

ASSEMBLING THE PIECES

An African-American perspective on community and family violence

Spring 2000, Volume 2, Number 1

Message from the Executive Director

Upcoming conference
will address substance abuse
and domestic violence

We hope that you can attend our conference on substance abuse and domestic violence on June 2 in St. Paul. We promise to provide a much-needed forum for discussing how substance abuse and domestic violence uniquely affect African Americans.

Our speakers, Peter Hayden, the director of Turning Point, a substance abuse treatment center in Minneapolis, and Dr. Frances L. Brisbane, professor and dean of the School of Social Welfare at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, will share their extensive experience in this arena. Responders Dr. William Oliver, associate professor at Indiana University, and Antonia Vann, executive director of Asha Family Services in Milwaukee, Wis., are sure to pose some interesting questions.

In response to requests from attendees of previous conferences, we've extended the conference to a full day. In the afternoon, we'll hold workshops for you to explore specific issues related to domestic violence and substance abuse and the effects on African-American subgroups, including women, men, children, youth, seniors, and members of the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community.

A thorough exploration of this topic is long overdue. This promises to be one of our best programs ever. If you haven't signed up yet, please refer to the registration information in the box on this page. The time you spend at this conference will be well spent.

Lastly, please save Dec. 1-2 for our fall conference in Seattle. It will focus on the effects of domestic violence on health and mental health in the African-American community.

I look forward to seeing you at both of these programs. ♦

Call now to register

IDVAAC's June 2 conference will be on the St. Paul campus of the University of Minnesota in the Student Center's theater. Workshops will be in nearby McNeal Hall, and the poster and networking sessions will be in the Student Center ballroom.

It's not too late to register for the conference. Call Sherri Goodall at 301-490-5500 or send her an e-mail requesting materials at Sgoodall@cgnet.com. You may also register online at IDVAAC's Web site: www.dvinstitute.org.



Oliver J. Williams, Ph.D.

Kate Maxwell Williams

INSTITUTE ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY

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June 2 conference will explore connections between domestic violence and substance abuse

There is a correlation between domestic violence and the use of alcohol and drugs, according to national researchers. Often, adults who abuse drugs experienced violence as children or observed their parents abuse alcohol or drugs. This can lead to repeating modeled behavior and continuing the cycle of violence and drug abuse when they reach adulthood, according to Oliver Williams, IDVAAC executive director.

Battered women may rely on substances to medicate themselves from the effects of physical and emotional abuse, Williams says. Men who batter and use alcohol and other drugs often suffer from poor judgment, reduced inhibitions and aggressive behaviors that can lead to physical and emotional abuse, he added.

This is a time bomb that is all too familiar to domestic abuse service providers. Still, most social service programs deal with one problem or the other. Most do not have the capacity to address both issues. And most programs lack the cultural competence to deal with the unique situations faced by African Americans, who according to research, are disproportionately affected by both domestic violence and substance abuse.

IDVAAC's June 2 conference is poised to ask some serious questions and share knowledge to begin developing solutions to these critical social issues, according to Williams. The conference will explore how domestic and substance abuse uniquely affect African Americans, what research and practices indicate are the best methods to address the needs of African American men, women and children and what the next steps should be in advancing education about these deeply interconnected issues.

The conference will feature keynote speakers Frances L. Brisbane, Ph.D., of the School of Social Welfare at the State University of New York – Stony Brook, and Peter Hayden, the head of Turning Point, a substance abuse treatment center in Minneapolis, Minn. Responders will include William Oliver, Ph.D., associate professor at Indiana University, and Antonia Vann, executive director of Asha Family Services in Milwaukee, Wis. The topic will be introduced by Dr. Larry Bennett, associate professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Brisbane is co-founder of "Counseling and Treating People of Color: An International Perspective," an annual conference now in its 14th year that draws professionals from more than 30 fields, representing more than 37 cultural groups. She is also the founder of the 100% Drug Free Clubs, a primary prevention program operating in the United States, several African countries and the Caribbean.

Brisbane also developed a model training program on "Overcoming Compassion Fatigue" for human services professionals who deal with abandoned and neglected children, and the terminally ill. She has written four books. Her latest, "Dr. C. Browne: A Natural Health Doctor – the Man, his Medicine and his Miracles," was published in June 1999. Most of her written work is on cultural competency, substance abuse, complementary medicine and spirituality.

