# SAFE RETURN INITIATIVE

# SAFE RETURN

## Phase I Report
## 2003-2005

### INSTITUTE ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY

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# Introduction

The U.S. Department of Justice's Office on Violence Against Women created the Safe Return Initiative (SRI) to provide technical assistance and support on ways to prevent and intervene in domestic violence situations as African American men leave prison.

Each year, more than 600,000 individuals return home from state and federal prisons.[1] High rates of recidivism indicate that many of these people will be incarcerated again – a reality that imposes a considerable burden on the communities to which they return. Most research on prisoner reentry has focused on the influence of unemployment, substance abuse, and inadequate housing on prisoners' post-release success.[2,3] Some studies have also examined family relationships during and after imprisonment, as well as the impact of family ties on recidivism.[4] Yet there has been little research on the relationship between domestic violence and criminal recidivism, even though many prisoners report a history of violence against their intimate partners[5]. In fact, some SRI collaborators in jail or prison programs note that many men violate parole and return to prison due to domestic violence offenses.

Federal statistics reveal that intimate partner homicide among African Americans is 2.5 times higher than that of their White counterparts. The Safe Return Initiative focuses on strengthening domestic violence services for all male prisoners and their female partners, but pays particular attention to African-American prisoners, families, and communities because they are most susceptible to negative circumstances related to reentry and domestic violence. The Safe Return Initiative also helps communities develop and strengthen responses to domestic violence for African-American families and prisoners returning to their communities.

To begin addressing this issue, the Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community and the Vera Institute of Justice forged a partnership, with support from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women to carry out the work of understanding how community stakeholders can respond to family violence among the ex-offender population. This progress report highlights tasks completed by the Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community in this effort.

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# Situational Analysis

Intimate partner violence is a serious problem in the United States. Between 1989 and 2002, 3.5 million people in the U.S. were victims of family violence, and nearly a quarter of all murders during this period were committed against a family member.[6] In most cases, the victims were women.

The threat of intimate partner violence is particularly acute within the African-American community. National crime victim survey data indicate that each year between 1992 and 1996, an average of 12 out of every 1,000 Black women experienced violence by an intimate partner, as compared to fewer than 8 out of 1,000 White women.[7] One study of national crime victimization data revealed that between 1993 and 1998, African Americans of both genders were victimized by intimate partners at significantly higher rates than individuals of other races. Moreover, African-American women experienced intimate partner violence at a rate 35% higher than that of White women, and 2.5 times higher than women of other races. African-American men were subjected to intimate partner violence at a rate 62% higher than White men, and 2.5 times higher than men of other races.[8]

There are other risk factors to consider, such as increased risk for women living in rental housing and living in urban areas.[9] These demographics again point to negative outcomes for African-American women, given that African-American women living in urban cities experience higher rates of poverty and premature mortality than other women.[10] African-American males are not faring much better, as the demographic profile of women experiencing non-lethal partner violence parallels that of Black males with the highest rates of incarceration.[11] Such statistics are particularly daunting given that African Americans make up 13% of the U.S. population, but account for 43% of intimate partner homicides.[12]

In the reporting of intimate partner violence. Among women victimized by a violent intimate partner in 2002, about 61.7% of African Americans reported the abuse to law enforcement professionals; about one-half of White victims did.[13] Though they did report intimate partner violence more frequently, African-American women most frequently called when the abuse was near lethal levels.[14] Such behavior is in line with the perception that "[An] African American woman may withstand abuse and make a conscious self-sacrifice for what she perceives as the greater good of the community but to her own physical, psychological and spiritual detriment."[15] The reporting patterns of African-American women have been linked to various concerns. For example, an African-American woman may not report abusive behavior to avoid having her partner interact with the criminal justice system, one that is already perceived as biased against African-American men; and/or she may not want to bring negative attention to the African-American community[16].

