STOP! HEAR A CHILD'S CRY
African American Children and Domestic Violence: Prevention and Intervention

June 5-6, 2003
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Minneapolis, Minnesota

University of Minnesota
Institute on Domestic Violence
In the African-American Community

College of Human Ecology

United States Department of Health & Human Services
When we were children, we looked to our parents to provide guidance on the ways of the world and how to effectively balance our lives. As adults, we expect that the behaviors of children will mirror what takes place in the home. If we abide by this philosophy that children are a reflection of their parents, and that their behaviors are patterned according to home training, then what should we expect? In an ideal world, we'd like to believe that children are being reared in homes that promote their healthy emotional and cognitive development. In the real world, we understand that children are all too often witnessing domestic violence. Equally distressing is the violence that these children are experiencing at the hands of a parent.

Domestic violence in any home is disturbing, to say the least. This type of violence is an equal opportunity destroyer. It shows no favor toward a particular race, religion, age group, or socioeconomic class of individuals as it creates a path of destruction in the lives of families who experience it. Still, that African Americans are particularly at risk in situations of domestic violence.

Research shows that African Americans experience higher rates of domestic violence than other minority groups, so it stands to reason that African-American children are exposed to domestic violence at higher rates than other children. This trauma is further compounded by the reality that African-American children are more likely to be subjected to out-of-home placement through the child welfare system when domestic violence does occur.

Given this set of circumstances, we are left with questions about the fates of African-American children. How do we begin to heal children whose families have been torn apart by not only the physical blows, but also the emotional scars left behind by witnessing and/or experiencing domestic violence? These and other issues were addressed at the June 2003 forum, African American Children and Domestic Violence: Prevention and Intervention—Stop and Hear a Child’s Cry. This powerful forum addressed the effects of violence both inside and outside the home. It also addressed a very important, yet often overlooked topic of fathering after domestic violence occurs.

As you read the proceedings of this event, bear in mind the message of hope from the comments, testimony, and recommendations of speakers and presenters at the forum. I encourage you to stop and hear a child crying out for a life free from violence. Only by responding to the needs of the younger generation can we begin to find solutions to end the horrible reality of violence for both young children and adults who were exposed to domestic violence as children.

Sincerely,

Olliver J. Williams, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community
Children instinctively look to the home to provide safety and comfort from all they face on a daily basis. The unfortunate reality is that environments typically thought of as safe havens for children, including their homes, have become the sites of some of the most brutal violence facing these young, impressionable individuals. In homes where violence is prevalent, this safe haven for children is being compromised.

Violence in the home is so acute that children are now experiencing traumas typically associated with the mental health needs of adults, such as depression, and are prone to nightmares that serve as a constant reminder of the violence they’ve witnessed or experienced. Even more troubling, children who witness domestic violence have a propensity toward becoming victims or perpetrators of violence later in life.

The June 2003 forum, African American Children and Domestic Violence: Prevention and Intervention—Stop and Hear a Child’s Cry gave us a chance to reflect on all that is happening in the violent world around us. Through a rich mixture of plenary sessions, workshops, and discussion, forum participants were compelled to stop and hear the cries of children whose lives we greatly impact by what we say and do. It offered an opportunity for us to engage in a lively exchange on research practices and recommendations aimed at forging more effective responses to the needs of children who live with the horror of domestic violence and abuse.

We must stop and hear the cries of our children before it’s too late. We must turn the tide on a behavior that threatens to destroy the very fabric of the African-American family. The futures of our children hang in the balance. How we shape their futures is one of the most important tasks before us. Rather than leave them with images of violence that scar them for a lifetime, let’s leave them a legacy of love and hope. Let’s stop and intervene in the cycle of violence and work diligently to prevent future abuse among this vulnerable population.

Sincerely,

William D. Riley
Program Manager
Family Violence Prevention and Services Program
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Welcome & Introductions

Oliver J. Williams, Ph.D., Executive Director
Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community, (IDVAAC), St. Paul, MN

"We're in for SOMETHING SPECIAL!"
- FINDING where we need to GO from here...
- LISTENING to people's STORIES...
- TRANSFORMING the way we THINK and the way we FEEL...

