According to respondents, other causes of violence included:

(1) Drug use and drug trafficking: the ability to make money through the drug-related lifestyle can be more appealing than the other economic alternatives available to this particular population. In the past, older generations might have engaged in a similar type of illicit behavior (i.e., selling whiskey) for a short period of time to help family finances, with the goal of ending such behavior once family economics were more stable. Today, participants noted, participating in selling drugs is more of a lifestyle, with money earned going towards personal financial gain.

(2) Desire for instant gratification: group members believed that this generation has been characterized by a desire for instant gratification, which in turn creates a mindset that seeks the fulfillment of present needs or wants above all and fails to consider the consequences of actions or plan for the future.

(3) Societal expectations: one respondent explained that in the past the power of public opinion pushed people towards conformity but now the emphasis is on individuality, or non-conformity. Instead of societal pressure to follow the law and stay out of trouble, delinquent behavior has become more acceptable.

In addition, the current definition of manhood (i.e., male authority in the family) factors into conflict management, the group believed. Couples can come to an impasse when the male feels entitled to something within the relationship and the woman feels equally entitled to say no. The situation can either be resolved through communication, or might escalate to violence.

Participants also discussed the changing role of women in the workplace and the home, and how those changes have influenced family dynamics. In the African American community, many women are the head of their household and are used to making the decisions and wielding the power, which can cause friction when a male enters the picture. One respondent shared his view on the authority of African American males over their female counterparts:

Black men have always had sort of a shaky kind of chauvinism or patriarchy cause black women have always worked, always contributed, and there is a trend of egalitarianism in black male/female relationships that goes way back to both people working together to try to have something.

(4) A lack of education and a lack of knowledge of the alternatives to violence. One group member questioned, "Do we lack the ability to know how to do something other than argue and fight?"

(5) A lack of African American leadership in the community

(6) A younger generation of parents and grandparents taking on responsibility: the age of parents today is decreasing, according to respondents. "Children are the parents of children… the age of parents of children is so close to the children's age themselves that there's not enough room for them to have that wisdom." Not only has the parent population changed, but the norms instituted within the family have also undergone transformation. "Children being abusive towards their parents is acceptable," one group member noted, whereas in the past more formal and respectful attitudes were expected.

One participant described the generational changes this way:

The older generation is dying out and being replaced with a younger generation of grandparents who used to be the stabilizing force in those areas. And I think the fact that we as a people, we're losing our own traditions and level of respect because the people we always looked to keep us on point are no longer there. And they have been replaced.

(7) Hopelessness: A lack of hope passed down from community leadership to parents and then to children was also listed as a cause of violence. Fear for the future implications of generational hopelessness and helplessness was communicated by one participant:

There's something else I've seen over the years that scares me to death… [when they] resort back to the days of yore when blacks had no control. And they carry that mentality through the generations. Instead of teaching the next generation that we can in fact do better if we have the ability and the will to do it. But there's some people who have remained hung up on, we can't because we're black… there's no point in even trying.

Respondents viewed violence in the African American community as a destructive cycle that cripples potentially productive future citizens, breaks up the family, and slows the overall development and betterment of the community.

[Violence is] …killing off what could be some good potential citizens with the violence that occurs… they can be innocent bystanders with a promising future and just because of the crimes that do occur, that could knock that potential individual out of a good future.

Participants also believed that in addition to these consequences, violence creates a void in society: the lack of available potential mates for young African American women and a lack of role models for young children who are seeking adults to look up to and mentors to provide guidance.

In order to solve the problem of violence within the African American community, group members saw opportunity as a major key to facilitate change, educationally and economically. Increased education on communication and anger management skills was described as one possible solution, and one member suggested offering more forums and opportunities for dialogue within the community in order to discuss the topics of race and violence. The presence of visible, strong leaders who are able to take a stand on issues, advocate, and be prominent figures within the community was another need mentioned within the group. Also unity, collaboration, and working together for change to promote the issue among a wider audience were listed.

It's gonna take leadership in the African American community… there's not another Martin Luther King, it's not Al Sharpton, it's not anybody else, they're not there, so we have to get over that and understand that there aren't those people but collectively there are… different folks throughout the country who are working in satellite areas and that we as a black people need to come together to really sit down and deal with what's going on with us so it's not just an African American thing.

There were several issues that the group recognized as obstacles in addressing violence in the African American community. Group members decided there needed to be more organizations and resources for victims of domestic violence, and that these programs and resources needed to be more accessible to the community. They cited the lack of opportunities for African Americans to seek help and to better their lives as another obstacle. Finally, they recognized that the opposing viewpoints of those who deny that violence is a problem within the community were another hurdle to surmount.

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Greenville - Faith Community

Eastern North Carolina often has been called the "bible belt" by other parts of the state, by the southeastern region of the United States, and by the nation. Eastern North Carolina has an abundance of churches, which represent the major religions, protestant denominations, and sects and "starter churches" that populate the area east of Raleigh, the state's capital. Pitt County, the community where this focus group was conducted, has a population of 134,936 persons; it also has 291 recognized houses of worship. There literally is a church on almost every corner.

There are counties in the eastern part of this state, which are predominantly African American, and other counties where American Indians are the largest ethnic group. Eastern North Carolina is an area where religion and spirituality have been integral parts of African American culture. Many of the social movements of the mid-twentieth century originated in North Carolina churches and were fostered by religious leaders and congregations, which sought change for all minority groups. Leaders such as Ben Chavis, Jesse Jackson, Sr., Kelly Alexander, and Henry Frye were congregational leaders who with their fellow parishioners led the way of change for African Americans. Religion and churches helped a people define themselves rather than education or occupation or other socioeconomic descriptors (Boyd-Franklin, 1989).

In eastern North Carolina, the church is the first resource consulted for help with family problems (Ellison, 1993). That fact is the primary reason that the faith perspective is included in this discussion of domestic violence within the community setting. Ten persons (8 women and 2 men) comprised the Faith Community Group, which responded to the 9-question interview. The two males in the group were ministers from the Pitt County and Lenoir County areas; two other group participants described themselves as an associate minister/mental health professional and as a minister/social worker. Other respondents included domestic violence service providers (2), a retired teacher's assistant, a homemaker and youth leader, a social worker, and a nurse.