*African Americans, both victims and batterers, are more likely to be arrested, prosecuted, and imprisoned due to domestic violence than other groups*

# Domestic Violence in Minnesota

Domestic violence statistics for the state of Minnesota often mirror those on a national level. In some instances, the state fares worse. Consider the following:

- Domestic violence victims accounted for over 25% of all violent crime victims in Minnesota in 1999

- In 1999, the Minneapolis Police Department received 18,501 domestic violence calls, of which 519 involved weapons.[18]

- At least 17 women and 4 children were murdered in Minnesota in 2005 as a result of domestic violence.[19]

- Minnesota's rape rate was higher than that of the United States in 2003.[20]

- In 1998, over 90% of victims of domestic violence in Minnesota did not report one or more occurrences of the violence to the police.[21]

## Population Distribution by Race/Ethnicity

| | U.S. Population Figure | Percentage of U.S. Population | Minnesota Population | Percentage of Minnesota Population | Percentage of Minnesota Adult Inmates |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| White | 194,552,774 | 70.9% | 4,400,282 | 89.4% | 57.8% |
| **Black** | **33,947,837** | **12.4%** | **171,731** | **3.5%** | **32.1%** |
| Aisian | 10,242,998 | 3.6% | 141,968 | 2.9% | 2.2% |
| American Indian | 2,475,956 | .9% | 54,967 | 1.1% | 7.8% |
| Hispanic* | | | | | |

2000 Census[22]; Minnesota Department of Corrections.[23]   *35,305,818 of the total U.S. population are of Hispanic ethnicity. 143,382 of the total Minnesota population are of Hispanic ethnicity. 6.9% of all MN Adult Inmates are of Hispanic ethnicity.

# Understanding Domestic Violence

*Despite these findings, few programs are designed specifically to address domestic violence in African-American and other non-White households.*

Over the years, experts in the field have identified a myriad of reasons for intimate partner violence.[24] For some, financial uncertainty may lead to stress that may, in turn, contribute to intimate partner violence.[25] For African Americans, high stress and violent community environments can result in anger, and have been linked to intimate partner violence. Other stresses that many African-American families experience include underemployment, blocked access to educational opportunities, high rates of life-threatening diseases, poverty, perceived experiences of racism, chronic community violence, and over-representation in the criminal justice system. These stressors often manifest themselves as violence in the home and outside the home, as depicted in the table that follows.

Social, institutional, and situational stresses like those previously mentioned contribute to violence in general as well as intimate partner violence experienced among African Americans living in high stress low income communities. While rates of domestic violence are fairly consistent across racial groups, rates of domestic violence are significantly higher for African American, and African American women call 9-1-1 to report domestic violence more frequently than do women of other races.[26] Despite these findings, few programs are designed specifically to address domestic violence in African-American and other non-White households.

# Violence in the Home

Domestic violence is a pattern of assault and coercive behaviors that adults or adolescents use against their intimate partners.  Often, physical and sexual assaults are accomplished through other coercive and threatening behaviors.  Domestic violence victims can experience some of the following:

| Physical Assault | Emotional Abuse | Sexual Abuse |
|---|---|---|
| • Hitting<br>• Slapping<br>• Kicking<br>• Shoving<br>• Burning<br>• Punching<br>• Assault with weapon | • Threats to kill<br>• Threats to kidnap children<br>• Jealous sexual accusations<br>• Enforced isolation from family or friends<br>• Constant harassment<br>• Name calling<br>• Punishment for discussing the abuse | • Rape<br>• Humiliating sex<br>• Pressured sex<br>• Threats to abuse children sexually |

| Economic Coercion | Coercion of the mother through the children |
|---|---|
| • Withholding money for food/clothes<br>• Forcible confiscation of money<br>• Ruining credit<br>• Lying about assets | • Threats to hurt or kill the children if mother leaves<br>• Threats to disappear with the children<br>• Escalating physical abuse of the children if the mother intervenes<br>• Forcing the children to spy on their mother |

(Schechter & Ganley, 1995)

# Linking Domestic Violence and the Criminal Justice System

The link between domestic violence and the criminal justice system is one that has been explored from many angles. Some of the research has focused on incarcerated perpetrators of intimate partner violence. Studies have found that men in medium- or low-security prisons admit to battering their intimate partners at rates higher than the general population. In 2002, one study found that 33% of inmates admitted to physically assaulting their intimate partners during the year prior to their incarceration; almost 10% admitted to committing 10 or more physical assaults in the previous year (White, et al. 2002).[27]

Though there is no evidence thus far to indicate that incarceration itself increases the likelihood that men will become batterers, researchers have found that incarceration is a possible risk factor for domestic violence.

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# Promoting Safe Communities

Living in a safe community is a goal for every Minnesota resident. But what is a safe community? Many indicators, such as high population density, economic risk factors, poor education and school outcomes, domestic violence incidence, child maltreatment rates, and crime rates can help determine the safety of a community.

