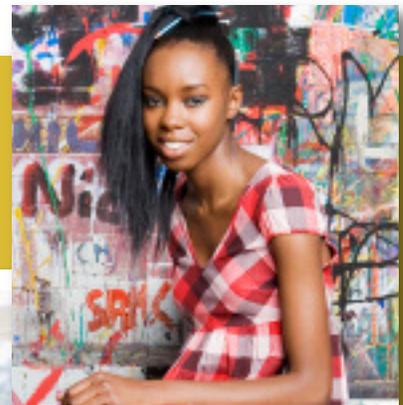
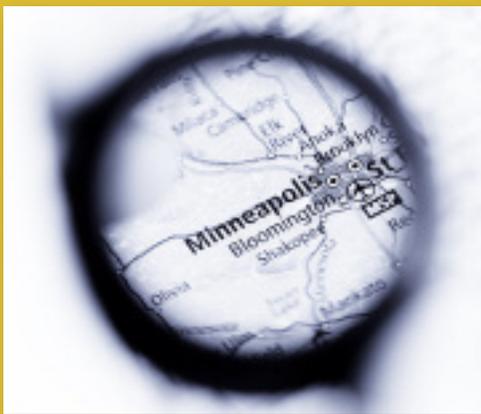


Understanding Youth Violence in North Minneapolis



Understanding and Responding to Youth Violence in North Minneapolis Using

Focus Group Data, a Community Conference, Community Organizing, and Expert Feedback



North Minneapolis Youth Violence Prevention Working Group

This project was a collaboration of several organizations: The City, Inc., Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee [JJAC], the Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community, Phyllis Wheatley Community Center, and the University of Minnesota's Urban Research and Outreach/Engagement Center, University of Minnesota Program in Health Disparities Research, and the University of Minnesota Center for Health Equity. The project planning committee included:

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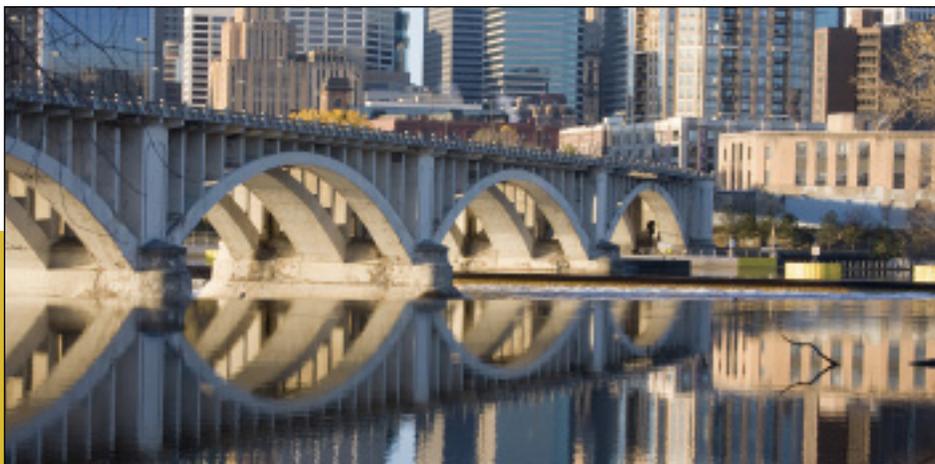
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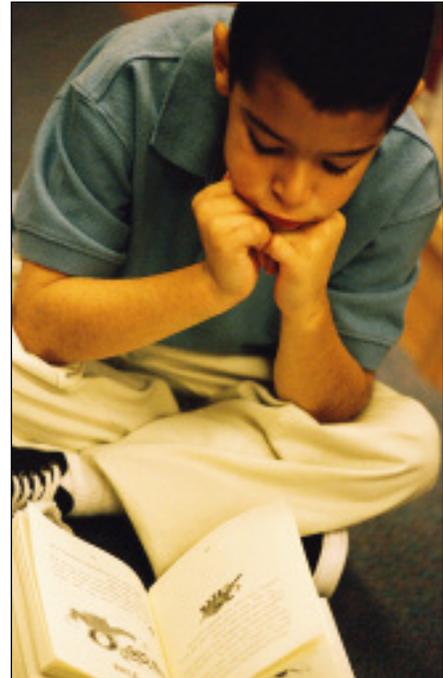
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY/INTRODUCTION

The community of North Minneapolis is disproportionately affected by violence. In 2010, the 15 communities in N. Minneapolis comprised 18% of the city's population but accounted for 60% of the city's murders. Youth and young adults accounted for over 40% of the city's homicides, with the majority of the victims and perpetrators residing in N. Minneapolis.