Respondents initially identified violent crime (i.e., assault on a female, assault on children, gang violence) as the primary type of violence that occurs in Pitt County and in eastern North Carolina. After some discussion, they added violence related to drugs, psychological intimidation, and violence that results from internalized racism. They proposed that the latter refers to "black on black" violence and to "black on white" or interracial violence. Sexual assaults, school (middle/high school/university) assaults, and physical domestic violence incidents were discussed by the respondents. Of particular interest were the actions taken by local hospital police to protect workers and other patients from all forms of violence. The group overwhelmingly agreed that violence against women has first place both in frequency and severity in eastern North Carolina.

Pitt County, the community where this focus group was conducted, has a population of 134,936 persons; it also has 291 recognized houses of worship...

Gang violence and its rapid growth over the past decade was a concern of respondents. They cited organized gang activity in Greenville and Pitt County. This activity occurs in Asian gangs, Latino gangs, "Crips" and "Bloods", all of which have been documented by sheriffs' departments and police departments. Some gang members have been attacked while hospitalized, which has required increased hospital security. Women and gang membership were spoken of as particularly problematic --women often are gang raped or required to have sexual intercourse as part of initiation rituals. "Other women are expected to not only have sex, but also to fight with other women who are either in the gang or the mates of gang members." Group respondents expressed concern about the ferocity that exists among male and female gang participants. There was brief discussion about similarities and differences between Latino and African American homes, specifically about the dominant roles of Latino men, the subordinate roles of wives or partners, and the roles of paramours who may or may not live with the Latino couples in their abusive homes.

Violence between lovers and spouses in the homes serves to model behavior for children. At schools, these children become bullies or are again victimized. Whatever youngsters learn in their homes, "they take it to school." One woman remarked,

> *I work in a pediatric clinic, doing evaluations . . . We have young children who tell us things about themselves and their friends, and you know that they've been either sexually assaulted themselves or exposed in some way. … We had a 4-year old the other day and we were talking about what are the kinds of things that you do and he said, 'Well you know, boys have to hump their girlfriends.*

Children witness the sexual assault and violence in a variety of locations–in their homes and neighborhoods. "Yes, there are sexual assaults and sexual activities now even in our high schools. Sometimes it's called rape and sometimes it isn't. But it really has to make you wonder about the safety of the high school environment." One male discussant said that he did not think "sexual assault" when condoms are found. Instead, he offered, "that's consensual sex. Because in a real assault on a woman, a man would not take the time to use a condom." To use a condom would suggest that it was consensual. A woman protested, noting that she works with perpetrators who have offended more than once and they used a condom because they "don't want to get caught."
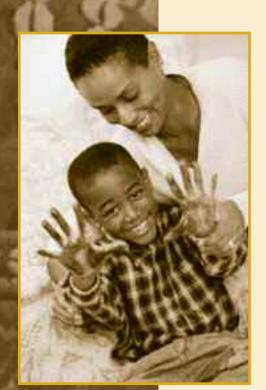
When asked the cause(s) of violence today, several probable causes were presented. These included:

(1) The lack of discipline with today's children. "We were disciplined by our parents, but, now the law says that we can't be hit youngsters";

(2) Children are being left home by themselves –unsupervised-- while mothers go to work and fathers goes to work. Kids are left to take care of themselves and they do whatever they want to do, to have their way."

(3) "Too many times children are raised by only one parent, usually the mother."

(4) "They do things in secret, a lot of girls get pregnant and the mother doesn't even know that they are pregnant cause they wear all these big clothes and, when they have the baby it's like a surprise to everybody."

...There literally is a church on almost every corner.

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When asked, how do you think violence compares in importance to other problems that are facing the African American community? One group member responded:

> I live in the northeastern part of North Carolina. I serve four counties, which are among the thirteen poorest counties in the state. In our area, there are no major industries; employment is farming. The lack of unemployment benefits, the amount of money that people make per capita is not enough to cover their needs. Then comes the 'drinkin" and the drugs and frustrations, it all just fits together and it makes the environment ripe for domestic violence.

There were differences of opinion about the role of drugs in violence. One participant linked drugs to social and political unrest (high unemployment and rioting), the economy and anti-poverty programs during the 1950s and 1960s, and to issues of social control most often identified with the public welfare system. Additionally, one participant remarked,

> In some cases individuals may use drugs as a crutch. But, there are individuals whose lives have been totally changed because of drugs and substance abuse, so they're doing things that they would not ordinarily do. We have a methadone clinic within our agency so that those individuals who have been heroin abusers can come and receive methadone so they can actually go to work everyday.

One female participant said, "Black people are dealing with the problems they always have –drugs, alcohol, promiscuity, television violence, there's nothing new." She spoke about the silence associated with violence and drugs, saying, "we don't bring them out of the home; we hide them out of public site. We live a façade." The group agreed that the problems continue because you cannot fix something that you don't acknowledge. They spoke of some abusive homes to which the community seems to turn a "blind eye."

When asked again about the causes of violence, focus group participants cited ignorance, lack of strong family values, learned behavior, the media, and poor choice control. When asked the most important cause of violence, respondents mentioned drugs, unemployment or underemployment, education and "under-education," and violence depicted in the media. Three persons expressed their frustration with television and radio media. They were concerned about the images of Black people –Black males in particular—depicted there.

The group expressed some concerns again about unemployment and the loss of major companies (TRW, Proctor and Gamble, etc.) to Mexico. They saw the movement of these businesses as lost opportunities for improvement and progress. Learned helplessness or the lack of a work ethic for multiple generations was the topic of some discussion among participants. Discussants thought that money alone was not the answer to fix the problem of family violence; there is a need for some motivated education.

