond to domestic violence. They felt that the school system was a missed opportunity in addressing this widespread issue.

### The Silence of Abuse

The participants felt that there has been an unnerving silence about domestic violence in the African American community. They emphasized that some may know about the domestic violence, feel that it is wrong and still not get involved. Some of the participants felt that the violence among African American men was excused due to historical and institutional racism inflicted on African American men. The participants felt that the community excuses the violent behavior of African American men and turns its head because of the societal injustices that have been experienced historically and continue to be experienced today. While they felt this is wrong, they also felt that it is entangled with an historical oppression that receives little direct attention today. As a consequence, the participants felt that domestic violence is often tolerated and has led to stereotypes of the community as being violent. The participants felt that it was important to acknowledge that most African Americans are not in violent relationships, however, the stereotypes of African Americans as being violent has been allowed to fester and grow.

### **Community Issues**

The structural issues in African American communities have also been identified as a cause of domestic violence. Abandoned buildings, broken glass, trash and other negative images are included as structural issues that are seen as their own forms of violence. Living in dense community environments, without distance or space, was identified as a form of violence. . These disorganized environments are seen as connected to disorganized structures within the home, where the home may be unkempt, without timely structures for eating or bedtime for children. They felt that these types of structural issues create an environment where violence can be fueled and generated. The participants felt that these issues connect with breakdowns in

community relationships and supports that have traditionally been strengths in the African American community. With affluent and middle class Blacks moving out of inner city communities, the participants felt that much of the human and social capital left with them.

### **Historical Context**

Each of the groups identified the historical oppression and institutional racism experienced by African Americans as being connected to domestic violence in the African American community. The participants felt that the connection between the trauma of slavery and domestic violence among African Americans has not been fully explored or understood but that it exists. They felt that there was a deep anger or rage felt within the community due to experiencing historical and contemporary institutional racism that was present, regardless of gender, and that has the potential to be unleashed, particularly within the family environment. The historical context was raised as a factor across each of the groups as being critical to understanding IPV in the black community.







### Table 2: Causes of Domestic Violence

#### Poor mental health

- Low self-esteem
- Poor mental health • Stereotypes of those that receive
- mental health services

#### Substance abuse

 Alcohol abuse Drug abuse

#### Societal influences

- Media violence
- Abuse of political power
- Economic disenfranchisement
- Barriers to employment and advancement
- Glorification of violence • Stereotyping of different populations, particularly the LGBT community

#### **Parenting practices**

- · Discipline and child rearing practices
- Poor parental supervision
- Child formation
- Placing boys in the position of being men or acting as a partner Witnessing violence

### The church response

- Lack of involvement of churches
- Using scripture to reinforce abuse and male domination

# Rigid gender roles and socialization

- Sex-role stereotypes of men and women
- Challenges of being a single mother in contemporary society
- · Sexual promiscuity and pre-marital sex
- Living together
- Relationship between violence and the independent Black woman

#### Lack of education

- Lack of awareness about domestic violence
- Lack of education of alternatives to violence
- Lack of education initiatives on domestic violence in school systems

#### Silence of abuse

- Ignoring violence
- Excusing behavior due to historical and institutional racism
- Tolerating behaviors that we are know are wrong because of stereotypes of the community

#### **Community issues**

- Chaotic physical environments
- Disorganized communities
- Dense communities
- Breakdown in community relationships
- Lack of human and social capital

#### **Historical Context**

- Impact of slavery on relationships
- · Impact of historical trauma
- Generational impact
- Feelings of anger and rage due to institutional racism

#### Fewer resources

- Mental health services
- Lack of alternatives
- Limited knowledge of resources
- Lack of community-based services

#### Lack of relationship skills

- Poor communication skills
- Lack of knowledge of alternatives for anger management
- Lack of knowledge of how to be in a healthy relationship
- Limited time to invest in relationship development

# **Consequences of Domestic Violence**

he participants identified a number of consequences of domestic violence within the African American community. The four primary consequences that they felt were evident are as follows: (1) reinforcement of rigid gender roles and poor gender socialization, (2) a sense of hopelessness, (3) greater health and emotional problems, and (4) systems organized around further disenfranchising African American communities.

### **Reinforces Rigid Gender Roles** and Gender Socialization

Rigid gender roles were not only seen as a cause of IPV but also as a consequence. IPV reinforces images of males as dominant and female submission which is reflected in other hierarchies in the community, including that of oppressing others due to their sexual orientation and class position.

### A Sense of Hopelessness

Experiencing and witnessing violence in the home, particularly within the greater context of other forms of oppression and abuse contributes to a sense of hopelessness grounded in the belief that these issues are cyclical, connected, and do not seem to have an end. Living within societal constraints of racist, sexist, classist and homophobic environments, coupled with disintegrating neighborhood resources, and limited economic opportunities, families are particularly fragile and susceptible to violence and other ills.

### Greater Health and Emotional Problems

Health and emotional problems result from domestic violence, and often go unrecognized or overlooked. Participants felt that the lethality of violence and the likelihood of someone getting killed was high for African American men and women because of their resistance to counseling and mental health services and because of the societal issues compounding the problems in the home, all of which leads to more severe violence. The participants felt that these health and emotional problems are further exacerbated by lack of access to physical and mental health services located in the community that are also culturally competent.

### Systems Organized Around African American Communities

The participants felt that an additional consequence of domestic violence in the African American community was having greater institutional presence in and monitoring of the black community. They recognized that African American men and women are more likely to be arrested and placed in jail due to domestic violence compared with other groups of people. However, they also noted that consequences of the violence in the community was having an increased police presence to deal with the greater number of calls, increased prosecutorial efforts to ensure convictions, increased numbers of children being removed from the home and placed in the foster care system, and increased economic devastation resulting from having the male, in particular, or female placed in jail or prison due to the violence.







Gender roles and socialization	<ul> <li>Boys are not given the emotional language to communicate differently</li> <li>Male dominance</li> <li>Hierarchy according to gender, sexual orientation, class</li> <li>Lack of accountability due to racist practices</li> <li>Black women assume greater responsibility that becomes increasingly difficult to manage</li> <li>"New age pimpin'"</li> <li>More children born out-of-wedlock</li> </ul>
Sense of hopelessness	
Greater health and emotional problems	<ul> <li>Greater likelihood of lethality of violence</li> <li>Greater likelihood to suffer physical and mental health issues as a result of violence</li> </ul>
Systems organized around African American communities	<ul> <li>More likely to be arrested</li> <li>More likely to be placed in jail</li> <li>Increased stereotypes</li> <li>Increased prosecutorial efforts</li> <li>Increased police presence</li> <li>Increased child removal into foster care</li> <li>Increased economic devastation resulting from this system wide approach</li> <li>Limited resources</li> </ul>

# Solutions

There were a number of solutions discussed to address domestic violence in the African American community. The solutions offered were as follows: (1) provide culturally based education, (2) address structural issues that feed into domestic violence, (3) increase and enhance the church response, (4) provide counseling, and (5) provide a comprehensive approach.

### Culturally-Based Education and Awareness

The participants emphasized the need for culturally-based education. They felt

that there was a need to provide domestic violence education within an understanding of the culture and historical experiences of the African American community. A number of specific opportunities and topics for education were suggested. It was suggested that Rites of Passage programs be offered and that domestic violence education should be included as part of that process. They also suggested workshops on relationship building and how to create and maintain a healthy relationship. They felt that communication skills should also be offered but not limited to intimate relationships but inclusive of all

relationship types, and that there needed to be greater opportunities for domestic violence awareness and the development of social skills. They suggested participation in healthy relationship and domestic violence prevention training as a requirement for obtaining a marriage license. Education should include a reshaping of sex-role perceptions and expectations within the community. In addition, there needed to be opportunities to explore and discuss how domestic violence differentially impacts women and men in same-sex relationships and what can be done to address their unique issues. They all agreed that domestic violence awareness and education should be offered in an age-appropriate manner in the school system beginning as early as possible.

### Larger Social Issues

The participants felt that all too often domestic violence services are provided in a vacuum, not fully recognizing the structural issues that warrant attention. They suggested that there be diversity training for police officers and that there be a greater investment in building positive relationships between the police and the African American community. They also felt that in order to fully understand the problem of how structural issues impact domestic violence, that there need to be an effort to better gauge the violence within that context. They did not believe that we have an accurate representation of domestic violence in current statistics and estimates and that there needed to be more emphasis on really capturing the true numbers. There needs to be a focus on enhancing the economic empowerment of African American individuals, families and communities.