SRI has promoted safe communities by working with national and local partners to develop and implement comprehensive, holistic strategies for reducing domestic violence in communities where ex-prisoner reentry is significant. The goal is to strengthen the community by bringing together key community stakeholders – in education, criminal justice, local government, social services, clergy, domestic violence advocates, batterer intervention programs, and community groups – to collaboratively learn about domestic violence and reentry; select a local domestic violence priority; and develop and implement strategies to address the needs of victims, ex-prisoners, and the community.

In the African-American community, the intersections of poverty, incarceration rates, and higher incidence of violence have shredded the family fabric and support. Numerous studies confirm that the majority of women receiving welfare have been subjected to domestic violence as adults, and as many as 30% reported being subjected to abuse within the last year.[28] With the undeniable connections between poverty and violence, it is important to monitor the rates of poverty in communities if efforts to promote safe communities are to be successful.

*"Minnesota's rape rate was higher than that of the United States in 2003. –Federal Bureau of Investigations*

# Partnering for Progress

As a result of SRI's time and effort promoting the benefits of the community working together, many organizations have moved forward in efforts to advance domestic violence and reentry work. These organizations are noted in the table that follows.

## Minnesota Safe Return Initiative Project Collaborative Partners

| Name | Type of Agency | Contribution to the Project |
|------|----------------|------------------------------|
| RESOURCE, Inc. | Employment Expertise | Provide case management and counseling for ex-offenders. |
| Federal FORUM/ Faith-Based Call | Community and Corrections Connector | Tap into grassroots expertise while working with families and corrections agencies. |
| Phyllis Wheatley | Social Service Provider | Provide domestic violence social services. |
| Tubman Family Alliance | Social Service Provider and Domestic Violence Program | Provide domestic violence social services: battered women and men who batter. |
| Domestic Abuse Project | Social Service Provider and Domestic Violence Program | Provide domestic violence social services: battered women and men who batter. |
| Minneapolis Family Services | Social Service Provider | Host SRI project community and planning meeting. |
| My Home, Inc. | Social Service Provider and Domestic Violence Program | Provide domestic violence counseling as well as men's circles for prisoners. |
| Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women | Advocacy and Domestic Violence Program | Provide advocacy, training, and domestic violence statistics. |
| African American Battered Women Resource Center | Restorative Justice and Battered Women's Org. | Offer capacity building for women and referral to battered women's services. |
| African American Family Services | Social Service Provider | Offer capacity building for battered women and men intervention and referred to battered intervention services. |
| Oasis of Love | Faith-Based Community Center | Offer capacity building for women and families and domestic violence services. |
| Minnesota Department of Corrections | Correctional Facilities (Faribault and Red Wing) | Provide expertise on systems change and leadership in dialogue to create seamless approach from penitentiary to community. |

# Significant Events

## Minneapolis, MN • March 2003

IDVAAC convened the first series of forums to introduce the Safe Return Initiative to the community in March 2003. Over 100 community members participated. This event set the stage for identifying partners to do outreach. The following recommendations were developed from the forums:

• A specific curriculum for domestic violence should beb developed for men in prison and for men in parole attending community domestic violence programs.

• Social Service providers should expand on victim impact statement in prison violence and substance abuse pre-reentry education.

• Redesign reentry curricula to ensure more focus on domestic violence. Redesign efforts should include community experts and corrections professionals.

• Link battered women in dangerous relationships with men on parole with battered women's programs and other support, social service or faith-based programs for battered women.

• Develop programs that successfully connect, confront, and transform men while supporting women within abusive relationships.

• If they chose it, families need frequent, structured, connection with the soon-to-be released prisoner if desired. They need to increase their understanding of the dynamics of abuse and the influence of the prison experience on the potential for violence and need to have access to community domestic violence resources that will equip families with coping skills.

• Develop strong sustained family programs, including domestic violence, that are well connected in the community and respected by the Minnesota Department of Corrections.

• Develop an alternative approach to reentry education that equips the offender, family unit, and community with coping and hope skills in job-seeking, education, and employment (career) growth.

• Conduct informational Session by training local or communinty based programs (such as domestic violence programs) to enter the correctional facitltiy and educate prisoners.