In response to the youth violence in N. Minneapolis a group of leaders of community service programs who work with at-risk youth, representatives from the University of Minnesota's Urban Research & Outreach/Engagement Center (UROC), and the Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community (IDVAAC) began working to address the issue of youth violence. The first step in that process was to conduct focus group interviews with at-risk youth and individuals who work with them to gather information that would eventually be used to adapt evidence based youth violence interventions. The planning group strongly believed that in order for interventions to be successful, they must be consistent with the lived experiences of the youth that they were trying to help. The second phase of the project was the planning and implementation of a community forum where the results of the focus groups and individual interviews were shared and commented on by participants and two leading researchers in the field of youth violence. The third phase of this project "Next Steps", refers to the planning committee's work, post-conference, to use information from that meeting and from from the research to develop intervention program.



Report on Focus Group and Individual interviews

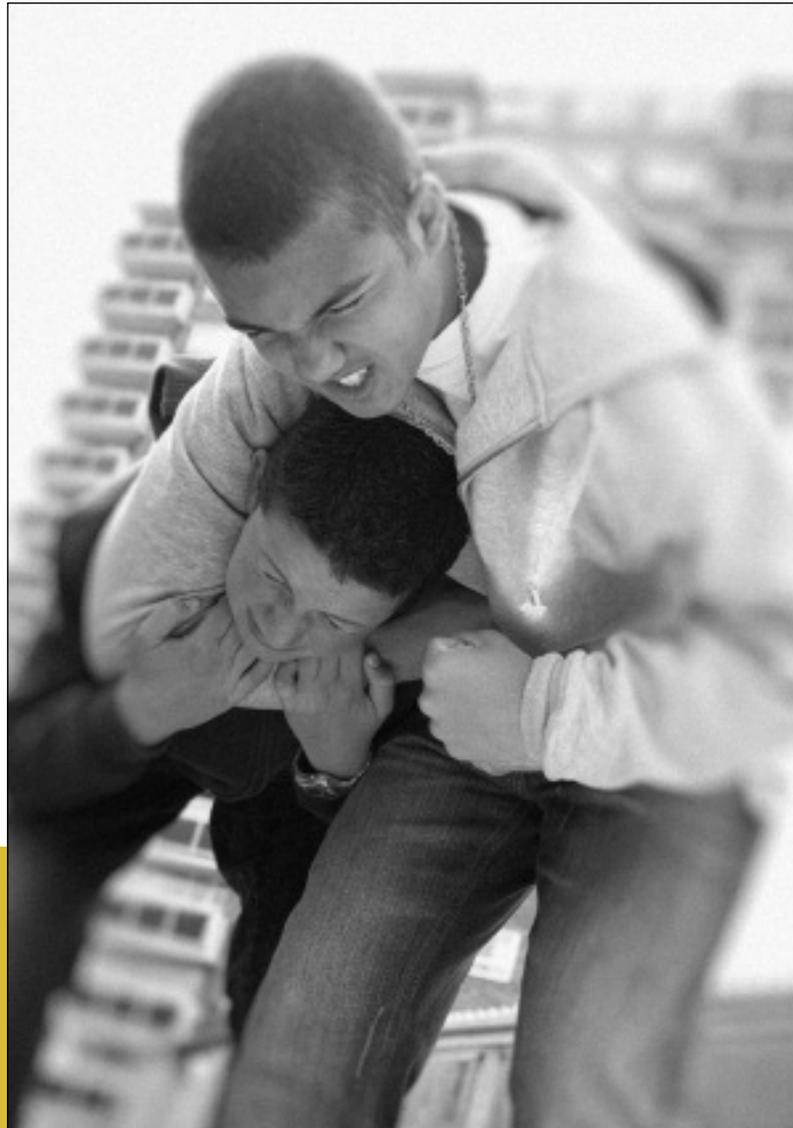
A total of 44 individuals, 12 adult providers and 32 youths (from high school and Jr. High School, males and females) participated in focus groups and individual interviews on the causes of and solutions for youth violence in North Minneapolis. All of the providers worked with at risk youth and the great majority of the youth participants had experienced interpersonal violence as a victim or witness.