Robert H. Bruininks, President/University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN

"A society that doesn't invest in children is making a conscious choice not to invest in its future."
- An Initiative of the University of Minnesota...Partnership with the community
- Discovering Knowledge: A Partner for the Public Good...with a special focus on children, youth, and families
- Welcome to those who traveled from out of town!
- Starting STRONG: A summit to address obstacles for children and increase public awareness

- The 3 Cs of healthy development in children:
  - Connections
  - Competence
  - Contribution

William D. Riley, Program Manager/ U.S.
Department of Health and Human Services,
Office of Community Services, (DHHS),
Washington, DC

"I look forward to the SPRING EVENT!"
- WELCOME!
- CHALLENGE!
- QUESTION!
- MIX IT UP!
- THANK YOU to the STEERING COMMITTEE:
  "The Brain Trust"

IDVAAC National 2003 Conference • African American Children and Domestic Violence: Prevention and Intervention • June 5-6, 2003 • Minneapolis, MN
KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Ouida Spirey, Ph.D.

"I'm an old line child protection worker...

"And I didn't get the connection between child abuse and domestic violence..."

"I know of the little girl who put her... things to stop abuse..."

"We are a society that lives in violence..."

"Poise and blame are key to the feelings of African American children in trying to stop violence..."

CREATING A CULTURE OF PEACE AND VALIDATION

- Collaboration, not control
- Speaking out against violence
- Nothing but violence and respect
- Community organizing for peace
- Support development of resources
- We can't do it alone

CREATING COMMUNITIES WHERE EVERYONE MATTERS

- There is love, life, laughter...
  - Everyone wants to matter and know what the matter is...
  - The matter is LIFE...

COMMUNITY

- The issue of domestic violence in the African American community has the potential to define...

- We live...

- How we live...

- Our community matters...

- Our children are little people and they want our love...

- Our community is in the right direction...

- A story about power that supports violence...

- "I traveled to West Africa..."

- "I swatted my son..."

- "I need women who choose to let me know that they were not acceptable..."

- "And a story about violence..."

- "In L.A., when we saw the LAPD pulling over young, white,addy, big, white, we would pull over to send the message..."

- "We are watching!"
CAROL SPIGNER, Ph.D./ University of Pennsylvania School of Social Work, Philadelphia, PA

GIVING VOICE... AND BREAKING THE SILENCE
- "I'm delighted to be here because this issue is crucial to the survival of African American families."

CHILD PROTECTION IN LOS ANGELES IN THE LATE 1969'S...
- "I'm an old-line child protection worker..."
- "...and I didn't get the connection between child welfare and domestic violence..."
- "I think of the little girl who got hurt trying to stop a fight between her parents."

SOCIAL NORMS CAN SUPPORT WHAT WE WANT... OR UNDERMINE WHAT WE ARE TRYING TO DO...
- We are a society that LIKES VIOLENCE
- ROLE and BLAME are key to the feelings of African American children in trying to stop violence

FAMILY and COMMUNITY are especially important when there is an institutionalized systematic devaluation of African American children

THE ISSUE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY HAS THE POTENTIAL TO DEFINE:
- Who we are...
- How we live...

CREATING COMMUNITIES WHERE EVERYONE MATTERS
- "There is LOVE, LIFE, LAUGHTER...Everyone wants to MATTER and know what the matter is...The matter is LIFE..."
- Children are little people...and they want our LOVE.
- "Spare the rod" is really about prodding our children in the right direction.

A STORY ABOUT NORMS THAT SUPPORT VIOLENCE...
- "Beat me...If you don't, this community will not respect you."

...AND A DIFFERENT KIND OF STORY ABOUT SOCIAL NORMS AND VALUES...
- "I traveled to West Africa..."
- "I swatted my son..."
- "Twelve women hissed at me to let me know that this is not acceptable."