> I have people who are 23 years old and have six children already. Let's pretend I am one of them. So, if I don't know and I wasn't taught, how can I pass correct information on to my children? Especially if I'm not the type of person to go out and ask somebody for help. … There are a lot of women who will not take the initiative to ask somebody for help. You can't always blame the children cause you gotta see where they're coming from. …

> Take a family of five --three children, husband, wife. If the mother and father have never gone to college or never finished high school, unless they've been out in the world and have educated themselves on their own, they don't know to tell their children about things important to them.

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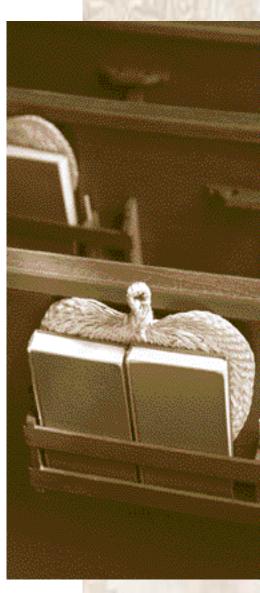
Another respondent asked,

When did this happen? I grew up in a home with a grandfather who had a sixth-grade education, who college-educated five children. And then turned around and started making sure that his grandchildren, of which I was one, was college-educated. Even though he dropped out of school to take care of his family when his father died, his whole goal was to insure that all his children were college educated. And he did that. They had a vision that they wanted something better. What happened between my grandfather's generation and now that they don't have that vision any longer?

When queried about a link between how families pass on information and success to their children and if that can be linked somehow to the violence in the community, respondents talked about learned behavior and lifestyle. An example of condoning violence was given, a participant allowed a family victimized by the male partner to seek refuge in her home. "But you didn't call it violence, you just said he's cutting up again and they need a safe place. When you grow up and get educated, you realize it was family violence."

Respondents thought that violence segregated people within the African American community. This was a major concern as the group again discussed black violence, media portrayal and racial competition. They talked about the unique role of the church, given its history and social impact on the black community. Several women spoke of religious persons who were abusers of women and children. One spoke about "church officials who will get the pastor out of jail after he's been picked up for assaulting his wife."   A male participant made two points: (1) church "members should not allow their pastors to do that [domestic violence]" and (2) church ministries should be integrated to include all of the problems that you know exist in your community. If they do not, then the minister is wrong, and the parishioners are wrong for allowing this to happen. "A minister is called by God and will be led by God and he will know what the real problems with violence are. He must spend time with each of the ministries and direct them in areas. What has happened is we are selecting the wrong ministers." The general consensus was that the church needed to assist in more finding homes for families affected by violence.

When asked if men and women are impacted differently as a result of violence, one respondent said, "I've heard from domestic violence programs that you'll have judges who say there's no such thing as domestic violence in this community. And so consequently he [the judge] will not hear any of the cases. So, there is no defense for women in that judicial system."   On other occasions, "perpetrators who come to court will bring their ministers with them. Male abusers forget all about Christianity and the Bible until they have to stand up there before the judge."   Other persons spoke about the political nature of the justice system, that it is often politically stacked against the female victim. One participant said,

I have to commend our three district court judges and one chief district court judge who started our batterer's task force. We now have a full-fledged batterer's program. The three judges that I work within our area have a 'no drop' policy when it comes to crimes that were committed against females. They will not drop the charges. Abusers are going to go before the judge. He may dismiss it, but he's not going to allow that victim to go to the prosecutor before that case starts and say, 'We've made up and I'd like to have the charges dismissed.' The judge is going to hear it out. In the state of North Carolina, Hertford, Bertie, and Northampton counties have the highest conviction rates for domestic violence in the state of North Carolina. The three counties are rural and very poor.

The general consensus was that the church needed to assist in more finding homes for families affected by violence.

Another remarked, "In Bertie County, even one of the big judges beat his wife. And he had to go to jail. But they sent him out of Bertie County to serve his time. What I'm saying is that one of the same district judges you talked about, beat his wife. They have problems too or at least he sure did."

The group identified seven solutions that the eastern North Carolina community developed to combat domestic violence. They included:

(1) A domestic violence program in the Pitt County hospital that involves the chaplaincy, the hospital police department, and the INSIGHT support program (psychologist, counselors, etc. who work with staff and link them with the police and educate them about how to go through the court system to get the kind of protection that they need.) Victims also get emotional help to build their self-esteem.

(2) Mandatory education for families who have experienced violence.

(3) Social outreach. "They have a very good fatherhood initiative for fathers or soon to be fathers. They accept young men who want to come in and be educated about certain aspects of dealing with violence and other things."

(4) Presentations to the general public and the faith-based community. "You have to keep reinforcing the message. Earlier is better. You cannot wait till children who are violent get to the middle school and try to change their behavior. We should start in Pre-K."

(5) Another solution is to educate the faith community, especially the leaders. "Education is important for pastors, who need to know how to help their congregations."

(6) Creation of a "safe" group, sponsored through mental health, which could be housed in a church was proposed. One participant noted that a women's advocacy group in Durham was trying to locate a domestic violence support group in a church setting.

(7) A nurse participant noted, "One of the things that we did at the hospital was to put brochures and information in the ladies rooms. Female victims can just pick up the information and put it in their pocketbooks and go on."

One participant, a member of the North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence, asked, "How do you bring the faith community to the table about domestic violence issues? We have found getting them to the table to be extremely difficult."

This question segued smoothly into a discussion of barriers or obstacles to the faith community's efforts in combating domestic violence. Nine obstacles were cited.

1. Territoriality surrounding domestic violence.

2. Program staffs and church personnel do not want to get involved in family issues.

3. Lack of ownership or leadership in the area of domestic violence.

4. The need for Fatherhood programs to evolve to keep the attention of abusers and potential perpetrators.

5. Participation in a Batterer's Intervention Program should be legally required of all perpetrators. Churches could be very influential with this because pastors counsel the individual partners, but pastor should not try to counsel the couple together.

On other occasions, "perpetrators who come to court will bring their ministers with them.