## Minneapolis, MN • March – November 2004

SRI provided project management support to Hennepin County's Reentry and Domestic Violence Steering Committee's work. This support included: 1) developing a project plan to guide the work of two committees and encouraging the stakeholders to attend and participate, 2) facilitating the committee's work by attending weekly work group meetings to develop work plans for service providers and creating an assessment through group input, 3) providing meeting minutes for all work group sessions, and 4) meeting with public safety commissioners and prison wardens to cast the vision of the work groups and garner leadership support.

In November, a forum was held to discuss the results of the project. Over 40 representatives from the federal government, Minnesota state government, SRI, and community partners attended to hear the findings of the effort in Minnesota. The project achieved the following milestones:

• The group discussed input from over 40 community members and professionals to develop the community and assessment work plans. A project charter was developed that provided a work schedule for both work groups.

• Community Sub-Group Charge: To develop work plan to address offender domestic violence, coordinate service provider trainings at two prison facilities.

• Staffing the Assessment Tool Sub-Group Charge: To develop work plan to design an assessment tool aimed at reducing offender domestic violence.

• Both work groups were challenged to brainstorm what a "domestic violence free Minnesota" would look like in the context of reentry and "what must be done today to achieve results."

• With the assistance of IDVAAC, work groups identified the following criteria to measure success:

  –What are the outcomes desired?

  –What will success look like?

  –How will success be measured?

  –Who will measure success?

  –If the training goal is achieved, what will be the impact on the organizations?

  –How will you know if the goal is met?

  –What measurements will you use to determine if the goal is met?

• Work plans were developed.

In Phase I, the Minnesota Safe Return Initiative objectives were:

- To work with communities that receive a high return of ex-prisoners to examine women and their children support systems; cultural values; and effective, cultural-based strategies for reducing domestic violence in African-American families.

- To raise community awareness of the significant domestic violence challenges faced by women, with an emphasis on women of color who experience intimate partner violence.

- To identify systems-level issues and barriers (i.e., policies and practices) that impact the ability of families to access and utilize domestic violence prevention services, and to develop specific strategies for influencing public policy.

- To identify and promote practices and strategies that have the potential to improve the health and mental health of women of color who experience intimate partner violence.

- To identify specific priorities and begin early implementation of strategies designed to improve the coping skills of women of color who experience intimate partner violence among men in prison or those returning from prison.

Additional information regarding this project is provided in Exhibit A.

## Faribault, MN • October 2004

SRI developed and presented training for the federal government's Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative at the Faribault Correctional Facility. This initiative, in collaboration with a project known locally as SOAR, was supported by grant funding from the U.S. Department of Justice to the Minnesota Department of Corrections and included the participation of the Hennepin County Department of Training & Employment Assistance and Community Corrections. This project was intended to provide intensive services to high-risk adult and juvenile offenders leaving correctional facilities, with an emphasis on seamless and comprehensive treatment, intensive case management, and the involvement of local communities.

Forty-eight corrections managers, supervisors, case managers, and trainers attended the SRI training. Comments from the group include the following:

*In 1998, over 90% of victims of domestic violence in Minnesota did not report one or more occurrences of the violence to the police.*
*– Minnesota Planning*

- "I realized that the relationship between domestic violence and corrections is increasing each year. With more people being incarcerated for domestic violence-related offenses or having a history of that behavior, it is necessary to push training with the staff that works with this population. I find it interesting that people are now focusing on relationships between the offender and the family and not just the impact on a victim of violence."

- "There is a direct correlation between domestic violence when someone is released. If the domestic violence is not addressed when incarcerated, it will continue and/or get worse after release."

- "It seems like the guys we work with have a history. Once they get out they come right back because of domestic violence."

- "We have a great deal of need for offenders who need treatment for their abuse issues before they get back on the streets and back in their homes."

Additional information regarding this training is provided in Exhibit B.

# Minneapolis/St. Paul MN • July 2005

A dynamic and knowledgeable group of professionals convened at the University of Minnesota campus in St. Paul to attend an SRI forum, "Safe Return: Issues on Addressing Domestic Violence: from the Penitentiary to the Community". Presenters represented all sectors involved in the issue, including experts on prison, parole, and the intersection of domestic violence and reentry. The forum included survivors, those in relationships with violent and serious offenders, men on parole, and ex-prisoners who were transformed.