### The Church Response

The participants felt that there needed to be an increase in the church response and an enhanced approach from those churches that do respond. The participants noted that there needs to be a re-examination of the use of scripture in churches. They felt that church leadership needs to explore how current interpretations of scripture are being used to manipulate, disempower, and, consequently

endanger women, making women even more vulnerable to violence. The participants emphasized that churches should preach empowerment and that there needed to be a greater focus on how to do that within the church from the preacher to the church leadership to the congregation and community. In addition, they felt that churches could increase their response to domestic violence by creating domestic violence ministries, domestic violence support groups and providing domestic violence education. They also felt that churches needed to take these messages of empowerment into the community and that the word should not be limited to those attending church but should include the neighborhood around the church as well. Finally, they felt that the church was in a pronounced position to be able to create opportunities for healing from domestic violence. The groups did not define what healing would entail but clearly delineated the church as the place where healing could best take place.





### **Counseling and Outreach**

The participants emphasized the need for greater counseling and mental health services within the community. They felt that counseling services should be offered to help take the blame off the victim and reinforce the accountability of the abusive partner. In addition, they felt that counseling services should be provided for men and women separately.

### **Table 4: Solutions**

Culturally based	<ul> <li>Rites of passage programs for</li></ul>
education and	children and youth <li>Relationship building</li> <li>Domestic violence awareness</li> <li>Communication skills</li> <li>Social skills</li> <li>Training provided before marriage license given</li> <li>Reshaping sex-role perceptions and expectations</li> <li>Early education in schools</li> <li>Sharing and promoting community resources</li> <li>Greater education about diverse</li>
awareness	populations, particularly LGBT issues
Larger Social Issues	<ul> <li>Diversity training for police officers</li> <li>Relationship building between the police and the community</li> <li>Better gauge the rate of violence</li> <li>Greater economic empowerment</li> </ul>
Church response	<ul> <li>Re-examine use of scripture in churches</li> <li>Preach empowerment</li> <li>Increase domestic violence ministries</li> <li>Provide domestic violence education</li> <li>Provide domestic violence support groups</li> <li>Move church activities into the community</li> <li>Encourage healing</li> </ul>
Counseling and	<ul> <li>Take the blame off the victim</li> <li>Provide counseling for men and women separately</li> <li>Explore barriers to getting help within</li></ul>
Outreach	African American communities <li>Encourage self-esteem and self-worth</li> <li>More support groups</li> <li>Non-traditional approaches</li> <li>Greater outreach</li>
Provide a	<ul> <li>Collaboration between agencies</li> <li>Engage the media</li> <li>Work on a grassroots level</li> <li>Promote community knowledge, connectedness</li></ul>
comprehensive	and responsibility <li>Community involvement and ownership</li>
approach	of programs

They stressed that these services be comprehensive, culturally-focused and geographically based in the community. They also felt that there needed to be greater thought given to how to address the barriers of reaching out to get help within the African American community. There should be an investment in traditional and non-traditional support groups and outreach that is relevant and helpful to the population. Finally, the participants emphasized that counseling services should be offered within the context of empowering the survivor and improving the person's self-worth and self-esteem, and educating and holding the abuser accountable.

# Obstacles

Two primary obstacles were identified by two of the focus groups. The obstacles identified include the following: (1) lack of commitment by systems, and (2) lack of cultural sensitivity.

### Lack of Commitment by Systems

The participants felt that the primary obstacle to addressing domestic violence in the African American community were the larger systems impacting the community. They felt that there are limited finances offered to address domestic violence within the community, particularly from the side of prevention. They felt that these systems were more focused on prosecuting and incarcerating for domestic violence without being equally invested in prevention efforts and community-based efforts to address domestic violence. In addition, they felt that political abuse of power was a major issue. They felt that continued nepotism

### **A Comprehensive Approach**

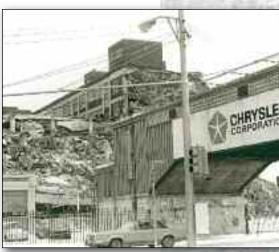
The participants emphasized the need to provide a comprehensive approach to domestic violence, with better collaboration between agencies. This approach also included the media which can do a better job of promoting violence prevention and encouraging healthy relationships within the African American community. Overall, they felt that in order for any approach to be successful,

there had to be an emphasis on community involvement and ownership of programs.

and barriers to obtaining economic and employment opportunities were part of a systematic abuse of power.

### Lack of Cultural Sensitivity

The participants felt that the lack of culturally sensitive practices within a number of systems was problematic. They felt that too many professionals base their decision-making and interaction with African Americans on stereotypes of the community as opposed to recognizing the vast diversity and experiences of the community. In addition, they felt that operating on stereotypes reinforces the lack of cultural sensitivity and reinforces African Americans reluctance to reach out for counseling and other types of domestic violence services.





### Table 5: Obstacles

A system of abuse	<ul><li>Limited finances</li><li>Political abuse of power</li></ul>
Lack of cultural sensitivity	<ul> <li>Lack of willingness to seek counseling services</li> <li>Lack of cultural sensitivity within the healthcare arena and among law enforcement professionals</li> </ul>
Limited time to work on relationship building	

# Session Summaries for Each Group

he following section provides summaries of each of the individual focus groups held in Detroit, Michigan. There is some variability across the groups, as the emphasis of each group was different based on their particular area and ideas on the topic. However, there is considerable overlap and redundancy across the groups, as well. Ouotes are provided to ensure that the words of the group members are captured. The six groups are as follows: (1) Faith, (2) Children and Youth, (3) Law Enforcement, (4) Human Services, (5) Community Activists, and (6) GLBTQ. The findings are similarly categorized as above: types of violence, causes and consequences of domestic violence, and solutions and barriers to ending domestic violence.

# Faith Focus Group

The members of the faith focus group identified a number of different types of violence: (1) *family violence, which included verbal abuse, physical abuse,*  threats, spiritual abuse (defined as keeping another from worshipping or worshipping in a manner that they choose) , elder abuse, emotional abuse and child sexual abuse; (2) community violence, which included school violence and property violence; and, (3) social violence, which included homophobia, economic abuse or economic oppression and media violence. The participants talked about having been exposed to domestic violence both personally and professionally, the challenges facing those in same-sex relationships and the lack of willingness on the part of the church to invite them to the table to address the issue.

### Causes

The group identified six causes of domestic violence: (1) the impact of historical oppression, (2) problems with family structure, (3) poor gender socialization and rigid gender roles, (4) lack of community, (5) the poor church response, and (6) the persistence of racism and stereotyping.

The historical oppression and racism experienced by African Americans was viewed as a contributing factor to domestic violence. The participants also identified problems within the family structure which leaves little time to invest in intimate relationships and or to teach others relationship building skills. Families also do not spend enough time in the positive socialization of their children. The participants felt that there was a lack of understanding of what constitutes a healthy relationship. As a result, violence is often not viewed as abnormal but as a legitimate means of addressing problems within the relationship. The children are not learning healthy communication and relationship patterns resulting in them being socialized to use violence as a means to control others and deal with daily stressors and challenges. Entangled with these issues are problems with low self-esteem that augment the challenges of building healthy relationships.

How we do relationships is one of the key things, I think, as we talk about the causes now. We don't teach ourselves or our children how to handle this precious gift of relationships. We do it all the time, it's something we do everyday, the gift of a relationship, on every level, but we don't teach ourselves how to do it successfully. So we mess it up, and we mess it up sometimes real real bad. And then we muddle through life with those messed up relationships and they compound themselves into, "I hate you", "I don't wanna be around you", "you're different from me", "you're lighter than me", "you're darker than me", "your hair's nappy, my hair's straight", all these kinds of phobias that we develop because we don't know how to appreciate the gift of relationships.

And I want to reiterate that we're talking about formation, how we're forming our children to grow up to be adults. And I see the men as they become adults. We're doing a very poor job forming our guys to be men in our society, because they really believe that the way you control someone is to dominate them. They come to the table with that thought. So that means that on the lower levels during our formation periods in our homes and in our churches and in our schools we're missing something.