Hayden is president and co-founder of Turning Point, Inc., a non-profit agency devoted to culturally specific chemical health and social service programs. The organization offers a 21-day residential treatment program and extensive aftercare, a 75-day halfway house, a safe residential rehabilitation facility for women with dependent children, an emergency shelter for children and other related programs.

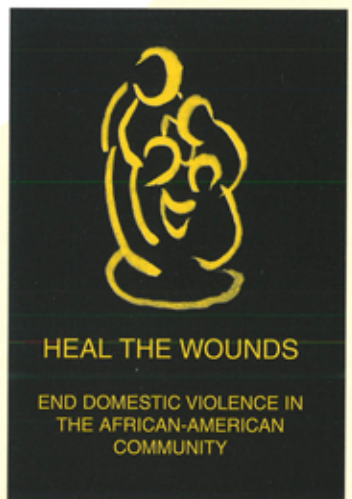
Hayden is a recovering addict who experienced homelessness and unemployment before changing his life. He is the chair of the board of directors of the National Black Alcohol and Addictions Council and is the member of several other boards of organizations working to heal chemical dependency. ♦



Frances L. Brisbane, Ph.D.



Peter Hayden





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Steering Committee Spotlight

Meet Esther Jenkins, Ph.D.

At first, Esther Jenkins wasn't sure how she fit with the mission with IDVAAC, since her primary research area is community violence and its effects on children. And although the fit still seems a little awkward to Jenkins, she increasingly sees connections between her work and the mission of the Institute.

Jenkins has been the research director at the Community Mental Health Council in Chicago since 1988 and a professor of psychology at Chicago State University since 1977. She enjoys the learning world of academia and the realities of working with a social service agency that provides a variety of services for its clients, including substance abuse programs, victim services and mental health programs for children and adolescents.



Esther Jenkins, Ph.D.

"The agency is unique in that it has a research department," says Jenkins. "Our job is not to evaluate programs but to research issues that affect our constituents. She recently completed a study of girls who are victims of sexual abuse, analyzing risk factors and outcomes, and comparing them with that of other patients who are not victims of sexual abuse. In addition, Jenkins completed a chapter for a book on clinical and developmental issues related to African-American children.

In 1996, Jenkins presented data on the incidence and consequences of witnessing violence from a survey of high school students at one of the first IDVAAC conferences.

"It wasn't immediately clear to me how I fit in with this new organization, since I don't see myself as a domestic violence or treatment person," Jenkins says. "But I joined the group because I like the people; they're very sharp and I think the organization has tremendous potential.

"Now, I'm very excited about the community assessments IDVAAC is doing with service providers and other groups in the black community," she says. "The community assessments IDVAAC is doing to determine how the black community defines and perceives domestic violence is critically important. The group has tremendous potential for raising public consciousness about domestic violence in the African-American community.

Jenkins is excited about IDVAAC's future in changing the way society views how to address African-American social problems. "If you're credible, you can influence treatment models and advocate and promote cutting-edge practices," she says. "This will be critical in achieving culturally sensitive treatment models for domestic abuse and other related social problems, such as substance abuse." ♦

Spirituality and Domestic Violence

The role of the faith community in healing wounds of domestic violence

By Lynn Ingrid Nelson

Wives submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Ephesians 5:22.

Passages like the one above have been used by many religious followers as validation for issues of power and control, according to Oliver J. Williams, executive director of IDVAAC. The trouble with this kind of interpretation is that it is selective and incomplete, he says.

There are many many passages in the Bible and other religious doctrines that exhort followers to love their spouses and treat them with respect. Chapter 5 of Ephesians in its entirety provides such critical context. "A favorite of mine is the passage that exhorts husbands to treat their wives as 'you'd treat yourself'. It goes on to say that 'a man who'd hurt himself is a fool.'"

Confusion surrounding religious interpretations and the role religious organizations play in human strength and restoration makes spirituality and domestic violence a dynamic issue. This is particularly true because centers of faith are often important refuges for victims of violence.

In addition, growing public conversation has encouraged more victims of domestic violence to come forward. Unfortunately, many places of faith are not well equipped to meet their needs. And sadly, as a result some turn their backs or miss opportunities to be of real service to victims of abuse.



Rev. Diane Thibodeaux

"God is finally pulling the covers off," says Rev. Diane Thibodeaux, who is a Minneapolis minister and a service provider. "But Christian women are notorious in denying their abusive relationships. They're afraid, and it is the traditional role of Christian women to cover, protect and shield their families. Many fear that people will label them or call them failures. Some blame themselves for not cooking, cleaning or praying enough. But they are hurting and wounded, and they need a trusted place to tell their stories."