Among the questions discussed are:

• What support will wives, intimate partners, and children need to successfully cope?

• What strategic alliances can be formed with community-based programs and battered women's and parole programs to keep women and children safe?

• How can all involved address the needs of the men seeking to reestablish themselves in a non-abusive way beyond prison walls?

Hope and safety were the recurring themes on returning prisoners safely to their families and to their communities. Keynote Speaker Rubin "Hurricane" Carter spoke about his experiences both in and beyond the prison system. Convicted of triple murder and sentenced to three life terms for crimes he did not commit, Carter spent 20 years in prison before his release in 1988. Carter spoke before an audience comprising individuals from departments of corrections, research institutes, faith-based programs, criminal justice systems, and domestic violence programs throughout the United States. His message was that anger and violence can be overcome. "First, we have to understand what anger is," he said. "We were not born angry…we were born into it. This is a jacket that we wear. But you can take off that jacket." He reminded the audience that the incarcerated must confront the anger within them while in prison, in order to successfully rejoins their families and communities.

July 2005 Roundtable of three SRI project collaboration sites, which included Nashville Tennessee, Minneapolis Minnesota, and Portland Oregon concerning how they include domestic violence as they do the traditional work with in the criminal justice, prisons and parole programs.

# Lessons Learned

Activities completed during SRI Phase I have laid the groundwork for SRI Phase II. Planning is a continuous process of strengthening what works and abandoning what does not, of making risk-taking decisions with the greatest knowledge of their potential effect, of setting objectives and appraising performance and results through systematic feedback, and making ongoing adjustments as conditions change.

SRI has learned a number of lessons as a result of roundtable discussions with criminal justice and domestic violence professionals, advocates, and consumer focus groups, as well as through numerous individual interviews and professional conference presentations. Lessons learned include the following:

1. There is a continuing demand among community-based organizations for information and assistance regarding domestic violence and reentry in the African-American community.

2. It is critical to train community-based/faith-based partners and criminal justice professionals to understand their role in addressing domestic violence if reunification occurs.

3. Stakeholders/service providers need culturally competent responses to domestic violence among African Americans.

4. Community-wide facilitated conversations are needed to promote a comprehensive, coordinated approach to victim safety and offender accountability.

5. There is a call for tailored technical assistance to a variety of professional groups that intervene in the lives of men retutning home from prison and their families, including parole officers, corrections officers, faith leaders, employment specialists, and domestic violence specialists.

6. Community programs, local businesses, and professionals protect survivors from future victimization and prevent the continuation of the cycle of violence from generation to generation.

## Exhibit A
## March through November 2004

SRI provided project management support for Hennepin County's SVORI Grantee Steering Committee. Its charge was to develop a work plan to address offender domestic violence, coordinate service provider trainings at Faribault and Red Wing prison facilities, and design curriculum.
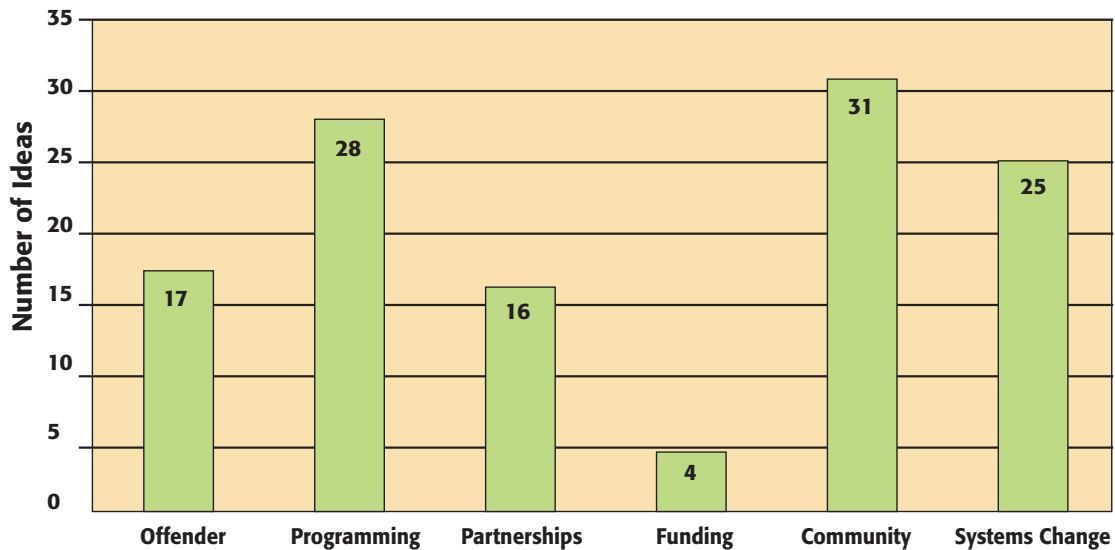
Materials Provided:

- 2004 Hennepin County Community subgroup work plan
- Hennepin County Steering Committee Meeting Priorities
- Summary information provided from the question raised to the group, "Given the vision outlined today, what do you see as the next steps for the Project to move domestic violence and reentry to the next level?"

*"First, we have to understand what anger is,"* he said. *"We were not born angry…we were born into it. This is a jacket that we wear. But you can take off that jacket."*

## Project SRI

Given the Project SRI vision outlined today, what do you see as the next steps for the Project to move domestic violence and reentry to the next level?

**Number of Ideas**

| Category | Number of Ideas |
|---|---|
| Offender | 17 |
| Programming | 28 |
| Partnerships | 16 |
| Funding | 4 |
| Community | 31 |
| Systems Change | 25 |

**Offender:** Actions that equip the offender to survive and thrive in community environment – jobs, housing, and domestic violence training.

**Programming:** Domestic violence curricula development, establish model for community reentry, lessons learned shared with stakeholders

**Partnership:** Key stakeholders

**Funding:** Sustainability for nonprofits working in domestic violence

**Community:** Includes domestic violence impact on the family, support services, and fatherhood role models

**Systems Change:** Identify champion, clear communications, public relations, and Department of Corrections and other elements within criminal justice

## Exhibit B
## October 2004

SRI provided domestic violence training to Faribault Correctional Facility leaders and staff. The intention of this training was to inform facility staff that domestic violence and reentry training would be introduced to offenders, and to provide staff with information on domestic violence (e.g., what domestic violence is, power and control issues in relationships, how to identify domestic violence, what you do when you recognize it, and resources for help).

Materials Provided:

- 2004 Faribault Correctional Facility seminar feedback
- Seamless Approach Model – From the Penitentiary to the Community

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# Fact Sheet on Intimate Partner Violence in the African American Community

## STATISTICS

In a nationally representative survey, 29% of African American women and 12% of African American men report at least one instance of violence from an intimate partner.[1]

African Americans account for 1/3 of the intimate partner homicides in this country[2] and have an intimate partner homicide rate four times that of whites.[3]

Black women comprise 8% of the U.S. population but account for 20% of the intimate partner homicide victims.[2]

## RISK FACTORS

The poorer African American women are and less educated the more severe the abuse they suffer

Alcohol problems (drinking, binge drinking, dependency) are more frequently related to intimate partner violence for African Americans than for whites or Hispanics.[5]

Among African American women killed by their partner, the lethal violence was more likely to occur if there had been incidents in which the partner had used or threatened to use a weapon on her and/or the partner has tried to choke or strangle her.[4]

Among African American women killed by their partner, almost half were killed while in the process of leaving the relationship, highlighting the need to take extra precautions at this time.[4]

Among African American women who killed their partner, almost 80% had a history of abuse.[4]

As with other women, domestic violence is more likely to end in the serious injury or death of black women when there is a history of her partner having used or threatened to use a gun or knife or the partner has tried to choke or strangle her.[4]

## IMPACT OF ABUSE

Battered women are at greater risk for attempting suicide[6] particularly if they were physically abused as a child, for being depressed[7] and to suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).[8]

## DYNAMICS OF ABUSE

Women fare better in abusive relationships when they have the support of friends and family. Battered black women who reported that they could rely on others for emotional and practical support were less likely to be re-abused,[9] showed less psychological distress,[10] and were less likely to attempt suicide.[6]

## TEEN DATING VIOLENCE

Black youth are over represented as victims and perpetrators of teen dating violence.[11]

African American girls are as likely as boys to slap or hit their partner,[12] but studies of racially diverse groups find that girls are more likely than boys to be violent with their partner in self defense[13] and to be injured as a result of dating violence[14]

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# SAFE RETURN

## Phase I Report
## 2003-2005

**INSTITUTE ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY**

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