Poor gender socialization and rigid gender roles were also identified as contributing to domestic violence in the African American community, particularly rigid gender roles and treating boys as if they were men. The participants stressed that these negative and rigid gender roles often stem from boys being raised without fathers and men that can teach them what it means to be a man. They emphasized that women cannot teach men these roles but are forced to try in light of the high numbers of single mothers raising boys. The perceived impact of boys being raised by a woman is the growing number of men that have a limited understanding of the roles and functions of manhood and a devaluation of women. They offered that faith-based communities add to these rigid perceptions by some leaders using Biblical doctrine to say that men are not only the leaders of the home but should be obeved and able to use necessary methods to discipline their partner. These issues add to the poor gender role socialization within the community.







...this child [is] in the role of her partner. Listen to me. They begin to call him "man", and he's a baby, a child, that's her little "man". They begin to put him as a pawn, and this child never develops his masculine role, because he's satisfying her needs, gratifying a lot of her needs as being her partner. I'm not even talking sexual, I'm just talking about partners needs. But this child has never learned how to be a boy, a young boy, a child, I mean, he's forced into a role as a man. And respect, he doesn't have to respect her, because their relationship is like they're equals.

What is the responsibility of the male, what is the responsibility of the female, what is the texture of the relationship supposed to be, and really walk through that entire process of defining what this whole life process is from a Christian point of view. We do a lot of finger pointing and a lot of causation, but quite frankly, we're talking about the Christian community. We have a faith that has been once and for all been delivered to the saints. Now our problem is, we don't know what that is.

Lack of community was seen as contributing to the problem, particularly within the context of limited supports for single mothers, poor use of power in the church and its connection to the community, fear and distrust, and isolation. Communal supports have traditionally been a strength among African American communities. Without having communal supports in place to assist with some of the daily challenges of living, many African American families feel isolated and disconnected.

I just think that we also become afraid and distrustful of one another.... But that happens because that's the sort of picture, but also because, as African Americans, we're in systems more, it seems like our problems are exposed to everybody. So this picture of us is that we've got all these problems, when all the problems we have, everybody else has, because they're not in systems the way we are, you know, their stuff isn't exposed.... we internalize it and begin to mistrust one another.

The participants talked about the lack of response to domestic violence within the community and the church as being problematic. They felt strongly that there has not been a strong enough response from the faith community to address this issue. Having a poor church response was singled out as problematic with a focus on the problem of power and control within church leadership, and the abuse of scripture interpretation. The Church was viewed as both a resource and a coconspirator of violence. The persistence of racism and its continued use of stereotyping and discrimination were also identified as part of the problem. In part, because of the limited community responses, it was stated that negative stereotypes are allowed to manifest about African Americans in regards to domestic violence. The participants felt that not addressing the issue furthers the negative stereotypes about African Americans when seeking services.

She knows now that she is not safe at church. Her pastor cannot be trusted, he does not have her safety at heart. And before we start kickin' him off the deacon board, brother shoulda been in jail. And the saints should have held him there, and should have let her know, we've got your back. But we're co-conspirators in this. ... And know that before he [the pastor] gets into the issue of my gender attraction, that he will deal with my issue of safety.

Well, it's magnified, given all of the stereotypes already attributed to us, and I mean from way back, to justify oppression and discrimination and reason why we need to be suffering anyway, the issue of violence in the Black community, domestic and otherwise, simply serves as a justification for the broader society to say we're no-count, you know, we're evil, it just reinforces the stereotype that's already there.... But it's that type of stereotyping and it continues to reinforce, whether it's justified or not, people don't need a justification, they just do it.

### Consequences

When asked about the consequence of IPV, group participants spoke about the various responses to partner abuse in the black community. Participants identified three primary consequences or responses: (1) differences in how domestic violence is handled across communities, (2) the lack of accountability for African American men, and (3) inequality in responses within the LGBT community.

The participants talked about differences with how domestic violence is handled in the African American community as compared with other communities, particularly in the law enforcement and court systems. The participants identified a lack of accountability for African American men when dealing with domestic violence. Some of the participants felt that the African American community is slow to address the violence of Black men because of the negative and disparate treatment experienced generally in the criminal justice system. They argue that this is problematic because it removes accountability for men to take responsibility for their behavior.

How often do you see a man in there, of any race, specifically in terms of African American men, in prison for life for killing their female partner, it's less often.... You know, we don't hold men accountable the same way. How many mamas really tell their sons, you know, "I heard that you were beatin' on your wife and I'm not gonna say it's okay" or "you can't come here and stay when you break up with her for the fifteenth time, I'm calling the police if I hear about it again, I want you to go get some counseling, I want you to do this." How many fathers say, you know, "this is not going to happen". It doesn't happen as often as it should and I feel like the consequence is heavy on the survivor. There's a huge burden that she has to bear because we don't interrupt the violence before it stops, and we don't interrupt it as we should after it starts.





Specific consequences within the LGBT community were also identified as not receiving the same responses and supports. The participants also felt that the LGBT community did not receive the same



supports to address unique dynamics of domestic violence within that population. The police and societal responses are often not the same as in male – female relationships.

There's also a difference in the LGBT community. For, if my partner and I get into a fight and I call the police, one, if they come...., they're going to ridicule me. So you've been beat up on, and now you have to be ridiculed by the police. They're not going to arrest her, "it's a fair fight, two girls, it's just a cat fight, just do your thing, you'll be all right" and then they'll make references to your sexual activity and encourage you to go to bed.

### **Solutions**

The solutions identified by the group include the following: (1) *the church needs to change its message*, (2) *there needs to be more education in the church*, and (3) *more education and awareness is needed on this issue in the African American community*.

The participants felt that the church needed to change its message, not just with regards to domestic violence, but in general to support empowerment and healing. They felt that pastors needed to have scriptural integrity and to be reminded that "one, there is a God, two you are not God". They felt that the focus should be on healing and creating opportunities for individuals to become empowered to address these issues. Both faith in God and self-esteem building should take place to enhance the response. While the Bible can be used in many ways, it was stated that church leaders should evidence scriptural integrity. That is they should not interject their personal biases

into Biblical interpretation but should use the Bible as a tool for healing and empowerment.

*I preach a message of love and* forgiveness of Jesus Christ and I always preach a message of empowerment. What I'd like to do is *empower the person and no matter* what their past was, or whatever they did, you know, God loves them, and God will forgive them, and God wants the best possible things for you, and you are well worth it. And so what I do is I try to build up their self-esteem. I try to build them up where they been torn down, let them know that God is the answer that He's just waiting for you. But I'm hoping that, and we need support groups within the church also. And we need community laycounselors, and maybe some families to be appointed to maybe even take families in for awhile, just a short time, until they can move into a shelter.

...we need to get a fundamental scriptural understanding about what the Word truly says, about violence, about the roles of men and women, about relationships.... if I went to 10 pastors I would get 10 responses. And it comes from all the things we've been talking about. They [have] got their own issues, they[are] trying to cover their own thing up, they [are] trying to keep their own thing going, but fundamentally there's just a lack of understanding. ... there has been a lot of work on some real fundamental "this is what the scripture says" and I know that there's some difference in belief and we [are]all denominationalized[but] I believe [that people] want to know a true answer, here's what it says right in the Word.

The participants felt that there was a great need for education on domestic violence within the church community. The participants felt that men and women needed to receive more education and awareness about domestic violence and alternatives to violence, while holding violent men accountable. The participants felt that part of the reasons for the church response was due to a lack of knowledge and understanding of the issue. Consequently, community education is key to advancing the church response.

The way I explain abuse to my guys, is that it is a misuse of something that God has given that is good. So, when we abuse someone, and the relationship we have with them, no matter what level it's on, it's a perversion of something that has a good to it, and we're choosing to be selfish and selfcentered and sinful, and when then turn it on it's head and make it serve us, and that's the first message we have to teach ourselves, is how not to pervert something that is good. If you and I are friends and I take that friendship and I turn it into something cynical, something nasty, I've just perverted something that was great, something that was good, but yet we do that all the time in terms of spiritual abuse. relationship abuse, child abuse, sexual abuse, we take all these things that are good and are given to us and we turn them on their head.