Youth Responses.

These adolescents were fairly ambivalent about their safety in their neighborhoods. Boys felt safer than girls, particularly in their neighborhoods with their friends, but all of them were aware of the need to take measures to increase their safety and spoke of the possibility of getting caught up in random acts of violence that frequently occur in their community. The prevalence of guns was a concern for all of the youth. With the exception of high school boys, these kids generally felt safe in their schools particularly those where staff was vigilant. The older kids in particular were very distrustful of the police whom they saw as offering little protection and often harassing them. “Ego”, “respect”, and “not getting punked” were prominent explanations for why kids fight. Many fights resulted from a wrong look, a rumor, slights to reputation that had to be defended. Electronic media was often used to arrange fights and in various ways contributed to the hostilities. Older boys spoke of the despair from deprivation and the need to make money which often led to involvement in violent activities and the thug life. Although most kids knew when a fight was about to happen, none indicate that they would tell an adult (“snitches get stitches”). These children were fairly pessimistic about the prospect of reducing youth violence, and saw the violence resulting from systemic and individual factors. The older boys sounded somewhat hopeless, believing that society cared little about them or their futures. However, they believed that youth violence could be decreased if there were more mentors and good role models, after school activities, and jobs.

Provider Responses.

The adult workers agreed with many of the causes of violence described by the students, but also saw anger, frustration, and hopelessness from deprivation as playing a large part as well. Poor parenting, and community and family destabilization from drugs and poverty were viewed as frequent contributors. These participants, who had worked with at-risk youth an average of 15 years, saw youths’ relationships with caring adults as a key deterrent to youth violence. In addition, jobs and after school activities were also seen as important in reducing youth violence.



Conference: Ending Youth Violence: A New Generation of Ideas

The results of the research were shared at a conference, held at the Holiday Inn – Metrodome, Minneapolis. The meeting was attended by 144 participants, representing 50 organizations. The morning session consisted of presenting the results of the research, and comments on the research findings by two nationally recognized experts in the field – Dr. Carl Taylor Professor from Michigan State University and Dr. Deanna Wilkinson from Ohio State University. In addition there were presentations by several formerly incarcerated youth and Otis Zanders, the former Superintendent of Red Wing Youth Correctional Facility. The morning closed with a lively discussion by a roundtable consisting of agency heads, politicians, police representatives, and community activists. In the afternoon, participants met in smaller groups to talk about strategies that they thought were working and their visions for the future.

In both the breakout groups and the conference evaluation completed several weeks later, participants spoke of the value of networking and collaboration (and believed that the conference provided some opportunities for this) , and the deep desire for concrete actions to result from the meeting.

Next Steps

Local members of the planning committee continue to meet, and have developed an action agenda based on the study, feedback at the conference, and the conference evaluation. In response to the clear desire of those at the conference to network and collaborate, the group has invited conference attendees to a lunch meeting on February 24, 2011 to continue the work of developing plans to end youth violence in zip code 55411.



Response Papers from Experts

Both scholars agreed that the findings from the youth and provider focus groups were quite consistent with that in the literature. Dr. Taylor suggested that the data could be strengthened by getting more information from youth violence perpetrators ("outsiders and outlaws") and females involved in violence. Dr. Wilkinson noted that more detailed information about 'conditions on the block' would be helpful in developing specific interventions, and noted the importance – and challenges – of working collaboratively.

FOCUS GROUP AND INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

The purpose of the study was to get youth and adult providers' perceptions of the causes and dynamics of the violence, recommendations for solutions, and perceptions of the barriers to successful interventions. The information was collected using qualitative research methods of focus group and individual interviews. The data was collected over a two day period, November 8 – 9, 2010.

Method

Participants

Youth. A frequent response from both boys and girls is that they fight over the opposite sex, and gender figured into fighting in a number of ways. The most obvious link is when there is competition for the attention of a particular boy or girl or a feeling that others don't respect your relationship with that person. Both boys and girls are particularly sensitive to being embarrassed in the presence of the opposite sex, making a small issue a much larger one, and boys were seen as often instigating fights between girls. For boys, "fame and name and rank" came from dominating one's opponent and attracted more girls.