A safe place

Rev. Sharon Ellis was looking for a safe place many years ago when she was a police officer involved in a violent relationship with another police officer. "I was crying out for help, and the two major institutions in my life – the church and law enforcement – were not available to me." She attributes this to the fact that the teachings of the church didn't encourage women to leave violent relationships and that law enforcement agencies were deeply into denial about physical abuse by police officers.

"This caused me to ask a lot of questions and catapulted me into working with domestic violence both in the police department and the church," says Ellis, who is now a police chaplain and an ordained minister. Rev. Ellis has been a tenacious educator and advocate within both institutions. And her anger and disappointment about the lack of assistance available to her when she needed it didn't cause her to give up.

"My pastor said they were sincere when I came to them for help, but they were sincerely wrong," Ellis added. "If churches really want to help and heal in the arena of domestic violence, they must provide training when they prepare pastors for the ministry." A good resource for this, says Ellis, is the Black Church and Domestic Violence Institute (BCDVI) in Atlanta, Ga.

According to the founder of the organization, Rev. Aubra Love, BCDVI is a national educational ministry, which offers annual training on the appropriate response to domestic violence by faith communities. The Institute held its second annual conference, "This Far by Faith," from Feb. 17-20.

A police chaplain's story

Ellis also has been active in increasing domestic violence awareness and education in the Chicago Police Department. She served on a task force to study the issue and hired the first advocate. She's a trainer for

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the department's domestic violence reduction program. "I speak a lot on the topic," she says, adding that she wants to play a major role in helping to break the silence about domestic violence. Ellis believes that the clergy has been co-opted into dealing with domestic violence in response to the increasingly louder voices of the victims.

She realizes that pastors can't do it all, but sees a special role for clergy who have worked in both the secular and sacred communities. "They can build bridges between both," she says.

Ellis says one of the barriers to effectively addressing domestic violence is the lack of conversation and coordination among professionals in the domestic violence arena. "By getting everyone to talk to each other, community policing has significantly increased police effectiveness," she says. Ellis believes the same kind of success could be enjoyed by those committed to healing domestic violence, if they improved their levels of communication and coordination.

Programs with roots in the faith community

In the early '80s, Rev. Thibodeaux realized that her church, Holding Forth the Word of Life Ministries, didn't have services to meet the needs of church members affected by domestic abuse. She wanted to offer a bridge between the church and community services. She soon realized that the community thought the church was part of the problem and vice versa. Thibodeaux started a program called Oasis of Love, Inc. which addresses the needs of the whole family in domestic violence crisis. It includes Marpe' (Greek for inner healing), which is a support group to address problems and to increase understanding of dynamics of domestic violence.

She also developed a program named "In Him" to deal with domestic abuse perpetrators. "I found that women don't necessarily want to get rid of their abusive partners — some want them to change their patterns of abusive behavior and be restored to the family," said Thibodeaux. She didn't stop there. Recently, she developed a program called "Kids Ending Relationship Violence" or KERV, which works with the public school system to educate teenage students and to address the needs of teens who are abuse victims of their boyfriends. She also developed another program for children, Oasis KidsPlace, which assists kids who have witnessed abuse in their homes.

To meet the needs of families who were transitioning from welfare to work — since most high-paying jobs are second or third shifts — Thibodeaux also began a program named Agape (Greek for unconditional love), which offers 24-hour childcare. The program is also a solution for women who have to leave most of their childcare support systems when they leave a violent relationship.



Sharifa Alkhateeb

Holding Forth the Word of Life Ministries has played an instrumental role in creating all of these programs. It provides the physical space for many of the programs. When grant money is available, the programs pay rent; when it isn't the church foots the bill. But the key role of the church is not just providing bricks and mortar. "The most important thing a church can do is acknowledge that domestic abuse happens and to educate its staff, so victims have a safe place to get help," says Thibodeaux. "Christianity should draw people in, not push them away. It's also important to treat all family members, because our focus is restoration."

Shame and blame — serving abusers

One of the most confusing aspects of domestic violence is the church's role in providing support for perpetrators. "Our society is really victim-oriented," says Rev. Michael Orr, a Detroit-area minister who has started a separate agency to serve men involved in domestic abuse. "We really haven't figured out a way to deal with perpetrators, but we must if we're going to attack the source of the problem."