## <u>Children and Youth</u> <u>Focus Group</u>

#### Types

The types of violence identified by the Children and Youth Focus Group were: (1) family violence, which included physical abuse, verbal abuse, emotional abuse, spousal abuse, child abuse, sibling abuse, and spanking; (2) community violence, which includes shootings, beatings, murder; and, (3) social violence, which includes economic abuse, alcohol abuse and institutional violence.

This group did have a ranking for the different types of abuse, feeling that spousal abuse and child abuse are particularly damaging to the African American community. The participants felt that domestic violence and other forms of abuse are tolerated.

So when you think of the violence that occurs with[in] the African American family, it's rated number one, because it [IPV]generates or trickles down all of the other issues and problems that we face because everyone's afraid of us, they're afraid to come do anything with us.... So, we face a lot of issues because of the violence that's generated from the top.

### Causes

The participants identified the following causes of domestic violence in the African American community: (1) racism and sexism, (2) child rearing and parenting practices, (3) the historical context, (4) gender socialization and rigid gender roles, and (4) the reluctance to get counseling.

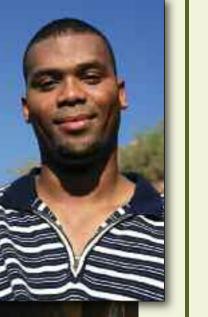






number of contributing factors to domestic violence in the African American community. They felt that "surely racism" and sexism were root causes of the violence. The participants felt that child rearing practices, rooted in violence, were a major reason why domestic violence continued. They felt that parenting practices were lacking and that many children had a lack of supervision. Included in this discussion was the perception that there was a poor socialization process for African American children.

The participants felt that there were a



My perspective is that our child rearing practices incorporate corporal punishment, which is a form of violence... You know using a form of aggression to control a relationship *especially when the relationship is* intended to be a nurturing and supportive parent relationship is something that we [learn] very early on because of the way many of us parent our children....in a lot of ways, we parent children in relationships that can be *unpredictable*. And using violence or physical punishment as a means of control over the behavior, given the cultural setting, given that there's... such a relaxed atmosphere around guns and weapons and in many instances those [things] are actually glorified.

The participants felt that the historical context was key to understanding domestic violence in the African American community, particularly related to how historical anger and trauma impacts contemporary relationships. There has not been the deliberate and specific discussion of the role that gender issues have played over the course of history and how that impacts contemporary relationships. These discussions often do not take place in the community where it needs to happen.

But we know the Black man has had it rough and still is having it rough, there's no question about that. But if it wasn't for that Black woman where would that male be, even today? There was a price that was paid, but that female paid dearly. Many men just do not listen to their wives. Now I speak from observation, I speak from 75 years of observation.

### Consequences

The primary consequences for domestic violence in the African American community was identified as the poor communication skills within the community connected to rigid gender role perceptions. The participants agreed that boys are often not given the verbal and emotional language needed to express what they are feeling which creates a void in communication and problems with the identification of what is being felt. Boys often struggle with complex feelings but lack the ability and safe place to address these issues.

...boys are not given the language to talk about or to express how devastated they are by witnessing violence in their home. You know, little girls are allowed more emotional language, boys are not given emotional language, so they act out in more violent and aggressive ways and they can be just as devastated.... like I see little boys all the time who are angry with their fathers for abusing their mothers and know that she had to leave, but of the same token, they miss their fathers. So they're dealing with so many emotions and they're such complex emotions and they're not given the language to really handle it, and they're not given the nurturance and support that a little girl[is] given, 'cause when girls are devastated, of course, you know, you feel very bad and of course you miss your father, but little boys, like, "suck it up, be a man, keep goin', it ain't no thang," and he's five. It's very, it's very traumatic for them, but I think for little boys, often, when I see them, the trauma has happened twice. First they have to witness the violence and then their feelings associated with it has been negated.

### Solutions

The participants identified the following solutions to address domestic violence in the African American community: (1) increasing education and skill development and (2) the development of culturally competent programs.

One of the solutions identified was increased education, particularly in terms of social skill development, and the development of culturally competent programs and initiatives that are rooted in a firm understanding of the African American experience. Because of problems within the community and issues of gender socialization, social skills should be emphasized but through a cultural context that is cognizant of historical and contemporary realities.

..... if men see an economic advantage to having good social skills, then maybe they would be more willing to participate. I think men usually see those kinds of forums and things as a waste of time, a bunch of talking, and it doesn't put any money in their pocket or solve their economic issues.

And I think that within the African American community we have never dealt with collectively the legacy of slavery, the psychological legacy of slavery or the emotional legacy of slavery. .... I just think that for so much of what our history is and the history that is finally now being taught in school for African Americans, it focuses so much on the kings and queens of Africa, focus so much on our wonderful triumphs that we've made. There's no conversation about the fact that slavery did happen, that slavery has had a significant impact on the way that we treat one another, the way that we raise our children.

### Law Enforcement Focus Group

### Types

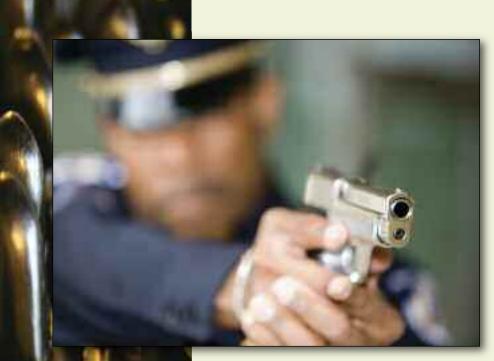
The types of violence identified by the law enforcement group included: (1) family violence, which includes domestic abuse, mental abuse, verbal abuse, physical abuse, family violence, sexual assault, and medical abuse (refusal to provide appropriate medical care); (2) community violence, which includes sexual assault, rape, murder, torture and carjacking; and (3) social violence, which includes drugrelated crime.

The participants thought it was important to really understand the different types of violence and how they are operationalized. Often people focus on physical and sexual abuse, which is critical. However, other subtle and damaging forms of violence often go unrecognized.









This one individual presented that his wife was a diabetic and he would constantly go to the store and would only buy sugar and sweets and things to keep her in that state. So, that in and of itself is a form of violence.

They also wanted it to be understood that having a lower income status made people more vulnerable to experiencing these different types of violence. They were clear in stating that it isn't "lower class" communities but "lower income" communities that may withstand these increased challenges. They emphasized that domestic violence is really a subset of family problems. They wanted it to be viewed in a more comprehensive way and that it is interrelated with other social problems.

.... in Detroit what we see happening is that when children are raised in violent homes, 50% of the time they either become victims or they become batterers. The violence extends over into their teenage life. In Detroit the middle school systems fight more than any other schools. And we also see that when you have children who were raised in violent situations they generally [go into] gangs, they end up in the drug culture. So we know that domestic violence in the family is a problem.... We see it as [it] extends over into other crimes and other behavior that you see in other [parts] of society.

### Causes

The causes of domestic violence in the African American community were identified as follows: (1) *drug use*, (2) *isolation*, (3) *family structure and child rearing*, (4) *historical oppression*, (5) *gender socialization and rigid gender roles*, (6) *chaotic home and community environments*, (7) *pro-violence media*, and (8) *mental health issues*.

The drug problem was viewed as a major contributing factor for domestic violence in the African American community. They viewed the drug problem as generational and different in the sense that younger people were becoming violent with family members in ways that did not occur prior to the crack epidemic. The participants felt that the crack epidemic and drug trafficking have contributed to higher levels of violence in ways unlike other drugs. Issues of drug and alcohol addiction have profoundly increased vulnerabilities to societal forces among African Americans.

Now, with the drug addicts, they need drugs so they rob, they do what they need to do. They take not from their personal family, they take from other people, you know, strangers. And then for the drug runner, you know, the turf is not right and they got to kill somebody or somebody stole drugs from them. You know, I can remember 20 years ago, 30 years ago, the drug scene and the drug scene now, the youth now, is completely different. 30 years ago we had a little [violence] on the streets, today it's nothing, it's outrageous, it's vicious and coldhearted.

The participants felt that isolation was another contributing factor to violence, particularly the isolation experienced by women and the community as a whole. This isolation was viewed as exacerbated by problems with family structure and child rearing. They felt that the use of corporal punishment and experiences with child molestation of African American children were key to understanding the pervasiveness of violence. The participants acknowledged childhood sexual abuse was a vital contributing factor that placed women at greater risk to experiencing violence in adult relationships.