The youth were recruited from two alternative schools, a community based program, and several North Minneapolis churches.

Table 1. Age of Youth Participants

| Age | Males | Females |
|---------|-------|---------|
| 11 | 0 | 1 |
| 12 - 13 | 6 | 5 |
| 14 - 15 | 1 | 3 |
| 16 - 17 | 8 | 7 |
| Total | 15 | 16 |

Prior to the focus group, the youth participants completed a brief questionnaire that asked about age and grade, but also whether they had ever been hurt in a violent incident (i.e. a beating, stabbing or shooting) or saw someone get hurt in a violent incident. In general, the youth reported considerable exposure to violence. One in four (25%) of the students reported being hurt in a violent incident and 70% had witnessed violence. However, as shown in Table 2, there was considerable variation in violence exposure by age and gender with older boys more likely to report victimization, but girls as likely to witness violence. Older youth were more like to have been exposed to violence; older boys were more likely than girls to have been hurt in an act of violence. Surprisingly, none of the junior high boys reported witnessing or experiencing violence.

Table 2. Violence Exposure of Youth

| | Boys | | Girls | |
|------------------------------|----------------|------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| | Jr. High (n=6) | High School(n=9) | Jr. High(n=6) | High School(n=10) |
| Witnessed violence to others | 0 | 7 | 6 | 9 |
| Been victimized by violence | 0 | 5 | 2 | 1 |

Adult Providers. Twelve adult providers participated in two groups, with six males and six females each in their respective groups. All of the adult participants worked directly with youth. Job titles included truant officers, school social worker, school counselor, peer educator, behavior specialist, sex educator, mentor/volunteer, minister, after school programmer, and school director. With the exception of one young lady who was relatively new to the field (1 year), the providers had considerable experience working with at-risk youth. Years spent working in the field ranged from 1 – 40, with a median of 17 years in the field and 15 years working in N. Minneapolis. Men had spent longer working with youth than women. On average men had spent 17 years working in the area and women had spent 11. The providers came from similar sources as youth: alternative schools, community programs, and churches.



Procedure

Youth and adult participants were interviewed at UROC, the university's urban outreach center located in North Minneapolis, in November 2010. Youth and adults were interviewed in same gender groups. After the groups, several boys and girls were selected for individual interviews based on their responses in the group. A total of seven youth were interviewed individually: two middle school boys, one high school boy, and two each middle and high school girls. All of the male individual and group interviews, youth and adult, were conducted by Dr. Oliver Williams, Professor of Social Work at the University of Minnesota and Executive Director of IDVAAC. The female interviews were conducted by Dr. Esther Jenkins, Professor of Psychology at Chicago State University, and a member of the steering committee of IDVAAC. The group sessions lasted approximated 90 minutes; the individual interviews were shorter. All sessions were tape recorded and, subsequently, transcribed. The study was approved by the University of Minnesota and Chicago State University IRB. Appropriate parental consent and youth assent were obtained for minors; informed consent was gotten from all adult participants.

Questions

A list of questions guided the group and individual sessions. Youth were asked a about their feelings of safety in their neighborhoods and in their schools, including what kinds of things increased their feelings of safety. Their perceptions of causes of violence were explored by asking why kids fight, who is most likely to fight, when and where fights are most likely to occur. Finally, the youth were asked about things that can be done to reduce or prevent youth violence in general, and gun violence and youth violence in North Minneapolis in particular. Providers were asked their perceptions of the causes of youth violence in general and in North Minneapolis in particular. They were also asked about solutions to youth violence in general, and ones that they personally have used.



RESULTS FOR YOUTH

Results are reported separately by age (high school vs. middle school) and gender. Reports from the provider focus groups follow those from the youth.

Feelings of Safety or Everybody on their toes every day.

High School Girls. The girls were ambivalent about feelings of safety in their neighborhoods: "I feel safe, but then I don't", "kind of, but not really", "I don't feel safe, but I don't feel not safe". Girls spoke of gender based fears, of men who "try to talk to you", who follow them home. They seem to feel safe in their immediate neighborhoods where they know people, and when they are with people that they know. They understand how to stay safe, for example to stay with others, not to go out at night alone. They are afraid of getting shot. Several spoke of "lot of shooting" around their house which made them feel unsafe. They recognize the hot spots (areas with "drug dealers, crack heads, just like grown people") and feel least safe "in the Lows" and on "Golden Valley Road", and talked about specific incidents that happened in those areas. The girls thought that black kids and young girls were least safe. In an individual interview, one of the high school students indicated that sexual violence was a big problem for girls, both in the home and in public places. She also believed that dating violence was a problem for girls, particularly as girls start to date older men.