Male abusers forget all about Christianity and the Bible until they have to stand up there before the judge."

6. One person questioned how to get people to work with groups. The response was, "there are lots of free speakers and trainers around the state of North Carolina who will come for free of charge and talk to you about violence. ... It may be a good way to start support groups or open discussions --just like some churches have auxiliary meetings during the weeknights. Why not have somebody from a domestic violence program come and just talk to ministries or the congregation about the dynamics of domestic violence?"

7. Concern about the secrecy of domestic violence becoming part of a woman's taboo was raised. "And when do we remove that veil from her? We need to stop having her own more of the problem than is hers?"

8. Lack of male attendance and involvement in church activities was questioned. "We are women that are in the church and are saved and our spouses are not. The Bible says 'unequally yoked' and that's what's going on."

9. Women who abuse men was seen as an aberration, but still a domestic violence problem. "Yes, sometimes men are victims of domestic violence. We...need to acknowledge that. We [have] a growing number of single fathers within the faith community separated from females who probably grew up in abusive environments themselves and were abusive either to their children and sometimes even attacked their husbands... It's a lot lower frequency... I saw a statistic that said about four percent of all domestic violence cases are men being battered." "Shame goes with that. If you are a young lady or a young man in a home and you see mom attacking dad, what does that do to your image of manhood?"

The Faith Community focus group generated a call to "galvanize and publicize" resources to get the word out about domestic violence. Take key personnel in churches (e.g., pastors, lay leaders, ministry group leaders) to lunch, invite them to special meetings, help people to assume responsibility for eliminating the secrecy surrounding family violence, and begin to work toward solutions were essential steps. Members also spoke of more opportunities for focus groups—such as this one—to galvanize support and generate possible solutions.

Greenville - Human Services

There has been some recognizable movement toward eliminating the different forms of family violence since the 1950s. In the 1950s, there was focused emphasis in the area of child abuse. Ending spouse abuse and partner abuse were the goals of the 1970s. "Curb the violence" efforts characterized the 1980s as society sought to prevent elder abuse, which was expanded in the 1990s to persons of different sexual orientations. Ending the violence has been the goal of social institutions, humanitarian organizations, human service programs, academicians, and community leaders. Additionally, communities have significantly increased the network of human services that work to eradicate domestic violence.

A number of the community responses noted above fall within the category of human service initiatives. The community assessment described in this report is one of the first efforts to explore the extent of and meaning of violence among eastern North Carolina's African American human service providers. Five women and one man comprised the human service group who were interviewed for this report. Their professional affiliations were diverse; participants included the director of a regional domestic violence office, a social worker/ manager of a local community shelter, an administrator with the NC Council for Women, a DSS social worker, a social worker/clinical analyst with the hospital emergency department, and a women's service center counselor.

Group members identified ten different types of violence as common in eastern North Carolina. These twelve types included physical abuse, which included physical assault of humans and other animals, sexual abuse/date rape, gang (especially youth) violence, verbal (emotional/mental) abuse, and media violence. They discussed abuse over the lifespan, identifying child abuse, spouse or partner abuse and elder abuse. Respondents talked at great length about health abuse, which they defined as destructive practices that affect human health; examples of health abuse included medical neglect, abuse of drugs and alcohol, and unhealthy lifestyle practices. There was much discussion about major crimes committed in the counties east of Interstate-95, a highway commonly referred to as the drug corridor, and police brutality. Power or political abuse by politicians also was a topic of heated conversation, with references made to recent arrests and misuse of campaign funds charges against some North Carolina state and national politicians. It was the consensus of the group that community violence or violence against one another, whether black-on-black or black-on-white or white-on-black, is a very serious problem in eastern North Carolina communities.

When asked about the relationship between these many different kinds of violence, respondents stated that they are interrelated. They talked about multiple underlying triggers of violence and abuse, which included family problems, drugs, alcohol, and unemployment. One respondent noted, "Violence is right up there with unemployment, poverty, and education. Drugs are in there too; drug trafficking is a dominant means of income. We can't fix one problem without looking at the others. They are all related; they cannot be separated." One female talked about learned behavior, when a child who has witnessed violence in the home is the class bully or may be abusive to animals. They continued this discussion and included youngsters in LDH (behaviorally challenged classes), which they described as filled mostly with black youngsters who cannot control their behavior. Participants saw violence in the community as affecting the entire community in a very negative way; they noted it is increasing and becoming more severe. "Thug mentality" is a phrase that they used to describe black male youth who exert negative peer pressure and threaten both the young and old. If not curtailed, they think this negative violence and attitude will cause the disintegration of African American families and the larger minority community.

In the 1950s, there was focused emphasis in the area of child abuse.

The human service providers talked at length about the culture of rural communities, where abuse and discipline can be seen as synonymous acts, where music, television, and video games entertain the young and hook them on the violence so prevalent in the words and actions of the "stars." If it is popular in a song or movie or game, many youngsters think it is appropriate behavior and seek to copy it. This is especially true for rural youth who may be starved to know and do what the "metropolitan" kids say and do. Many talked about the "Janet Jackson wardrobe malfunction" and "all of the clamor it caused."

When asked about the causes of violence in the African American community, respondents named five causes, which were,

(1) Lack of knowledge.

A person can only be taught up to the level of the person's understanding who is teaching you. … That's the way I was brought up in my home, that men are supposed to hit their wives and things like that, then I can only teach that behavior to my children, and so on and so on and then you get into the generational curses, and generational cycles of violence.

(2) Lack of education and the inability to break the vicious cycle of violence,

(3) Lack of good coping skills, which are exacerbated by the economy, unemployment, lack of education, disintegration of the family.

(4) Hopelessness and despair which are magnified within the family environment, and

(5) Provoking behavior, when you push somebody to the limit, as institutionalized racism does to minorities.

Black women are not faced with it as much, but black men seem to take it more internally. And of course they cannot lash out, or they feel they cannot lash out at the person who is exhibiting this racism, whether it be their boss or another man at a grocery store or wherever they may be in their day-to-day activities. On the job they take it. But, they come home and take it out violently on the people to whom they should come to for solace.