I think they've already been programmed, they're coming from childhood, I find that a lot of women who have been molested as children, something in that process of growing up that isolated themselves because they [are]so busy searching for the fulfillment in their lives, that kind of, you know, kind of draws abusers to them. And not knowing that they[are] looking for this fairy tale life, and then they find themselves in a situation and they feel like they can't get out of it.

The participants identified historical oppression and racism as additional contributing factors. The participants felt that class status has implications with regards to frustration about not being able to succeed in the society that leads to anger, which may manifest itself in domestic violence. They felt that these issues were greater representations of historical oppression and its impact on relationships within the African American community. The role of historical oppression and its link to contemporary factors

has not adequately been explored. Consequently, individuals continue to struggle with issues rooted in a historical context that are not fully understood.

I think it comes from our ancestral, from slavery. ... we [African American women] had to be the front, we had to do everything, and we do everything! ... "we get the house, we get the car, we get the food, all you have to do is come home and eat." And when it comes to that partner relationship, intimacy, and "he's violent", we can't handle that.

I think the issue is being Black in America and seeing so many other folk having material things, especially White folks. White folks getting jobs, White folks get the chance to get more education. It's a minimum excuse, but it is an excuse just the same. And that in turn, sets up the frustration again and then you strike out to those that's closest to you.

The participants identified gender socialization and rigid gender roles as problematic. They noted that the socialization process encourages violence, particularly as it relates to how we socialize young people. There was also discussion as to the connection between today's independent Black woman and violence. The group felt that this connection needs







greater understanding and a contextual understanding of the contemporary issues in the African American community. They emphasized that Black women do not cause the violence but they have been socialized to try to manage and expect relationship problems. Some women choose to not respond, while others may become combative in an attempt to protect themselves.

... most women who feel they *can do it on their own [have]* been trained by their mother or their grandmother how to handle themselves when it comes to male relationship. The other thing ... she [may] have been violated as a child, most of 'em, almost 90?% of them. So they have, you know, shielded themselves, "I'm gonna be strong, I'm gonna do it, because somebody told me I ain't goin' to, I will never have". So, she always got her defenses up, and she is gonna retaliate. "you're not gonna do that to me. And if you are, this is what I'm gonna do to you. I'm a cut you, shoot you, or run over you." And she instills this in another form, in her children

The participants also identified living in chaotic environments and having a lack of structure and order in the home as contributing to the violence. The interviewer noted the following and the participants agreed "...that intervening factor was the degree of social organization, social control, access to economic resources". You can be exposed to pro-violence media; however, if you have access to resources and stability and order in your community, then there is less likelihood to engage in this violence that you been exposed to in media. But when there's a lack of order, then the individual becomes more vulnerable to that kind of expression".

Well, only thing I know is that when you arrest the woman, not only are the children standing there crying, but the man is puttin' on you, telling you not to take her to jail. First of all she's gotta stay there take care of these kids, second of all, when we do, when you arrest the woman, the male, 90% of the time, does not want to talk to you. So we get nothing from that particular situation. You know, it's a no-win situation. You take the mother out the home, where the children are, the children are upset, but the man's upset because he wants her to be there to make her do what he considers to be her duties. And then he won't cooperate with us, so we still have not accomplished anything. Although, he hits her next time, she gonna hit him back. So, vou know, it's like a no-win situation.

The participants also identified mental health issues as contributing to low selfesteem and a resistance to getting help for mental illness due to the fear of being viewed as "crazy". Mental health is still not understood in the Black community. It is not clear what causes and constitutes mental illness and poor mental health. In addition, individuals are still viewed negatively for not being able to manage their mental health which creates resistance to publicly seeking support and addressing the issue.

And the other thing's mental illness. You know a lot of women are on *Prozac, unfortunately, for whatever* reason..... The woman [has] to be on Prozac because, number one, her hormone level is up, she's goin' through menopause or she's pre-menopausal, or she's PMSing, and then she's gonna pick a argument... one of the ladies told me in my group she sniffs her man to smell another woman... and this woman's taking medication.... those are some of them little, them little subtle things. And abandonment issues. A lot of people who are adults now felt abandoned by their father or their mother or whoever. And they feel like you had an argument, he wanted to leave and you stood at the door and said, you ain't goin' nowhere. You have abandonment issues. 'Cause you think he ain't comin' back. He is comin' back! He just [wants] cool off.

### Consequences

The participants identified two major consequences of domestic violence in the African American community: (1) systemic issues related to disproportionate responses, and (2) the high rate of violence and lethality. Systems were seen as coming together to work against the community in response to the high level of violence in the community, and the participants felt that both men and women are at-risk for being killed due to domestic violence.

### Solutions

# The participants identified the following solutions: (1) *education and awareness* and (2) *providing counseling services*.

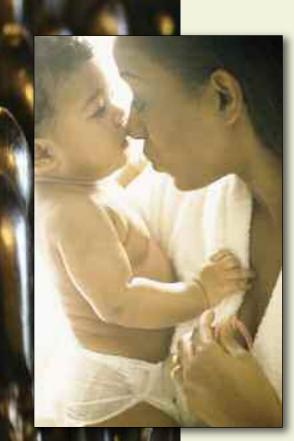
Education and awareness was viewed as the primary solution to the problem. Included in this solution is the idea that young people need to be socialized to be nonviolent and that parents need to discipline them through a non-violent means because using corporal punishment teaches violence as an acceptable behavior. Culturally specific community education is needed to help prevent and respond to issues of domestic violence. An emphasis is needed on creating more awareness of what constitutes domestic violence. Part of these education and awareness efforts should focus on how to better socialize children to understand what constitutes a healthy relationship.

Talk about it. Then next of all you have to be able to evaluate. Evaluate with all the knowledge to get people together, tell them, okay here's domestic violence, what we gonna do about i?, how we gonna treat it?. You have to educate... when you start educating, the first thing that happens, we notice, is an increase of reports going up. And finally... rejuvenate. You have to look at ways of saying, whether it be spiritually, or whether it be medically, or unfortunately if it gets to us, it's going to be through the judicial system.... and that's the final option, but I think we have to take that approach, or that concept and kinda break it all down and educate people. But once you educate 'em, you gonna push up the stats. And that's somethin' you have to say.

The participants felt it was key to increase counseling services across age groups that are community based and culturally competent. Counseling services need to be geographically accessible and regarded as an appropriate resource to help address issues. There needs to be a focus on creating normalcy for help seeking and obtaining support.







So we [started a] program called Second Response Team and Care Program.... but you have to take that blame off that female, you gotta release that tension from her. Then you gotta *tell the man, educate the* man, that it's not because of her you goin' to jail, it's because of the Michigan law. and make him understand. ..... And I'm a firm believer in if we don't change the behavior of that mother, you can give him 26 weeks of batterer's counseling, 52 weeks of batterer's counseling, and he's gonna go back into that dysfunctional situation because she's still hollerin'

and screamin' at him then you gonna see some repeat violence. Because you know, we know 26 weeks does not cure you from somethin' that it took you 30 years to learn.

### **Barriers/Obstacles**

This group identified barriers and obstacles to ending domestic violence in the African American community which included the following: (1) resistance to counseling and mental health services, (2) lack of cultural competence, and (3) limited resources. The resistance to get counseling and mental health services was viewed as a barrier, particularly in helping to get to some of the deep rooted issues behind the violence. The lack of cultural competence within these services and poor relationship with the police department was also viewed as major obstacles. Services must be culturally competent to be ideologically accessible and applicable to the population. Belief

systems can only be challenged when the beliefs are understood as being rooted in the person's culture and contemporary experiences. Providing services that do not reflect an appropriate cultural understanding will only perpetuate domestic violence. For example, one of the participants describes his or her perception of how black people often respond to therapy, keeping "family business" in the home and finding your own way of dealing with mental health issues.

We don't sit in front of a counselor and tell them all your troubles and stuff, your father is beatin' your mama down everyday or your mother is, you just go to school you don't say nothin'. 'Cause you not supposed to put stuff that happens in the house out in the street.