When asked if rehabilitation of abusers is possible, Orr responded that as the leader of a church that believes in salvation, it's critical to believe that people can change. And he's seen plenty of evidence of this in his work. Orr's clients are often referred to his organization by the courts. His agency offers classes in anger management, as well as counselling groups for men who batter. Orr believes pastors can play a special role in healing domestic abuse, due to the built-in credibility they have with people of faith. Leaving the job to social workers alone is not an effective response, according to Orr.

However, he also cautions that the mantle of responsibility cannot be placed solely on the ministers of a church. "If that happens, the church won't be able to deal effectively with the issues," he says. Instead,

he recommends that a special team be assigned to work on the task. "If you heap everything on the pastor, things are bound to fall through the cracks," he concludes.

Role of religious myth

Religious misinterpretations sometimes contribute to the perpetuation of domestic violence. "Children and women were treated like livestock," says Thidobeaux. "It comes as a revelation to many perpetrators that women should not be treated as subservient but as equal partners. Some men suffer from the Adam and Eve syndrome. They like to blame Eve for leading them astray. They don't want to take responsibility for their own faults."

"I focus on the fact that men and women are different, but that our respective worth and personhood are of equal and immense value," he says. "I emphasize that God wanted to create a companion for man and went to the rib, the part of the body closest to the heart."

Ethnicity versus faith

Another challenge in dealing with domestic violence is that most public agencies are accustomed to dealing with ethnicity, not religion, according to Sharifa Alkhateeb, founder of the American Council for Muslims. "Most Muslims identify with the Islamic faith, rather than their home country," she says. In the United States, the nation's Muslim community is composed of about 45 percent African Americans and about 45 percent immigrants, with whites making up the other 10 percent.

Domestic violence is not a public subject yet for most Muslims — not even in their homes, even though a survey Alkhateeb did in 1993 indicates that about 10 percent of the Muslim population has experienced domestic violence. "In their home countries, Muslims deal with domestic violence through their extended families," Alkhateeb says. "They don't try to get help from their place of faith because it's taboo to discuss the topic outside the family."

Domestic abuse becomes an even bigger secret here because there may not be an extended family to turn to, says Alkhateeb, adding social service agencies that deal with abuse sometimes break up families, sometimes placing children in Christian homes. In addition, Muslim leaders, who are called Imams, are experts on religion, but unlike their U.S. counterparts, most have not been trained in counseling, law or pastoral care. "Often, an Imam will tell a female victim that the abuse is her fault, and she should figure it out or get support from other family members," says Alkhateeb. "So the problems are not solved — rather, they get compounded."

To meet the need for more educated religious leaders and members of the Muslim community, Alkhateeb is developing a national training program she calls the Peaceful Families Project. The focus will be to share more peaceful and egalitarian ways to approach family relations. She plans to offer it in 10 major cities throughout the United States. Eventually, she hopes to make it available overseas.

Role of faith community

It's clear that the faith community can no longer dodge the searing bullet of domestic violence. Victims are being encouraged by health professionals, school personnel and family members to come forward and get the help they deserve. Their primary source of solace and support must be prepared to help meet their needs and at the very least direct them to community-based programs. While communities of faith can provide a wide range of support — from resource and referral to the kind of holistic programming offered by such pioneers as Rev. Dianne Thidobeaux — one thing is certain.

God has pulled the covers off the issue of domestic violence. And communities of faith are expected to meet their followers' needs for warmth, compassion and words of wisdom — not with insincerity, but with training and commitment. ♦



Rev. Michael Orr (center)

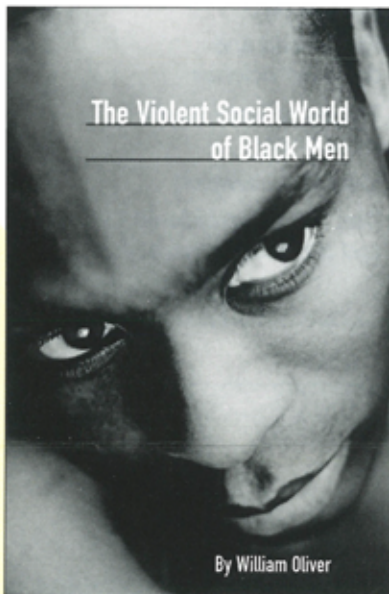
The Violent Social World of Black Men

William Oliver. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998.