One participant coined the phrase, "Hurting people hurt each other" to describe the tendency of people to express their frustrations by hurting the people closest to them.

When asked about the causes of domestic violence in the black community, respondents cited:

(1) Insecurity that can be traced back to racism. "It is the lack of security or lack of stability in one's day to day activities, in his/her job, and being very insecure in the sense that, you know, how/where/when am I going to be compared to my white counterpart, or my Asian counterpart for that matter."

(2) Stress associated with efforts to survive economically in an unfriendly and unforgiving environment.

Ending spouse abuse and partner abuse were the goals of the 1970s.

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(3) Lack of communication between spouses and between all members of the family unit. "A lot of times I find that, we're talking but we're not really saying a lot. … We're talking but we need to learn how to effectively communicate, which is … a discussion within which one can agree or disagree on something."

(4) Ineffective coping skills. "Violent people cope, but in inappropriate ways."

(5) Lack of self-esteem on both the victim and the abuser's part, and

(6) Violence is learned behavior –from parent to child, from the community, from the media, from any source that produces desired results and can be emulated. Group participants moved easily into a discussion of the daily doses of explicit sex and violence provided through television soap operas. The sexual violence often is presented in very subtle ways and is so tightly interwoven into the story lines that negative experiences are glamorized. Several participants suggested the same phenomenon happens multiple times a day on radio music stations by rap artists through their CDs.

The group spent a considerable amount of time talking about "family time," necessary time that adults must spend with children –listening and monitoring and molding their behavior. One respondent said,

Growing up, it used to be that parents spent quality time with their children instead of … just buying them a lot of things. Now children are focusing more on other things instead of time with the family. …They have other influences growing up that we didn't have --drugs and things like that. Even though my Mom and Dad both worked, we knew we had certain things to do. But today our children have a whole lot. It's a different world in middle school than when we went to junior high. Parents have to spend quality time with our children not just trying buy their affection.

Another respondent noted,

One of the other problems I see is that the age of the parent is so close to the age of the child that the developmental issues that you think happen with a maturing individual haven't happened. … Look at a fourteen year-old who had a baby and the child is in middle school. The parent is now twenty-four; twenty-nine is the prime age when most young adults are beginning to have fun, find their careers, know who they are, have good self-images. But, momma's partying because she never had the chance to grow up, to hit the developmental milestones or benchmarks. … She says, yes, I had the child, but he's there and I'm over here. And the only time you can get them together is if the child is getting expelled from school or is in court getting ready to go to prison.

Another common scenario was discussed by the group, one which has a grandparent struggling to raise a child.

As long as they provide shelter and food and clothing, they don't see any visible signs of something going awry. A lot of times a grandparent may feel that everything is all right until they get that bad report from school. … We've got twenty-eight year-old grandparents. … Yes, there are some parents and grandparents who may themselves be very young 'children.' They may never have learned how to spend time with family.

Participants were asked about possible differences in the causes of domestic violence in other regions and in the rural east. They responded that, "Violence is violence no matter where it is." They did note differences saying that in this rural area, there is (1) almost no public transportation other than taxis and (2) a lack of human service resources or other resources to get children involved and steer them in different directions.

Social efforts were expanded in the 1990s to persons of different sexual orientations.

In an urban area you may have boys club, girls club and five million other things available to help plug kids into options. We may have one boys' club in a one hundred square mile area, if we have that. It is made worse by the problem of transportation 'cause they can't get to the one boys club -- because there's no mass transportation in rural areas. … There's not as many services. Oftentimes if you call a shelter they may not have space for you. And there is only one shelter in the community and it serves all the surrounding communities. It's an impossible situation.

Respondents all thought that violence has a strong negative impact on the community when asked, how does domestic violence affect this community? They mentioned that violence destroys family units, which are already in trouble. They talked about financial repercussions for men [with families], who are in jail. "It's taking away from the family income --they've gotta pay attorneys, fines, and all the other costs of court actions."

One respondent returned the conversation to the young, "The kids often end up exhibiting negative behavior in the schools and being placed in alternative schools or in educable or other labeled and labeled classes where most of the students are black."

A female respondent asked that the group think about how the increased number of black males in prison denies the "family unit." The "family unit" gets to be viewed only at visitations to the regional facility to see daddy or momma and that's a very different image from the traditional black family of twenty-five, thirty years ago.

Imprisonment of black people was viewed from another perspective by one participant, who said,

> *By warehousing our black men, we have provided jobs for another class of people, another class of employment. And it's a booming business. … We now have another prison going on line, a medium-security prison in Greene County. That will bring jobs to the area, but it will have a very negative impact for black men and for black women who will not have those jobs. They will be the prisoners who are overseen by those in the new jobs.*

Another participant said, "I've worked with several men who have tried to change their lives, to flee violent situations. But because they have a past reputation, if they were charged with assault or domestic violence ten years ago, the police can arrest them again because they have a history of past of domestic violence. So it can have a long-term effect; it can prevent them from getting good jobs, which also keeps their families in that poverty cycle."

The increased number of females imprisoned for assaults and murders were concerns of the participants. "…Years ago, you just never heard of a woman killing her husband or anything like that. It was very rare, but no longer." The group digressed briefly to discuss an incident of female violence –"she glued him." When asked what "she glued him" meant, they responded,
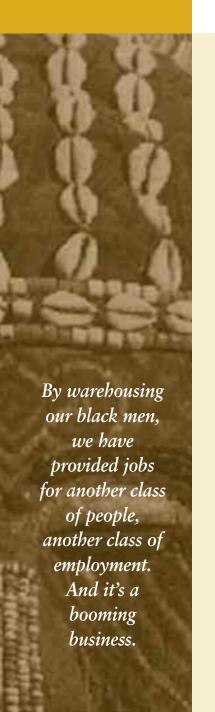
> *Lorena Bobbit --she used a knife, sometimes women use glue. We had an incident of that about fifteen years ago in Kinston. I remember it was quite something for this area. … And she glued him down with Superglue. … The man died. Amazing. It was a violent retaliation for a lifetime of domestic violence. She had been the victim, so she glued him. Just like Bobbit, same kind of thing.*

Purple and black shoes symbolize the number of domestic violence deaths in North Carolina in 2004.