## Human Services Focus Group

### Types

The Human Services focus group identified the following types of violence: (1) family violence, which includes spousal abuse, partner abuse, sexual abuse, verbal abuse, male-on-male violence, physical abuse, child abuse, child abandonment, neglect, emotional abuse; (2) community violence, which includes gun violence and school violence; and, (3) social violence, which includes drug and alcohol abuse and gambling. The participants emphasized that family violence is real and is connected to other issues such as homelessness, school performance, and neighborhood culture. Domestic violence is not an issue that

can be addressed without acknowledging and responding to other issues taking place simultaneously.

Sleeping in their car for a week trying to get away from their perpetrator, they come in, with just the clothes on their back, they've left their kids some place, we've got to help them reunite with their kids.

And that spills over into the schools and to the education system too and it causes a lack of attention, you know, to the teachers. The teachers can't control the classroom because of that type of verbal abuse that the children are passing along, to the teacher.

#### Causes

The causes identified by the human services group were as follows: (1) bureaucracy and nepotism, (2) lack of education and awareness, (3) media impacts, (4) rigid gender roles and socialization, (5) mental health issues, and (6) the poor church response. Bureaucracy and nepotism were identified as major contributing factors of domestic violence. They emphasized that domestic violence takes place within the context of this larger element of violence. While residents are called to be non-violent, leadership often exudes violent acts through disrespect, neglect and systemic favoritism. These issues are important to understand.

...nepotism. That's the biggest, one of the greatest frustrations in the city of Detroit. From the city government all the way down, most of your top folks in management so to speak.... You know, they're all related to somebody, who's related to somebody, who's related to somebody, who's related to the mayor.,

The lack of education and awareness about domestic violence were also identified as major contributing factors. While the media could be seen as a resource, it does little to educate communities about these issues and was even listed as a cause of violence "because they learn behavior and how to relate to people a lot of times through the media".. The media must be acknowledged for its facilitative role in perpetuating violence. From images on television, movies, music, videos and paper mediums, the media plays a part in perpetuating violence.

Rigid gender roles and gender socialization was also discussed. The participants felt that a derivative of rigid gender roles is patriarchy. Gender roles were viewed as problematic because they teach boys to act one way and girls another way. These roles are usually focused on males controlling females as opposed to presenting healthy forms of communication and appreciation across gender. These issues are then reinforced in the Church making it increasingly complicated to address. Rigid gender roles were again acknowledged for impacting how men and women view each other and how issues are resolved. The church plays an important role in crafting these perceptions of what is appropriate or inappropriate.







Men were taught, little boys were taught to be strong, they taught them, their families taught them That's the way they're taught, you know, like I tell the guys in my program, , if a man can't support his family, he's weak. If a man shares his feelings, he's weak. It's the way you're taught.

The man is the head, the woman is supposed to follow and do all this and....Only thing is, when the scriptures, they teach that [are] portions of it....They're not teaching the whole lesson... and leaves the congregation in a mess.

...., when someone comes to you for counseling and they say, "I've been battered and bruised" and you say, "well, honey, you gotta, you know, submit to your husband and you know"... go right on back there to that relationship. I mean so you want to be in order, so you go on back to that relationship and you get kicked again, where do you go if your church tells you to go back? And they're not addressing that violence because to be quite honest with you not all pastors, not all ministers are equipped to address that issue.

Being in denial and a willingness to excuse violence along with problems with mental health were also identified as contributing to domestic violence among African Americans. Mental health is a critical issue to address as mental health continues to be viewed as a sign of weakness rather than issue that can be addressed through proper supports and treatment. Self-esteem and self-efficacy are keys to addressing violence.

### Consequences

An increased presence in the criminal justice system was seen as the primary consequence of domestic violence among African Americans. The participants felt that African Americans often do not receive equitable treatment in the criminal justice system. The participants stressed that African Americans are more likely to be directed to the criminal justice system for domestic violence as opposed to receiving treatment or other supports to address domestic violence. They emphasized that there needs to be an increased focus on community-based responses that do not necessarily always include criminal justice intervention.

### **Solutions**

The participants offered a number of solutions to address domestic violence in the African American community: (1) more education, (2) a stronger response from the church, and (3) an investment in relationship building. Education was viewed as the primary solution to address domestic violence, along with greater positive influence from the Church, and it was emphasized that these programs should be culturally competent. The need to educate clergy and help them become more aware of domestic violence is critical. Churches need to actively seek to identify and assist people trying to address this problem.

I think you need to have a forum [to] educate the clergy where you have specific classes just for the clergy, so they can understand what domestic violence is. ...Some of these churches are mega churches, and they couldn't tell you [how many of their members are experiencing this]. The participants also suggested that there be more time and resources invested in teaching how to build healthy relationships and how to improve communication skills.

### <u>Community Activist</u> <u>Focus Group</u>

#### Types

The types of violence identified by the Community Activist focus group include the following: (1) family violence, includes spousal abuse, elder abuse, verbal abuse and threats; (2) community violence, which includes youth violence and black-on-black crime; and (3) social violence, specifically *media violence*. The participants emphasized the connection between the different types of violence and that domestic violence is an important and critical social problem in the Black community that often goes unaddressed. Domestic violence is linked with other types of violence. Instead of focusing on one type of violence, it is important to also address how violence is correlated and interconnected.

Violence is the number one problem in the African American community. ... we have health problems, you're going to have environment problems and social problems and so all those things are related. So I do feel like violence is the number one problem; whether or not our community recognizes it is a different story, but I do believe it is a huge problem

#### Causes

The participants identified four primary causes of domestic violence in the African American community: (1) socialization, (2) historical oppression and its impact on the individual, (3) parenting practices, and (4) lack of community. The socialization process was identified as a major contributing factor of domestic violence, along with the continued secrecy about abuse. In order to facilitate the socialization process, there must be an emphasis on diminishing the notion of keeping the secrecy about violence that occurs in the home.



... I have learned to observe people and I can tell when someone is out of church, I can tell when someone comes and is seated in the back that if you mention the husband or the wife and a look will come upon the face of the children, of control, just by the name of the parent. I've had quite a bit of domestic violence, both physical and verbal. I've seen kids, little boys calling the girls bitches, and not thinking anything of it because the adults are around and they just say it in front of the adults. I think the problem is greater than we realize because it's sort of undercover, people aren't bringing it out. That feeling in the black community has been I guess, still is, "what happens in the house, stays in the house" so you don't talk about it outside. So we have to develop systems to identify and to teach.

They identified anger as being a primary trigger for domestic violence. They felt that this anger was rooted in historical oppression and the persistence of racial injustice. The participants strongly felt that it was critical to understand how historical oppression intersects with feelings of anger and persistent contemporary violence. The anger and rage associated with historical trauma has not been adequately explored in relation to domestic violence in the African American community.





Some families do not recognize that violence shouldn't occur in the family. They feel like that's a part of a family structure, so we have to teach them that you do not have to be abused in order to survive.

The participants also identified the lack of community as a problem contributing to domestic violence among African Americans. The issue of communities no longer working together and holding each other accountable was seen as problematic and a contributor to violence. The need to come together and work on issues collectively is needed. Finding ways to strengthen community bonds is needed to truly produce a community-based response to domestic violence.

...the regeneration or the breakup of the family system [and] the community system [is part of the problem]... I think our society took on individualism where we try to go out and become individuals as opposed to members of the community.

#### Consequences

The following consequences were identified: (1) women initiating a violent episode to stem future violence, (2) increased stereotyping, (3) negative socialization of children, and, (4) poor mental health and self-esteem, Women's pre-emptive attacks were identified as problematic, where women are actually starting the violence in order to possibly stem off future attacks against them. It is important to learn how to differentiate these pre-emptive acts from women that are in fact abusive. Helping women find other ways of coping with the threat of abuse and dissatisfaction in her relationship is critical to enhance her safety and reduce the likelihood of a criminal justice response.

> What I see now is more and more women jumping the gun. You have men and women who try to talk it out but then you have women who are lashing out. You know you can't beat this man but you're sitting there you're beating on him, you're slapping him. This doesn't make sense to me, you know you cannot beat this man so why are you sitting there trying to fight him and he has not done a thing to you. He has made you angry, he has cheated on you he has done whatever, but the bottom line is you have started the violence first.

