

# Two Reports Describe Promising Programs and Approaches to Preventing Youth and Intimate Partner Violence

Overview of violence prevention programs with a focus on youth and intimate partner violence

#### **SUMMARY**

Project staff at Prevention Institute, Oakland, Calif., produced two reports highlighting promising programs and approaches to preventing youth and intimate partner violence—with an emphasis on initiatives directed at vulnerable groups, including women and girls and low-income communities.

# **Key Findings**

Prevention Institute staff produced two reports that summarized their findings:

- A June 2006 report, *Creating Safe Environments: Violence Prevention Strategies and Programs*, describes nine violence prevention approaches, with emphasis on initiatives directed at vulnerable populations, including:
  - Racial/ethnic groups
  - Immigrants
  - Low-income populations
  - Girls and women.
- A January 2007 report, *Poised for Prevention: Advancing Promising Approaches to Primary Prevention of Intimate Partner Violence*, discusses conclusions from a conference of national experts, including:
  - Promising approaches to changing community environments and societal norms to discourage intimate partner violence.
  - Actions to build momentum for primary prevention of intimate partner violence.
  - Ways to advance intimate partner violence primary prevention in immigrant communities.

## **Funding**

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) supported this project with two grants totaling \$151,394 between March 2006 and January 2007.

## THE PROBLEM

Every year, nearly 5.3 million women in the United States experience violence committed by an "intimate partner"—a current or former spouse, boyfriend, girlfriend or other person with whom they have been involved in an intimate relationship, according to Prevention Institute, an Oakland, Calif., nonprofit dedicated to advancing community well-being and health equity through primary prevention. Intimate partner violence can affect men as well as women, people in heterosexual or homosexual relationships, and those who do not necessarily live in the same household.

In recent years, organizations such as Prevention Institute have focused on "primary prevention" of intimate partner violence—developing comprehensive strategies to prevent the threat or onset of violence before it occurs. These strategies focus on changing the community environments and societal norms that promote and permit intimate partner violence. They are designed to alter the underlying conditions that shape behavior, rather than focus on treating one individual at a time.

Larry Cohen, executive director of Prevention Institute, says lessons from prior prevention successes should be applied to intimate partner violence and cites smoking bans in restaurants as an example of an environmental change that led to a change in norms and behaviors as it influenced more people to quit smoking.

"If you go into a restaurant and you take it for granted that smoking is natural, you are more apt to smoke," he said. "If we create an environment where smoking is something that you're embarrassed about or reticent about [because it's no longer allowed in restaurants] then you're less likely to smoke."

Although many local communities have adopted strategies to encourage primary prevention of intimate partner violence, this approach has yet to achieve widespread adoption, according to Prevention Institute. There have been few opportunities to examine lessons learned about various approaches, to identify gaps or to think strategically about advancing primary prevention on a larger scale.

#### **CONTEXT**

In 2006, the RWJF Vulnerable Populations team selected violence prevention as one of three new areas of focus. Violence prevention represented a new area of work, and a review of the field would provide a valuable and systematic review of existing programs that focus particularly on youth and intimate partner violence.

Earlier, RWJF had funded violence prevention off and on, but with no distinct or effective strategy.

#### THE PROJECT

Project staff at Prevention Institute, Oakland, Calif., produced two reports highlighting promising programs and approaches to preventing youth and intimate partner violence with an emphasis on initiatives directed at vulnerable groups, including women and girls and low-income communities.

As part of the project, Prevention Institute staff:

- Reviewed and catalogued the features of existing violence prevention programs. (ID# 056950)
- Convened a national conference of experts to discuss promising programs and approaches to preventing violence toward intimate partners. (ID# 056950)

# **Review of Violence Prevention Programs**

For its review of violence prevention programs, Prevention Institute undertook the following activities:

- Identified key informants from its database, including experts and leaders in the prevention of violence toward vulnerable communities.
- Received information on promising programs from 24 experts with experience in a range of fields, including policy development, research, government service and program development and implementation.
- Identified programs and initiatives with the following characteristics:
  - Designed to prevent violence before it occurs.
  - Age and developmentally appropriate.
  - Focused on efforts beyond individual behavior change to look at systems.
  - Had institutional settings primarily outside of school, but still community-based.
  - Had an orientation to resilience.
  - Involved youth to the extent possible through either youth-led activities or youth-driven programming.
  - Included programming that enhanced the capacity of those invested in the program and working in the field.

The programs and initiatives need not have been previously evaluated for effectiveness. The goal was to highlight innovative and promising approaches.

• Completed a report, *Creating Safe Environments: Violence Prevention Strategies and Programs*, summarizing the results of the review. (See Findings.)