By Robert L. Allen

William Oliver has taken a hard look at a disturbing issue: the high incidence of interpersonal violence among black men in the United States. He cites the well-known statistics showing that black men, especially young black males, are at extremely high risk for being the victims or perpetrators of homicidal violence. For Oliver, the critical questions are why does this violence occur and what can be done to reduce it? What he found has wide-ranging implications for everyone interested in violence prevention.

Oliver, who teaches criminal justice at Indiana University and serves on the steering committee of IDVAAC, decided to approach his research by going to the source: he interviewed 41 lower-class black males about their involvement in violent confrontations that occurred in bars and barlike settings. He chose these arenas "because many lower-class black males use these settings as social stages in which black men learn, construct, and project ghetto-specific manhood roles." (p. ix) Oliver's book is a ground-breaking study of black male violence in these settings.



His major finding was that black men's commitment to three manhood orientations — "the tough guy," "the player of women," and "the hustler" — increased their likelihood of becoming involved in violent confrontations. Oliver's analysis employed the key concept of compulsive masculinity. "Compulsive masculinity refers to a pattern of masculine behavior characterized by over emphasis on norms of toughness, sexual conquest, manipulation, and thrill-seeking." (p. 13) He argues that compulsive masculinity represents a dysfunctional compensatory adaptation on the part of men who, due to structured inequalities and other factors, cannot enact the traditional masculine role. The traditional role, he states, prescribes that men must be self-sustaining, occupationally successful, and they must protect and provide for their families.

Compulsive masculinity is dysfunctional because, as Oliver observes, not only does it fail to solve problems, it generates additional ones, especially the likelihood of violent encounters with other men attempting to enact the same manhood orientation. Oliver found that violence occurred often when men felt their autonomy as males had been transgressed.

"I felt like he wasn't being courteous or respectful of my rights when I said no to him... I think there's an unwritten thing about 'I respect you, you respect me.' It's respect. He disrespected me and my rights as a man. That right there alone made me mad, made me angry.... That's what causes a lot of problems." — Washington (pp. 125-6)

I might add that, although Oliver's research focuses exclusively on violence between black men, it is apparent that commitment to compulsive masculinity, with its central emphasis on exploitation and control of women as a marker of manhood, plays an important role in fostering domestic violence as well. For men for whom women are possessions to be controlled not only are other men threats but the very humanity of women is a "threat" to their distorted masculinity.

An interesting point made by Oliver is that although violence is commonly associated with bars and barlike settings, what mainly occurs in these settings are symbolic displays of masculinity. "Many lower-class blacks males use bars and barlike settings to exhibit their ability to dress and dance well, to attract the attention of members of the opposite sex, to control and manipulate the behavior of others, and to demonstrate their knowledge of controversial issues and worldly activities such as male-female relationships, child-rearing, race relations, politics, sports, gambling, alcohol and drugs." (p. 24)

Oliver recommends a number of approaches to reducing black male violence, including efforts to foster alternative masculine role orientations and lifestyles among black males. He calls for prevention strategies that would reform the social context in which black males internalize compulsive masculinity. "Reform of the social context must include community-based coalitions to prevent violence, black

male schools or classrooms, mentoring and manhood development programs, multicomponent community centers, and aggressive policing", the latter to be linked with community-based violence prevention efforts. (pp. 190, 196-7)

William Oliver does not excuse black male violence and he does not demonize black men. Instead in this provocative study he offers a carefully researched and thoughtful assessment of the causes of black male violence, coupled with a program for prevention based on community action. His book deserves to be read by a wide audience of government and social service professionals, as well community activists and concerned citizens. ♦

Robert L. Allen teaches African American and Ethnic Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. He is senior editor of *The Black Scholar* journal and a former board member of the Oakland Men's Project, a community-based violence prevention group.

Family violence conference to be Sept. 23-27 in San Diego

The fifth annual international conference on family violence will cover a wide range of topics, including advocacy, assessment, intervention, research, prevention and policy issues. It is sponsored by the Family Violence and Sexual Assault Institute at the California School of Professional Psychology in San Diego and is co-sponsored by IDVAAC. Executive Director Dr. Oliver Williams is also a member of the conference faculty.

This year the conference will be from Sept. 23-27 at the Town & Country Hotel and Convention Center in San Diego, Calif. More information and registration materials can be obtained by contacting Jae Marciano, conference coordinator at: 858-623-2777, phone, ext. 406; 858-646-0761, fax; or jmarciano@mail.cspp.edu, e-mail. ♦



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