The participants felt that there was an increase of stereotypes about African Americans as a result of domestic violence. They felt, in part, that socialization was a part of this issue because young people are socialized to be violent in their intimate relationships as early as childhood and that part of the problem lies in rigid gender roles delineated early in life. Issues of mental health and poor self-esteem further compound the stereotypes and the negative socialization, as socialization occurs within a context of poor selfesteem and at times when children's minds and ideas are being formed.

#### **Solutions**

The solutions identified by the participants are as follows: (1) comprehensive services that are also culturally competent, (2) increased education and awareness, (3) community responsibility, and (4) fostering healing *in communities.* There was concurrence that the effort to address domestic violence in the African American community must be comprehensive and culturally competent. They emphasized that we also need a better idea of the extent of the problem. They stressed that this approach needs to include our leadership as well because they too are engaging in this behavior and not holding each other accountable.

More education and awareness opportunities about domestic violence was also identified as necessary, particularly related to changing what was discussed as many years of tolerating violence. Community education and awareness helps to address misinformation about domestic violence and creates the opportunity for dialogue on the needs within the community. There must be an emphasis on community-based education that is culturally based.

I believe truly that many communities of color share things in common culturally, some of those things are actually interchangeable. I think that we need to have more of that dialogue and I think this is an excellent opportunity to maybe for the first time, provide people across the state of Michigan information about what is going on around the[state].

They emphasized the importance of making this a grassroots issue where the community comes together and takes responsibility for changing the course of domestic violence. The participants felt that moving forward on this issue was not likely to come from leadership but from within the actual communities. Coordinated community responses far too often equate to agencies working with a disproportionately lower number of actual community groups. It is critical that the community is involved and engaged with these issues.

> [in the past] The neighbor watched you ... I believe highly in the grass roots foundation. It has a purpose, its very important. It's a basis of building something far more permanent. We have had many upstart projects in the African American community. We've had a lot of projects start up with good intentions but they fall short, people lose interest or they don't turn out to be what [you think they are] or they're disappointed in the leadership. People have to have interest and believe in the project that they are doing and if you start in your neighborhood, your household, it's truly a way to get invested.

The participants emphasized that due to persistent and historical oppression the emphasis in the community is on survival and not these types of issues. They stressed that part of the solution has to be changing this factor and helping our communities to heal and thrive. If communities are focused on survival, it diminishes the ability to focus on domestic violence and other issues. There must be a conscious and focused effort to address the sociopolitical and economics of African Americans to begin to address domestic violence.





For a lot of African Americans the main priority is to survive, so when it comes to dealing with violence or whatever...I have to eat first, I have to make sure my children are being taken care of first. Once I get finished with that I have to go to sleep because I'm tired and I have to start over again. We have a cycle of survival, which includes violence at the turning of the wheel.

#### Barriers

The limited inclusion of cultural competence and the perspective of African American women in the women's movement were also identified as problematic and persistent. The idea that culture is not relevant or critical to program development continues in the field. This oversight does not take into account the unique experiences of African American women. The role of African American women in the movement continues to be negated and not understood by people committed to addressing domestic violence but not with respect to culture.

That has been part of the problem the so called women's movement was never needed for black women. Black women didn't need it then, black women shouldn't have bought into it because black women have always been if you go back down to history warriors. Black women didn't buy into that, white women needed that because they had no power in their own communities.

### <u>Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual,</u> <u>Transgender (LGBT)</u> <u>Focus Group</u>

#### **Types**

The types of violence identified by the Lesbian Gay Bi-sexual Transgender Group are as follows: (1) family violence, which included physical abuse, mental abuse, verbal abuse, domestic violence, and child abuse; (2) community violence, which included gang violence, carjackings, black-on-black crime; and (3) social violence, which included substance abuse, intentionally infecting others with HIV, and suicide. They emphasized that violence has a far-reaching impact on the behaviors of people, especially women. The participants also identified individuals infecting others with HIV as a form of violence. Again, domestic violence is not a simplistic issue but interacts with other compelling social and political problems. There must be a focus on helping others to understand how domestic violence is integrated with other key issues.

I'm alarmed at the number of HIV infections that are continuing to arise.....There are a lot of people....that know they are HIV positive that are continuing unsafe sex practices and although this is not an overt form of violence, it certainly has...an astronomical impact, particularly on the black female community as well as [the] gay community in terms of people getting infected and having to [deal with it] the rest of their lives.

The participants identified the rising rate of suicide among African Americans as another type of violence, particularly as it relates to increasing societal issues impacting these rates. The suicidehomicide connection must be examined within African American communities. As the suicide rate increases among people of color, there must be some focus on identifying triggers and factors that are unique to issues of culture.

Suicide can be related to other types of violence and...If you're psychologically stressed enough by the violence in your life, child abuse and domestic violence abuse....it has led people to commit suicide. And in our community, we're finding that statistics bear out that a lot of LGBT's, as they're discovering who they are and what their identity is, they confront homophobia and sometimes that leads to depression and selfdestructive types of behavior which often lead to suicide. In fact, one third of the teenage suicides are due to a person struggling with their attraction orientation. So I don't want us to forget about suicide as an issue of violence in our community too....especially in the LGBT community.

The participants emphasized that one could not ignore the impact of stereotyping, hateful language, and discrimination as a result of sexual orientation. They stressed that this too is a form of violence. It is critical to acknowledge that hate crimes are a form of violence and that this violence can propose unique challenges, particularly in the LGBT community. Negative and discriminatory treatment creates a reality of enhanced stress, fear, and anger for being in a situation that can diminish the self-esteem. ...because you know, we hear all the time the jokes of you know, the gay bashing in comedy. You know, all the comedians out there do it, but it's never been impressed as being serious as the violence, because

it's making humor of it, and making light of the situation versus actually addressing it; so nobody has a real sense about how painful it is for the individual that has to go through it.

#### Causes

The participants identified a number of causes of violence: (1) rigid gender role socialization, (2) greater societal factors, such as poverty and the glorification of violence, (3)historical and contemporary forms of oppression, (4) limited human capital, (5) child abuse and its connection to adult violence, (6) poor communication skills and its connection with low selfesteem, (7) exposure to witnessing violence in the home as a child, and (8) stereotyping and discriminatory treatment of those in the LGBT community. The participants identified rigid gender role socialization as being a primary reason for violence.

You've got a lot of young men who can't express themselves at home, that can't talk to their family, can't talk to their father, the only way that they know [how] to communicate is to hit....So therefore they can kind of go back out into the community with all this hostility and frustration and then people associate that and always put it to the young black man...







African Americans [are] usually destroyed or devastated by what happens at home....and it kind of goes onto the community soul and it reflects everybody as a whole.

The participants also identified larger societal factors such as poverty and the glorification of violence in society as interwoven

factors that impact domestic violence. While some agreed that poverty is a critical factor, they felt that it was characteristics of only some poor people and due to Black professionals moving out of low-income communities. In addition, some felt that poverty was often used as an excuse for behavior.

I think that violence is interwoven in hopelessness and poverty. I think that 40, 50 years ago our parents were in poverty and they had a sense of hope and there were some expectations that they could rise and that they could educate themselves and move on in life and become contributing members of society, whereas I think now people that are impoverished don't see any answers. I don't think society is providing answers to people in impoverished areas. No pathways. No role models.

The need to be able to have control over something in life, due to disenfranchisement and oppression, was also identified as an issue that results in a displacement of anger and frustration. They believed this reaction is rooted in historical and contemporary oppression. The historical context continues to be acknowledged as critical to understanding unique challenges, the realities of helpseeking, and the barriers that inhibit action.

*I think violence really is about* control. You lack control in one aspect, whether it's self-imposed or not, and therefore you gain control using violence, but I think that the root of it is the big overlap where you... lose your power in those [economics, education] things, and now I've got a need that I have to control something. Whether it's taking drugs...I hit you... I'm controlling that.... suicide, I'm controlling that...I'm taking the control no matter how it affects anyone else, [and] now I'm gaining control in this aspect, because I lost control in other aspects.

The participants identified child abuse and the use of physical violence in the form of discipline as a contributing factor that continues to be utilized in the African American community as an acceptable practice. This connection needs greater research in order to fully understand its impact.

I mean everything that you do, the child absorbs it, just like a seed. You plant a seed, it's gonna grow, and if you plant a seed in an environment where all it is compact anger, that's all they're gonna do. They're gonna grow up and they're gonna impact another child or affect someone else.