## **National Conference of Experts**

For its conference of experts, Prevention Institute:

- Conducted a review of the literature on the area of primary prevention for intimate partner violence.
- Interviewed 26 prevention experts before the conference to help set the agenda for the meeting.
- Developed a framework of guiding principles to help guide discussions at the conference. (See the Appendix for framework.)
- Convened 27 participants to the meeting at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation in Princeton, N.J., September 7–8, 2006. (For a list of participants, see Appendix of meeting report, available online.)
- Completed a report, *Poised for Prevention: Advancing Promising Approaches to Primary Prevention of Intimate Partner Violence*, summarizing the discussions at the meeting.

#### **FINDINGS**

## **Review of Violence Prevention Programs**

- Prevention Institute's June 2006 report—Creating Safe Environments: Violence Prevention Strategies and Programs—describes nine promising violence prevention approaches, with an emphasis on initiatives directed at vulnerable populations. These included:
  - Racial/ethnic groups
  - Immigrants
  - Low-income populations
  - Girls and women.
- The nine promising approaches, and examples of each, include:
  - Comprehensive Government-Led Initiatives. The Blueprint for a Safer Philadelphia produced a coalition of more than 100 elected officials,

- representatives of community organizations and residents who worked on systematic strategies to prevent violence.
- Gang Violence Prevention and Intervention Programs. Homeboy Industries for a Future in Los Angeles is an economic development, job training program that helps ex-gang members and youth with job training and placement, tattoo removal, community service opportunities and case management services.
- Youth Development Programs. After School Matters in Chicago is a non-profit organization that expands out-of-school opportunities for Chicago's teens through partnerships with city agencies and community-based organizations. See Program Results Report on the RWJF program, After School, which supported this project.
- Youth Driven, Youth-Led Programs. Whereas some meeting participants viewed youth-led programs as a subset of youth development programs, others saw these programs—which are led by youth, with adult involvement—as an emerging approach with promise. The report cites the Movement Strategy Center, an Oakland, Calif., community organizing organization, as one group supporting this approach.
- School/Preschool-based violence prevention programs. Safe and Drug Free Schools in the Wichita, Kansas public schools delivers an extensive series of programs and services that are designed to prevent and reduce drug abuse, gang activity and other forms of youth violence.
- Mental Health Programs. To screen for exposure to community violence among students, the Los Angeles Unified School District uses a 10-week, school-based counseling intervention called the Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in the Schools (CBITS). CBITS is skills-based group intervention to treat symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and general anxiety among children ages 10–15 exposed to community violence.
- Intimate Partner Violence and Sexual Assault Prevention. SafePlace in Austin Texas, a shelter for women leaving abusive relationships, started the Expect Respect program in 1988 in response to school counselors' requests for support for girls in abusive dating relationship. It has grown to involve girls and boys in counseling and support groups, leadership training and a youth theater company.
- Coalition and Collaboration. The "Not Even One" campaign, is based on the premise that not one youth should be the victim of a homicide. Housed at the Carter Center, Atlanta, the project brings together researchers, law enforcement and residents across the country to identify causes of youth firearm fatalities in their communities and share the findings with leaders and local agencies to help prevent similar deaths in the future.
- Training and Leadership Development. The Institute for Community Peace based in Washington, is leading a national movement for community peace. The

Institute promotes a safe, healthy and peaceful nation by mobilizing community resources and leadership to support strategies that emphasize civic enablement.

# **National Conference of Experts**

- Prevention Institute's January 2007 report *Poised for Prevention: Advancing Promising Approaches to Primary Prevention of Intimate Partner Violence* summarizes the conclusions from a meeting of national and local leaders who work to prevent intimate partner violence. The report includes a discussion of:
  - Promising approaches to changing community environments and societal norms, including:
    - *Influencing policy and legislation*. For example, in South Los Angeles, community groups organized to reduce the availability of alcohol, which is a risk factor for various forms of violence, through reducing the number of outlets that could sell liquor.
    - Changing the practices of organizations. For example, Verizon Wireless has a
      domestic violence prevention HopeLine program that collects used cell
      phones and distributes them to victims of domestic violence. Liz Claiborne
      has a Love is Not Abuse campaign and workplace program that provides tools
      to the general public and employees about ways to prevent domestic abuse
      and assistance when involved in an abusive relationship.
  - Actions to build momentum for primary prevention of intimate partner violence including:
    - Leadership and advocacy. The National Network to End Violence Against Immigrant Women has elevated "informal" community leaders (neighborhood people who take a stand, step up and organize others) to become national leaders in the movement to prevent intimate partner violence.
    - Resource and support for practice. One of the most effective ways to support the practice of prevention is to share examples of promising initiatives from which others can draw inspiration or insights in a way that is easy to use.
  - Ways to advance intimate partner violence primary prevention in immigrant communities that include:
    - Environmental strategy and norm-change approaches. A positive approach to engaging people and organizations as partners can be particularly important in communities that face discrimination and stigma from the dominant culture.
      - For example, the National Compadres Network seeks to strengthen the traditional extended family system and encourage the positive involvement of Latino males as fathers, sons, grandfathers, brothers, mentors and partners in their families and community.

• Fostering comprehensive and multidisciplinary prevention. This type of prevention includes reducing the overall structural and systemic barriers immigrants often face in matters including housing, education, employment and health care.