...AND A STORY ABOUT VIGILANCE...
- "In L.A., when we saw the LAPD pulling over young adolescent males, we would pull over to send the message: WE ARE WATCHING!"

CREATING A CULTURE OF PEACE AND VALIDATION
- Collaboration, not control
- Speaking out against violence
  - Modeling NON-VIOLENCE and RESPECT
  - Community organizing for peace
  - Support development of resources
  - We can't demonize anyone.
ESTHER JENKINS, Ph.D./ Professor, Chicago State University, IDVAAC Steering Committee Member, Chicago, IL.

TALKING ABOUT TRAUMA...
- We train people in schools to recognize symptoms of trauma...but we need to change the incentive structure in schools so that people have time to HELP!

Violence
Risk
- “There is often a CO-OCCURRENCE of violence and risk factors.”
- Lack of community support
- School Difficulties
- Depression
- HIV/AIDS
  - Values that support risk
  - Lack of self-efficacy
  - Substance abuse

Different responses to trauma
- DEVELOPMENT has an impact on response to TRAUMA...and TRAUMA affects development...
- The DEVELOPMENT TRAJECTORY can be thrown off by TRAUMA...
- Symptoms vary by age:
  - Numbing
  - Regression
  - Re-enactment

Toileting
Nightmares
Feelings of vulnerability
Sexual acting out
Substance abuse

MICHELLE COOLEY, Ph.D./ Assistant Professor, Department of Mental Health, Bloomberg School of Public Health at the Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD.

COMMUNITY VIOLENCE
- Media Violence
- Indirectly Hearing about Violence
- Directly Experiencing Violence
- World Violence
  - Depression/Anxiety
  - Disruptive Behaviors
  - School Difficulties
  - Substance Use
  - Aggression...

TWO STUDIES...
- Neighborhood Violence and School Expulsion
- Psychiatric Disorders and Exposure to Community Violence
  - “Kids are especially anxious about their loved ones being okay and safe…”
  - “Kids should not be having disorder!”
  - “It’s important to talk about prosocial and adaptive things that kids do to cope.”
  1. Self-talk
  2. Physical response
  3. Problem-solving
  4. Religion/spirituality
  5. A WHOLE PERSON approach to therapy?

IMPROVING MENTAL HEALTH
IMPROVING MENTAL HEALTH
- Eliminate access to weapons
- Parental monitoring of children
- Opportunities for kids to share feelings
- Decrease media violence
USENI EUGENE PERKINS/Director, Chicago State University Family Life Center, Chicago, IL

A BRIEF HISTORY OF GANGS

- European immigrants were the first street gangs in the US...
  - Ethnic superiority
  - Community Control
  - Economic/Financial Benefit
- African American street gangs emerged for:
  - Identity
1. A person of value and belonging...
2. African American
3. Masculinity: “Black men need to STAND UP and take part in the maintenance of the community!”
4. GIRLS are part of gangs, too!
  - Economic gain
  - Belonging
- Traditional institutions and centers have failed to address needs of young black men (i.e., School, YMCA, Youth Centers, Community Centers, etc.)
- TRADITION has played a big part in gang membership
  - “My buddy is in a gang…”
  - “…and so is my brother…”
  - “…and so was my uncle…”
  - “…and so was my father…”

POLITICAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC OPPRESSION AND EXCLUSION CONTINUES TO MAKE GANGS RELEVANT AND IMPORTANT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE!

GANGS PROVIDE VALUES, DISCIPLINE, A SENSE OF PURPOSE, AND A SENSE OF BELONGING...

MOBILIZING THE COMMUNITY TO PROVIDE FOR NEEDS OF FAMILIES AND CHILDREN...

- A school environment where people CARE...
- “After all, it’s where our kids are being raised outside the home.”
- “Kids should not be expelled from school unless there’s somewhere else for them to go!”

TWO STUDIES...

- We need to give our kids something to DO!
- What is there to do?
- Where is there to go?