We had an incident of that about fifteen years ago in Kinston. I remember it was quite something for this area. … And she glued him down with Superglue. …. The man died.

The consensus was that consequences differ when the group was asked if consequences differ for African American men and for women who commit violence. Examples presented were:

(1) the responses of sheriffs' departments to domestic violence. The law officers "always arrest the man" even though the female may be at fault. "They're supposed to take both, but I've seen situations first-hand where they had to literally drag her off of him and they still arrested him and took him away. There is a difference because of social and political stereotypes."

(2) Racial profiling. The impact of it has drastically increased in eastern North Carolina.

(3) African Americans are less likely to have adequate representation in all aspects of the criminal justice system -- representation by black lawyers, black people on juries, or by the number of African American judges, and

(4) A difference was proposed when situations pitted African American men versus white men. "... It depends on who the victim is. In black on black crime the legal system never really comes into play. But, if the victim is a white person there is more of a chance the black person will be incarcerated and convicted. ...It is not necessarily gender-based consequences, there are racial differences in general."

Members of the group identified a number of solutions to domestic violence in eastern North Carolina:

- Restraining orders are considered to be generally ineffective. They spoke about many women who had secured restraining orders and were killed by their partners.

- More successful solutions are needed that utilize a holistic approach to working with families embroiled in domestic violence. The holistic model provides education about assistance that is available through the mental health community that the entire family needs, not just the perpetrator. ...And long term, not just whatever's court mandated for the abusers. We have abuser treatment programs set up across the state now for fifty-two weeks. He will stay on task, for many reasons or go back to jail.

- There are programs that offer treatment for the whole family in three phases, (1) individual counseling for the perpetrator and for the victim, (2) couple counseling, and (3) total family counseling. The victim may have to realize that the solution may not be to keep the family together. Sometimes it's not realistic."

- Empowerment. Women, or the lower-income members of the family, need to be able to take care of the family and to sustain themselves without the husband or the mate

- Empowerment also is needed to give middle-income individuals a voice. Because of pride, status, and the ability not to care for self, the middle-income group may be locked in denial about domestic violence. This was seen as especially important for partners of policemen, firemen, lawyers, physicians, judges, etc.

By warehousing our black men, we have provided jobs for another class of people, another class of employment. And it's a booming business.

- Domestic violence education must be made available in the school systems because our teachers may be able to get through to children when parents cannot. Programs are needed in our schools to examine domestic violence (beginning in kindergarten), dating violence (beginning in elementary school), self-esteem (beginning in kindergarten), and to offer more training classes for teachers so that they can recognize cultural differences surrounding domestic violence.

- Community awareness campaigns to "make people aware that they do have options."

- Religion is an important solution available in the Black community, it is important to educate ministers about domestic violence and to discourage them from "encouraging women to be submissive to men" and "sending wives back into abusive situations because the bible says the man is the head of the family."

When asked about obstacles to solving problems of domestic violence in their community, eastern North Carolina human service participants unanimously agreed that the church is a primary obstacle. Other obstacles cited were a need for more battered women's shelters and more counseling programs for abusers, more funding for social programs, research about both victims and perpetrators, and job-training opportunities for economically distressed areas. Group members also noted that rural eastern North Carolina has a few sparsely placed services for both victims and abusers. These services take the form of treatment facilities that stress holistic care, housing, and specialized services through the public hospital. They thought community resources have different levels of effectiveness, but that ultimately the responsibility for ending domestic violence in the black community must rest with the community itself. There will never be enough public or non-state funding, so communities have to rely on other initiatives, i.e., churches, Boys and Girls Clubs, and opportunities such as this one to come together to discuss violence and methods to resolve it.

Oftentimes if you call a shelter they may not have space for you. And there is only one shelter in the community and it serves all the surrounding communities. It's an impossible situation.

Greenville - GLBTQ

Domestic violence is a serious social problem in North Carolina, a state which most recently passed revisions to its Domestic Violence statutes in 2003. While the revised legislation provides additional protection to a majority of the state's residents involved in various forms of domestic disputes, one group, those who experience domestic violence from same sex partners, continues to be marginalized. To learn more about the thoughts and unique circumstances of same sex partners in rural eastern North Carolina, six members of the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered (GLBTQ) community gathered to provide information about the experiences of those in same sex relationships. Three males and three females comprised the GLBTQ focus group, who were interviewed for this report. The female participants identified their professionals as social worker (2) and an office manager; the male participants were employed as a case manager, a clinical lab scientist, and a computer programmer.

Focus group members identified police brutality, physical abuse (hitting, slapping, pushing), mental abuse (fear), and verbal abuse (threats) as the most prevalent forms of violence found within their community. They discussed verbal threats as common communication in black families and expressed their embarrassment when such threats are recounted in mixed racial groups. The group also identified destruction of property (cutting clothing, damaging vehicles, etc.), stalking, substance abuse, and media violence as common in the region. The consensus of participants was that victims only talk of their abuse after the relationships end and that denial of abuse in relationships makes it difficult for the GLBTQ community to address violence and victimization. When asked about the relationship between the identified types of violence, respondents said they saw the kinds as "piggybacking" off of each other, as "interrelated," and as often dependent on the socioeconomic class and educational levels of both the victims and abusers. They quickly noted that they recognized violence as occurring across all socioeconomic levels, but thought it occurred most frequently among children from "lower economic groups."

When asked about causes of violence, participants talked about intergenerational exposure to violence and learned behaviors, the collective experience of slavery, and the biblical implications of "spare the rod and spoil the child." Respondents spoke of "parents wanting to control our children in public" and concern about "what might happen to them in the system" if they did not provide strong discipline and control. "If I don't beat you, the police is going to be beating you later," was stated by one participant. There was discussion of control and its purpose in same sex relationships. Respondents saw control as used by a "dominant or stronger partner," of "having the final say in the relationship," of male (aggressor) and female (non-aggressor).