For example, immigrant women who face barriers in securing drivers licenses will have less independence and mobility for taking care of basic needs and escaping potentially harmful situations. Efforts could focus on enabling immigrants to obtain drivers licenses more easily.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

The report *Creating Safe Environments: Violence Prevention Strategies and Programs* made the following recommendations for RWJF and other funding organizations:

- Strategy development is needed to ensure maximum effectiveness. The complexity of violence underlies the need for a strategic approach, which is the key to determining priorities, maximizing discrete efforts and ensuring that they build on each other.
- Infrastructure for preventing violence that affects youth is vital. Since no one program can be all-encompassing, there is great value in multi-component initiatives. This requires the appropriate infrastructure, including support for staffing, ongoing coordination and collaboration and improved data systems to enhance access, facilitate data sharing and answer questions that will promote the most effective violence prevention efforts.
- Violence prevention programs should have certain key characteristics. Primary prevention programs should strive to both reduce risk factors and increase resilience factors. Many of these characteristics are often forgotten in program development although they contribute to the success of programs.
- Training initiatives would enhance violence prevention skills. Practitioners, service providers, program directors and elected officials need skills to prevent violence. Cross-disciplinary training builds a common language, fosters understanding about different roles and builds necessary skills.
- Technical assistance would strengthen the field. Technical assistance can be a
  valuable component to help communities and providers overcome barriers to
  achieving goals. These barriers may include a lack of focus, shared vision, lack of
  knowledge and skills to change community environments and norms, and challenges
  related to building multidisciplinary partnerships and collaborations.
- Support for the primary prevention of violence affecting youth and intimate partner violence must be prioritized. Violence is among the leading causes of death for many in urban communities and many more people are affected by it—through

- the loss of family members or living in fear on a daily basis. However, these issues have not been given adequate attention or resources.
- Appropriate evaluation is key. Evaluation is a critical component of ensuring that
  efforts are effective and are addressing the identified need. Good evaluation will
  increase the viability of programs and approaches by demonstrating effectiveness and
  establishing credibility.
- Research and knowledge for preventing violence that affects young people and
  intimate partner violence must be furthered. Convening forums, commissioning
  papers and funding pilot initiatives could support conceptual development and the
  knowledge in this area.
- **Efforts must emphasize sustainability.** Violence prevention efforts should be sustainable over the long term. The instability of funding is a common cause of program failure.

## **LESSONS LEARNED**

- 1. When convening a group with the hopes of producing a report or a set of findings, it is useful to give the group a framework to help guide the group's thinking. Prevention Institute provided a framework to meeting participants to help guide discussion about a comprehensive approach to preventing intimate partner violence. The framework helped participants organize their thoughts and see how their work fit into a broader approach. (Project Director/Cohen)
- 2. Conducting research and interviews before and after a convening meeting strengthens the findings from the meeting. Project staff interviewed more than two dozen people before they convened their meeting to help guide the agenda; then they interviewed participants and others following the meeting to clarify and expand on the thoughts expressed during the meeting. (Project Director/Cohen)

### **AFTERWARD**

Following the close of these grants, Prevention Institute continued its work in primary prevention of violence in two related areas:

- Through a grant from the Ms. Foundation, Brooklyn, N.Y., Prevention Institute convened a meeting of experts in January 2009 to identify gaps and think strategically about ways to advance primary prevention of child sexual abuse and exploitation.
- As part of a group called the Healthy Eating Active Living Convergence Partnership,
  which is funded by RWJF and others and includes RWJF and six other organizations,
  Prevention Institute served as a consultant to help meet the partnership's key goal:
  Building the capacity around the country for people to encourage healthy eating and
  physical activity through changes in the environment.

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#### **APPENDIX**

# **Framework for Primary Prevention of Intimate Partner Violence**

(Current as of the end date of the program; provided by the program's management; not verified by RWJF.)

Staff at Prevention Institute provided the following framework to help guide discussions at the September 7-8, 2006, meeting of experts and practitioners in the field of preventing intimate partner violence.

The *Spectrum of Prevention* is a six-level tool that can assist advocates, practitioners and educators interested in advancing a community solution in thinking about all levels of activity and intervention. The *Spectrum of Prevention* is designed so that each step reinforces all other subsequent levels of an initiative.

The Spectrum of Prevention:

- 1. **Strengthening individual knowledge and skills.** Enhance an individual's capability of preventing injury or crime.
- 2. **Promoting community education.** Reaching groups of people with information and resources to promote health and safety.
- 3. **Educating providers.** Informing providers who will transmit skills and knowledge to others.
- 4. **Fostering coalitions and networks.** Bringing together groups and individuals for broader goals and greater impact.
- 5. **Changing organizational practices.** Adopting regulations and norms to improve health and safety and creating new models.
- 6. **Influencing policy and legislation.** Developing strategies to change laws and policies to influence outcomes in health, education and justice.

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