These children do not feel safe with the police. There was a long, animated discussion about their fear of and dislike for the local police. Complaints about the police ranged from police brutality (use of excessive force) and harassment (apparent indiscriminate stops) to unresponsiveness - "the police don't have a clue". Most participants had a story to tell of police harassment or brutality that they had witnessed or heard about.



“The police feel like they want to bother you, that's what they gonna do. I really can't feel safe. The police don't make you feel safe from the drugs and rapists and none of that stuff, cause you can't trust them either, cause they probably be the same way.”

The girls believe that black kids get targeted by police because of race.

“You can be a nice dressing kid, look good and you could be the good child or whatever, it don't matter. You're still ain't going to be safe, cause they don't care who you is, if you're black.”

The girls felt safe at school mainly because of the staff's monitoring.

“... the staff, they be so like, and I'm not going to say into your business like it's a bad thing, but you know they....”,

“We tell the teacher everything that's going on in the school and I feel safe at school”.

Jr. High Girls. These younger girls also did not feel safe ("not really safe") though there was less apparent gender based fear. These girls talked more about fears fanned by news events, but also were aware of violence in their neighborhood. They particularly didn't feel safe at the corner store "because that's where people get shot at", at Commons Park and "over north...you see a whole bunch of people sitting on the corner throwing up gang signs". They were concerned about shootings in their neighborhood and recognized the unpredictable danger of the streets ("...When I'm with friends or hanging out on the street, I don't feel safe because...you never know what's going to happen.") Unlike the older girls, there was no great fear of the police and at least some belief that they police can protect you.



They believe that the kids who are least safe in the neighborhood are "gangbangers" and "kids that want to be gangbangers", both boys and girls. As one participant said "...some of the kids are involved in stuff, so it's like [they] *shouldn't* feel safe".

The girls attended four different schools and there were mixed feelings about safety in school. "I feel kind of safe, but then not so safe". Fighting in school lead to feelings of un-safety. One student attending a selective school felt very safe "because bullying or fighting is not tolerated at all in my school". The kids most at risk for getting picked on in school were "the little people" - in terms of being young and small – and people who are nerdy.

High School Boys: As with the older girls, the boys felt personally safe in their neighborhood with their friends, but were very aware that something could happen that was not of their own making.

"...but its other guys you know. ..that's just reckless you know, but ..we know them still, [and] what they be doing might inflict on us. Like what if they get into a shootout, we might be right there you know. "

As one participant explained his 16-year old brother's violent death "he was in the wrong place at the wrong time". The random unpredictable nature of the violence around them was a recurring theme throughout the interview. The young men weren't scared, knew the potential dangers and were vigilant.

"...wherever you go, you still got to have the mentality that if you, like even when you leave out the house in the morning, it ain't really guaranteed that you're going to come back. "

The boys were very aware of danger on the North Side – 'everywhere on the North Side'. The neighborhood was seen as least safe for gangbangers – and for children who could get caught in random violence. They talked about areas of the city that should be safe zones, but were not (e.g. Boys and Girls Club, the suburb of Lake Calhoun).

As with the older girls, there was a general mistrust of the police: "Cops are crazy. Cops be more reckless than us. Cops be beating us up."

These boys had mixed feelings about their teachers and the safety of their schools. Perceptions of school safety varied by school. The boys agreed that violence/fights could occur in the school, but also after school and may involve others who are not students.

Schools were seen as not really connecting with these youth. The boys thought that some of the teachers tried to help students, but others focused on academics, didn't appreciate what they were going through, and were quick to punish them when they didn't do well academically.

"The thing is the schools don't really care. They don't got grief counselors. You gotta think about man, these kids is going through hell out there. Their friends are dying like that. The shit they're going through at home is crazy. The parents are drug addicts, beating their momma's ass every data. This shit is for real and they going to school with that on their mind. Like, damn, am I going to have somewhere to stay?"