> *They want to be able to look and identify with their eyes who looks more masculine or feminine. ...Roles are very important in the black community. ...Straight folks are trying to figure gay and lesbian roles out. ... I know of a situation where in a butch-fem relationship, the fem woman was beating up the butch person. The fem was the abusive person.*

Participants talked about how mental illness can exacerbate an already "explosive relationship." They rejected the notion that rigid roles supported same sex violence and suggested that rigidity was more characteristic of heterosexual society. They repeatedly talked about the silence associated with same sex relationships in eastern North Carolina. One participant mentioned insecurity as a strong cause of domestic violence in gay and lesbian relationships; he clarified the idea by suggesting a causal relationship between insecurity and perceived infidelity by one's partner.

"I wonder if the perpetrator initially feels bad about it, but when they do it so much, when it becomes second nature, do they feel guilty anymore?"

"… Sometimes rigid roles lead to violence but sometimes lack of clarity about roles leads to insecurity that leads to violence." Respondents agreed there were particular "stressors related to being in the gay lifestyle" and that "gay marriage would not necessarily decrease the rate of violence."

Another respondent spoke about a lack of respect among heterosexuals for same sex relationships, noting, "I don't know about with men but I think a lot of times straight people don't respect lesbian relationships. They just assume it's two women or something, … they wouldn't flirt with someone's husband but they don't have a problem flirting with your woman."

Another concern discussed by the group was social, career related, and financial "partner envy" and the conscious or unconscious competition sometimes associated with it. They talked about partner envy among interracial partners and thought the envy or jealousy or "interracial resentment" would be strongest for the African American person. However, they also agreed, "If the African American was making more, … because that's not the norm, then that might cause some resentment from the Caucasian person." Some discussion ensued about the perceived hypersexuality of black women and men causing a Caucasian partner to exert more social control, which could cause domestic violence in interracial relationships.

When asked how domestic violence in the gay community compared with other problems facing African Americans, one participant thought,

> Black people don't really acknowledge domestic violence as being a holistic problem, as much as an individual problem. They say, it's their problem over on that street. I think a large percentage of African Americans don't see it as a large problem.

Another participant noted, "… I remember seeing an interview with Mary J. Blige and she said she didn't know a woman in a relationship who wasn't being abused."

A third respondent said the domestic violence is "very prominent but not important. It is prominent but it's ignored." She continued, "I think you have a lot of generational domestic violence victims and perpetrators within family systems. I think you have both perpetrators and victims within one family system --so it just kind of evens out and negates each other."

Another woman spoke about the nature of black same sex violence, saying, "They may be getting abused badly so the response is just to do something back. They're trying to slash their man or whatever but it doesn't really solve anything because the same cycle just keeps happening." Respondents purported that the nature of "the violence is different. …Somebody might beat you down in our community, but in the white community they have other ways to do it (beat you down) that are vicious, more subtle -- maybe you'll lose your job or something like that."

The community's perception of the enormity of domestic violence was reflected in another exchange.

> I don't know that we do a good job as a community of identifying our problems and, and dealing with them. Even in the media and rap, we're talking about violence amongst ourselves, it's a lot of black on black crimes. … I don't see that we're doing a whole bunch to try and resolve those issues. Going back to the idea of slavery, you have to endure to get through it. Sometimes we don't really acknowledge our problems. I don't know a big problem that we're as a community fighting against right now. … It would be too overwhelming if we started dealing with all the

"So many people are just used to violence, they don't see it as something wrong."

problems, the health concerns, violence, teenage pregnancy, black on black crime. We ignore a lot thinking one day it's going to get better or the Lord's going to see us through. … It's that religious thing again. That somehow it's just going to be okay. Especially in the Southern areas, there's a strong religious belief that if you just keep praying everything's going to be okay. You got slapped but just stay and hold on.

The introduction of religion prompted a discussion of what the group termed the "big sin category," which they described as "huge." They talked about an alternate lifestyle as "the worst thing you could do."

I have never gone to a service where they really get on the gambler. The whole sermon, but I have gone to church and the whole sermon is, these gay people they're trying to get all sorts of rights and I'm so tired of them trying to legalize this sin …

Respondents thought that GLBT communities might be ahead of heterosexual in dealing with HIV and other health issues. They thought of themselves as having more "educational awareness." Others said that many African Americans in their community dismissed health issues and different forms of violence "as a white concern saying, we don't deal with that." Clarification suggested that African American people in eastern North Carolina categorize black gays and lesbians as something "white." Another person thought whites were more accepting of gay people than black parents are. Still others thought black straight people accept white gay people easier than they accept black gay people. …It's cause there's lower expectations or less care and concern about blacks from blacks.

When asked about the consequences or effects of violence and abuse on the African American community and on black gay and lesbian people in particular, respondents acknowledged that all pay a heavy price. Specific consequences included low self-esteem for victims and fear for bystanders who see violent incidents. Examples of fear included one respondent who recalled being at the club and seeing somebody slap another person because they gave too much tip money; another person mentioned a fear of escalating violence, asking, "is a gun going to come out next?" One respondent spoke of fear as she recounted having observed "a fight and one lady sprayed another one with pepper spray but it got all of us. We were all choking with burning eyes. It was very uncomfortable." Other consequences cited were feeling traumatized, feeling helpless, and causing some to re-examine their relationships.

When asked about consequences that differ based on gender, the group spoke of female victims feeling especially betrayed by their female partners, feeling "a lack of trust about relationships in general," victims observing the abusing partner's struggle with the violent behaviors and then feeling badly about their actions, and anger toward the perpetrator. One male person asked, "I wonder if the perpetrator initially feels bad about it, but when they do it so much, when it becomes second nature, do they feel guilty anymore?" The group then discussed their feelings about victims who stay in abusive relationships and concluded it is frustrating and time-consuming for a community and the individuals in it to constantly deal with relationship violence when it doesn't stop and when victims threaten, but take no action.