Poor communication skills, resulting from witnessing unhealthy communication in the home, were also identified as problematic particularly related to low social skills, low selfesteem, and feelings of insecurity. Coupled with growing up in a home where violence occurs, communication skills were identified as being particularly problematic. There needs to be an emphasis on developing communication skills and patterns that are healthy and that address the challenges of different communication styles and methods across gender.

....I think children learn at an early age to become violent. Some of them grow up in violent homes [where the only communication they have seen] between adults is from anger, and not being able to resolve conflicts....not being able to communicate, so they learn early, the only way to communicate with somebody is to be rough with 'em, verbally abusive, or verbally aggressive with 'em and then it gets reinforced by what they see on TV, talkin' about the raps, the hip hop, the lyrics and music, and that becomes normal.

Homophobia and transphobia were both identified as major contributing factors connected to isolation and misunderstanding as well as being manipulated by an abusive partner. Being isolated in a same gender relationship and the continued discriminatory treatment of those in the LGBT community was identified as a contributing factor which was further exacerbated within the transgender community. The LGBT community continues to be challenged by discriminatory treatment that isolates them and places that community at greater vulnerability. It is critical to find ways of addressing the discriminatory treatment and thinking that devalues others based on sexual orientation.

I imagine transgenders tend to get ignored, swept under the rug, not taken seriously, treated as a joke, and so where do they go to get help in a domestic violence situation or an attack or an assault? There have been some murders, quite a few murders, you never hear about them in the mainstream news, it's just completely, completely swept under the rug.

Molestation and vulnerability to violence, particularly for women was also highlighted. The participants concurred that boys also get raped and so this issue is prevalent among both genders. There was great discussion about the vulnerabilities and challenges for both populations. There must be a consistent and concentrated efforts to address the high level and silence of sexual abuse in the African American community. Supports and mechanisms to respond to this victimization must be crafted for all communities. Perpetrators should be held accountable for their behaviors and given treatment. The focus on this critical issue has been limited but warrants targeted prevention and intervention efforts that respond to multiple forms of victimization experienced by women.

It seems like a lot of women were molested by men who the community knew, but didn't do anything about it.... we make excuses. So I think that women are more vulnerable when it comes down to violence and I think it becomes more accepted and more learned behavior that's gonna happen.

Men are never able to be considered victims from birth. So it's easier for a woman to come out and say she was victimized versus if a guy said he was victimized at any point in his life, it's already, you know, a strike against his manhood. ... You can never be a victim, a man can never be a victim. And that's sad.







#### Consequences

The primary identified consequence of domestic violence in the African American community was having increased numbers of broken homes. The fragmentation of many African American families and the increasing number of boys and girls growing up without a father or positive male presence is debilitating. There must be greater collaboration with fatherhood initiatives and Black male organizations to engage in the dialogue around this issue. community. There needs to be a focus to dispel myths and address negative stereotypes of the LGBT population. The LGBT population is critical to the viability and strength of efforts to stop domestic violence. They cannot be viewed as separate from the community but embraced as a critical part of the African American community.

From the African American community I expect a whole lot. I expect a whole re-thinking and a whole re-education about this issue about attraction-orientation before they can help us with our issues of domestic violence in the LGBT community. They gotta know who we are, they gotta know who we're not, they gotta value us as having families and having relationships, you know, and one of the things we need to do is promote dialogue...

The participants felt that the church should be more active in addressing and preaching against domestic violence. They also felt that there should be an emphasis on enhancing economic empowerment within the Black community. The participants felt that the Black church could play a role in this, and that while it would not directly stop violence, it would offer a critical start. The church must play a more active and informed role in responding to domestic violence. These efforts should be coordinated and comprehensive utilizing the full opportunities of church structure, such as through ministries, sermons, and pastoral counseling.

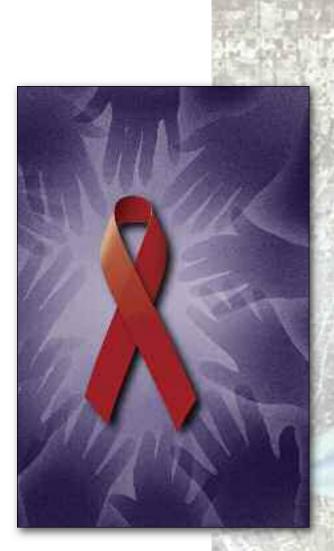


#### Solutions

There were a number of solutions identified to address domestic violence in the African American community: (1) greater education about the LGBT community, (2) greater education and awareness about domestic violence, (3) an improved church response, (4) greater economic empowerment, and (5) both traditional and non-traditional outreach and support groups. The participants stated that we need greater education about the experiences of the LGBT community, particularly those that are also within the African American I think the key ... is economic empowerment in the black community. We're talking about economics, we gotta improve our economic situation. And how are we gonna do that? First of all, we gotta know that we're worth it...Because we, individually don't think we're worthy of having economic empowerment, so that everyone can have jobs and no one has to...commit crimes, and violent crimes and all of that. You know, that's where it's gotta start. It's gotta start with ourselves, with our self-esteem and how we treat people...

Both traditional and non-traditional support groups and outreach efforts were suggested as an important solution to aid the empowerment of individuals and communities. The participants stressed that it cannot be business as usual but that service providers need to develop new and innovative strategies to engage this hard to reach population. There must be greater exploration and testing of outreach methods that respect the population and can be documented for further use. Outreach must be central to community education and awareness efforts.

I think we need some outreach and we need to go to where people are, because obviously they're not gonna come to us just because we have [a] meeting space...we may have to go into the bars and all of that and you know, dance with someone and educate them on the dance floor!









## Summary and Recommendations

The diversity of participants' responses across these six groups makes on thing clear: intimate partner violence in the African American community is a complex issue and one point of intervention alone will not stop the violence. Based on the respondent's feedback, we offer eight specific recommendations.

- (1) We must address those historical factors that continue to impede the development of healthy African American relationships. This effort must be done in the context of committing to address those institutional and systemic factors that undergird and perpetuate racism, sexism, and classism, and discrimination based on sexual orientation.
- (2) There must be an investment in restoring the strength of the African American community from neighborhood to neighborhood. More must be done to re-establish community linkages and re-create that sense of communalism that has traditionally been a strength of the African American community.
- (3) We must create opportunities for defining healthy African American relationships and supporting these relationships through creating mechanisms of education, and socialization of skills that honors the individual and couple.
- (4) There must be an emphasis on re-

defining gender roles in the African American community that is rooted in a positive cultural tradition and not an adaptation of other cultural values. We need to be clear on how to socialize African American children and re-socialize the community on what is appropriate and expected within the context of healthy gender roles.

- (5) There needs to be greater attention given to the contemporary challenges of Black parenting and how that is connected to domestic violence. More needs to be done to explore viable options and to identify needed supports centered around raising healthy Black children within Black families empowered to support their positive development.
- (6) More emphasis is needed on establishing education and awareness not only about domestic violence but the underlying issues that contribute to it. There need to be more opportunities for healthy dialogue on these issues that supports an agenda of change.
- (7) The Black church must stand as a beacon of light that is not only more informed about this issue but committed to practicing these principles from a non-sexist and nonoppressive place. The emphasis on healing, liberation theology and empowerment needs to be reexamined and then operationalized as a part of regular and ongoing church practice.

(8) Finally, it is critical that all of the above happens in a way that is culturally responsive to the unique issues of the African American community in question. There must be a commitment to ensure that our practices, policies and research are truly culturally-based, accessible and community-based and driven.

## Closing

The participants again are commended for helping each of us to re-think our understanding of the complexity of domestic violence in the African American community. They offer critical insights to inform our practice, policy options, and research agendas. It is clear that African American communities are interested in stopping the violence plaguing their communities and finding solutions that will aid in healing the community for today and generations to come.

## References

Bent-Goodley, T.B. & Williams, O.J. (2005). Community insights on domestic violence among African Americans: Conversations about domestic violence and other issues affecting their community, Seattle, Washington. St. Paul, MN: Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community.





# **Community Insights on Domestic Violence among** African Americans

**Conversations About Domestic Violence And Other Issues Affecting Their Community** 



### Detroit, Michigan, 2003

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