"My nigga just got killed and I'm going to go to school like nothin' happened. I got to wake up every day and go to this dirty ass school with these dumb ass teachers, do this work that ain't going to help nobody and what's on my mind, my nigga got killed. I ain't got nowhere to live. How the hell am I supposed to go to school with all that on my mind, all that on my brain? How am I supposed to do mathematics, calculus and talk about some shit that's irrelevant to your situation."

"And they put you out when you ain't doing it."

One student, describing a chaotic home life and a recent loss, referred to himself as a ticking time bomb, potentially violent in school but also grateful for the positive things that school offered:

"I ain't gotta worry about the police in school.....free food, you know you can chat women up in the hallways, gotta place to be. That's school."

Middle school boys. As with the older boys these boys felt somewhat safe in their neighborhoods where they knew everybody but also knew that the neighborhoods were potentially quite dangerous. Like the younger girls, they mentioned fears raised by news events, but they often heard shooting and sirens in their neighborhood and reported that unsafe events, such as fights, drug dealing, and public drunkenness frequently occurred.

"... my neighborhood ...it's not a good place, but it's an OK place. It's like when you wake up in the morning, you got your days – that's how my neighborhood is, when you wake up in the morning it's got its days, you never know how it's going to be."

The participants attended four different schools, which were seen as safe. One student talked about the presence of teachers outside the bldg making him feel safe. They also talked about not feeling safe at other schools that they attended. Even fights in school were safer than those occurring in the neighborhood because they were seen as less likely to turn lethal.

These kids also saw neighborhood fights as more likely to involve guns, less likely to be broken up, and more likely to be deadly. Schools were safer because teachers would stop fights. The students also saw their teachers and principals as caring, concerned about their future, and generally supportive.

In summary, these kids felt safe in their neighborhoods because they knew people but were aware of the random nature of bad events and that there were places where they were least likely to be safe because of gangbanging, drug dealing, loitering etc. While both boys and girls were aware of the possibility of getting hurt in the neighborhoods - not because they would instigate an event but rather being at the wrong place at the wrong time – girls spoke of being aware of gender based violence. Age differences were not dramatic but older youth seemed to have had more direct experiences with violence. Students generally felt safe in schools where there was monitoring.

Causes of Youth Violence or What did you step on my shoe for?

Table 3. Youths' Perceptions of Cause of Youth Violence

| | | |
|----------------|---------------------|------------------|
| Disrespect | Witnessing violence | Boredom |
| Opposite sex | Poor role models | Electronic media |
| Financial need | Family dysfunction | Weapons |

High school girls. The group generally agreed that girls (themselves included) fight for a number of reasons, often for no apparently good cause – "just stuff". The girls believed that at the core of girl fights, regardless of the apparent cause, was a concern about being disrespected. When asked how this alleged disrespect is shown, the girls indicated a number of ways, often non-verbal: "a look or gesture", "your attitude; your face expression", "everything", in addition to talking about or spreading rumors about the girl. When a girl is disrespected, she is obligated to confront the other party "to prove like they ain't no punk or something". The participants talked about the importance of rumors and how girls fight "because they don't like each other" and sometimes without even knowing each other. One of the participants described an incident on the bus in which she overheard another girl, whom she "didn't know from a can of paint", say to friends how she was going to beat her up because she was allied with one of her enemies. These girls had never met and did not know each other by sight. Another girl in the focus group reported a similar incident.

One participant offered an insightful modeling/inter-generational analysis of the need to respond to disrespect with violence:



"Everybody got raised like not to be disrespectful....I'm not trying to be racist, but white people do they ever get hit or spanked or whooped, or anything? ...But if ya'll disrespected your mom, you all gonna get hit or cussed out. So, you feel like if somebody else is disrespecting you, you do what your mom do. OK, if you disrespect your mom, she's probably going to hit you or something to let you know don't disrespect her. So you think if a random girl trying to disrespect me, I'm not going to let her know not to disrespect me? Oh, I'm going to let her know. I'm going to say something. I'm not going to just hit you, but if I say something, you're going to say something, so then basically we're just going to fight."