The consensus was that police involvement was more of a weapon in the heterosexual community and less in the gay and lesbian community because of fear of being "outted," of having your business in the street. Several talked about having police watch a violent altercation between same sex partners and "take no action until afterwards, they just figured they could go and sort of beat up on the perpetrator for awhile without filing a report. …I think a lot of times you don't know if you can trust the police because they might be adding to the violence." Most agreed that there isn't much reliance on the criminal justice solution in black GLBT communities. Clarification revealed that blacks, neither heterosexuals nor GLBT persons, do not trust the criminal justice system; but, black

Especially in the Southern areas, there's a strong religious belief that if you just keep praying everything's going to be okay.

gays and lesbians trust it less. All respondents agreed that there should be consequences of violent behavior and that for many the ultimate fear is that the victimized partner will leave the relationship. Particular problems were identified for victims and children who try to leave a violent situation and have nowhere to go. Members noted problems associated with homelessness and talked about the stresses of giving up a certain lifestyle (money, nice home, nice vehicles, security, not having to work, status).

When asked about violence leading to other social problems, one respondent spoke about violent substance abuses having children in the child welfare system. Participants did not think that substance abuse caused domestic violence, but did see a correlation between the two phenomena.
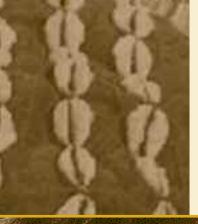
They identified several potential solutions to partner on partner violence, which included (1) increased media awareness (magazines, billboards, radio), (2) a description/definition of what is violent behavior, (3) options for getting out of a violent situation or of stopping it, (4) getting people to think that violence is a problem. "So many people are just used to violence, they don't see it as something wrong." (5) substance abuse counseling and family therapy and couples therapy, (6) more education about domestic violence for the heterosexual community, (7) members of the GLBT community must become more comfortable confronting both victims and perpetrators, and (8) more involvement by the faith community because African Americans "really look to the faith community for direction about what's right and wrong." One respondent noted that the church is "quicker to help a family who just lost their home to fire than they are to help a woman who's being abused."

When asked about barriers to implementing solutions to domestic violence in the GLBT community, a participant noted, "One of the barriers to getting help is that people who are outside our communities can't distinguish who's the victim, who's the perpetrator, or don't want to take the time to understand, or whatever's going on." Instead, one person thought, "They equate it as, y'all are just having a catfight, or something not to be taken seriously." A second barrier is the need to minimize homophobia so heterosexuals could begin to look at the sanction of same sex relationships. Other obstacles to solutions were (1) lack of resources (needed services in close proximity, funding), (2) lack of back up by members of the GLBT community –some of whom may see abuse as an indication of love, (3) negative attitudes of persons in helping professions (police, hospitals, etc.), (4) no consequences or accountability, (5) lack of clarity about what abuse really is and how it differs from love and protection, (6) lack of leadership, (7) lack of protection under the law, and (8) deathly silence on the part of victims and community.

The session concluded with a discussion of community services and transitional housing programs available to the GLBT community, or more correctly the lack of such resources. While Raleigh has a lesbian health resource center, it is 1.5-3.0 hours from most communities in eastern North Carolina. And even Raleigh has no such services/programming for gay men. The general consensus was that rural communities, such as Greenville or Belhaven or Ahoskie or Plymouth, are especially isolated areas for the African American GLBT community. Participants thought that a meeting place for members of the community was essential; this center would have space for educational groups, support groups, crisis information, and refuge for persons in abusive same sex relationships. Participants recognized the dearth of providers and provider agencies available to the straight community in rural eastern North Carolina; this lack of available services was seen as one reason the informal networks that support individuals in the gay and lesbian community survive. The physical isolation, coupled with the lack of government and private program funding, suggest the need for continued reliance on the informal networks.

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Greenville - Children and Youth

Domestic violence is an issue that affects the family. Those workers who have the job of caring for, educating or aiding children are often confronted with the effects of domestic violence. Their expertise and unique point of view can provide additional insight into the impact of domestic violence on the community as a whole, the responses provided by their own agencies and their beliefs as to the major obstacles surrounding breaking the cycle of domestic violence for the good of future generations.

Seven participants comprised the Children and Youth focus group in Greenville, North Carolina. Three males and four females responded to interview questions regarding domestic violence and its impact on the African American community. Their ages ranged from thirty-three to fifty-three, and their professions or experience included roles such as substance abuse program director, social worker, victim advocate, youth leader, and non-profit executive director.

When asked what types of violence they associate with the African American community, participants in the Greenville area Children and Youth focus group were able to compile a comprehensive list. Violent behavior among youth was a key category of violence that was discussed. Participants thought youth violence was manifested in ways such as: neighborhood rivalry or gang violence, gun violence, school bullying, and dating violence. Gang violence was viewed as a new and harmful form of violent behavior "starting to float into our communities" and making its presence felt in eastern North Carolina. In addition, respondents noted that instances of homicide, abuse inflicted upon an intimate partner, and violence within rural areas were forms of violent behavior occurring in their community.

Members of this group believed instances of violence to be frequent, taking place daily and even hourly. They gave mixed responses when asked about the priority that should be assigned to the problem of violence within the African American community. Some participants thought that it should be ranked high on the list of pressing concerns because of its frequency and the fact that it may be even more prevalent than it appears on the surface.

> *I would say it's a very high priority because it's hidden and never talked about. You'd be surprised the number of acts of violence that's happening in our homes, our neighbors' homes, but you would never know. Because Mom won't tell, the kids won't tell, but Daddy comes out looking like he's the pillar of the community. But it's happening in their homes.*

Those who believed violence to be of high priority viewed the issue as a root cause of other problems affecting community members. Those group members with dissenting opinions ranked violence less high because they saw violence as a consequence of other social problems. Issues such as self-esteem, substance abuse, parenting skills, and pre-existing social inequality were named as topics by these respondents that should be addressed first.