In response to a direct question, boys were seen as the number one reason why girls fight. Girls fight over boys and boys were seen as often instigating fights between girls. A boy may tell a girl when someone has said something bad about her, or directly encourage girls to fight - "Boys, dudes would be the main ones ampin', getting stuff started...'you gonna let her say that to you?' She'll be like 'no'..."). Girls try to prove to boys that they are tough, and boys are entertained by girls' fighting.

Junior high girls. "I don't think it's necessary to fight, unless you have to." These girls noted that fights are typically caused by rumors – someone says something about the other (or its rumored that they said something), the target then has to confront the alleged rumor spreader, there is an argument that escalates into a fight. The fight may develop quickly or may unfold over several days or weeks, as there is much talk among other students about the impending fight. Crowds gather at the fight and instigate. They also saw girls fighting for the same reason as did older kids: "they have something to prove, they want to be cool, they want respect" "they want to be known". Girls also fight for no apparent reason. One participant recounted an instance in which she fought for no apparent reason – "I just didn't like her. She got on my nerves. I hated seeing her face". They saw arguments over boys as often being a factor in fighting, and several noted the general angst of growing up as a contributing factor – "you know how teenagers start acting like they're all grown up and stuff?... and then they try to prove themselves by fighting other people to show them that like they can be whatever, do whatever".

High school boys. The young men's first response to the question "why do fights break out?" was "women", but then a number of other factors were eventually offered as contributors: "gossip", "ego", "pride", "jealousy", "hating", "built up animosity", "straight up stupidity", poor role models in the community and media, deprivation, and environments that support violence. "Living the thug life" often addressed many of these, particularly identity related issues and deprivation. Not being embarrassed in front of women, and other men respecting your relationship with a woman indicated the close relationship between jealousy, pride, and ego. Also, fame and name and rank – which came from dominating one's opponent - attracted more girls. Similar to the girls response, these boys talked about animosity growing out of jealousy – "its just animosity built off your gear, what type of girl you got, how your money flowing..." "They gonna hate on you cause you got what they aint got...'the shit I don't got, be the shit I gotta take.' Being "one-upped" or embarrassed, even if inadvertently, could easily lead to animosity, and eventually, violence.



"It could be something little like someone being smarter than you. In class, the teachers ask you a problem, you don't really get it, but the next person next to you, they say the answer. Now they gotta prove themselves and whatever."

Obviously fear of embarrassment in such circumstances can lead students to not participating in class.

Violence and involvement in the "thug life" were often intertwined. Some boys talked about involvement in the thug life in order to get stuff for themselves and their families

"I'm in the household with my momma, ... I love her to death, [she] is a mother and father to me. But we have struggled through my whole life. So my mentality for my family was to get money anyway, anyway possible. "

Others talked about coming from middle class homes but being drawn to the possibility of getting even more stuff, plus respect.

"I wanted that lifestyle. It wasn't because I didn't have things, because I had all of that..I chose to live that lifestyle. I said you know what? My big cousin is out here getting it. Nigga's are scared of him. Nigga's fear him when they come around. I wanted to be like that."

The boys talked about their environment, the absence of positive role models and the presence of negative role models.

"I was just raised around nothing but people selling drugs, family members doing this, going to jail....I've been through a lot ... so I just see it as if it's the environment we're in that's set up like that. If we was in the suburbs or something, we'd be good I think. The white kids are all lawyers and everybody's parents are married. We aint got that lifestyle".

"We ain't got nothing."

"We're seeing guns, drugs. We're seeing the big ballers with the Mercedes. How do you get that Mercedes?"



Girls and partying are the obvious perks to being successful in the thug life.

The boys also thought that boredom contributed to violence and other problems.

"For everybody that got nothing to do ... is going to lead to the same thing, cause if ya'll aint got nothing to do, now what can we find to do ? Let's whoop on the next person who comes past. "

"Point them out and knock them out. "

"People get bored and start using drugs and shit. "

Violence in response to boredom was seen as recreational.

Middle school boys. "What starts fight?" Girls, gossip and rumors: "people talking about you – your mom or grandmother or clothes", "gossip...he said this, she said that or you talking about that person or that person talking about you". " ...And somebody say something to them or they step on their shoes. Like that's the most thing, like dudes care about shoes and cars.



They also saw certain kids as more likely to be involved in fights: poorer students, those who act out in class (yelling and “cussing” at teachers, walking out of the room without permission), and those who don't take care of themselves – “come to school with dirty clothes, don't want to wash up, bad hygiene and stuff”. Students “saggin” and in gangs (as indicted by throwing gang signs) were also seen as most likely to be involved in fights. These middle school students talked about students wanting to be in gangs even if they weren't, “making up gangs”, and the presence of “Y and T” (younger thugs) at their schools.

Witnessing violence impacts youths' view of the world, which now becomes a potentially (probably) unsafe place, and primes them to act aggressively in their own defense.

"Your whole thinking process changes seeing somebody getting killed in front of you."

" You feel like you're gonna go out like that. I'm not going to go out like that."

"So now you got to protect yourself. "

Electronic Media

The electronic media figures prominently in fighting. Rumors and threats are spread through texting, Face book, and twitter. Both the junior high and high school girls described Face book pages where girls are slandered, apparently with little recourse as to how you get listed on the page. Fights occur over things posted on the internet.

“On Facebook, there's no privacy on Facebook. You can see everything somebody writes. It don't even gotta by your conversation for people to jump into it, add what they got to say. Then this person jumps into it and add what they go to say, then ya'll be arguing and when I see you I'm going to do this and that and then...”

“Why is your boyfriend taking pictures of me?”

“Its also a lot of he say, she say. They're making up page about girls being 'ratchet' (promiscuous)...they'll put your name out there and say you're doing stuff you're not even doing.”

Fights are recorded and posted on You Tube. Cell phones are used to arrange fights - and ambushes, i.e. in a beef, others call to give a girl's locate so others can come and beat her up.

Weapons or I just want to know, what is the reason with the guns all the time?”



High school girls. According to these participants, many of the girls who fight carry weapons such as mace, rocks and locks in socks, knives, blades under their tongue. The use of such weapons was generally considered "unfair", a result of the girl not being able to fight or intentionally attempting to disfigure the other party. Girls made a distinction between one-on-one fighting (fair) and getting jumped by many girls (unfair). "But nowadays fights aren't really fights, you got weapons...Its not a fight, it's a jump". The intent of the weapons was often to disfigure the opponent. The girls noted that boys also used weapons, but almost consistently the weapon was gun.

Junior high girls. These girls talked about the same kinds of weapons as the older girls: knives, cork screws, socks and rocks, locks, sharpened pencils and paper clips, mace, rings and brass knuckles. They noted that weapons are often used to "even the odds" because "people be scared nowadays".

High school boys These young men talked frequently about the ready use of guns, which is a relatively new phenomenon.

"It used to be just fight ...no guns, just fighting."

"Fight and be cool after that...now it's kinda crazy...it jumped straight to 'I'm taking your life nigga, fuck that fighting'".

Guns may be used when a person is retaliating for having lost a fight, and gun use bestows rank as the shooter becomes known as "a killa". Guys who used to be considered "lame" become tough guys with guns. The participants noted that once others get guns, you have to get one in order to protect yourself. They also noted that guns are equalizers and are most likely to be used when the individual feels very threatened, as in getting jumped, or if they think they will lose the fight. "We gonna fight, one of us is gonna lose, one of us can't swallow our pride, so its gonna be a gun involved". Sometimes gun use is the first resort: "its going to escalate to gun problems anyway, so why don't we just skip to gun problems". While recognizing the need to use a gun (to stay safe, if getting jumped) the boys generally disparaged the use of weapons and thought that "real men" used their fists to resolve disputes. Referring to gun use, one participant noted

"I don't respect it. I see anybody can shoot a gun. I think a baby can shoot a gun.I'd rather throw these hands than shoot".

Middle school boys. These boys also talked about gun play, particularly in retaliation for losing a fight. They also talked about how the size of one's gun indicated rank and respect. They thought kids got guns from their parents, off the street, and from "big homeys" – older guys in the gang. One participant described hearing a boy on the bus talk about how he and his friends have one gun, which they keep in a designated place where each can find the weapon when its needed.



Reluctance to Tell Adults or “Snitches get stitches”.

Whether or not the children would tell an adult if they knew of an impending fight, involving themselves or others, depended on the identity of the adult. None of them would tell a teacher but the girls indicated that they would tell their mom.

High school girls. "Snitching" was seen as a serious transgression and the girls didn't believe that the teachers could or would protect their identity if they shared something in confidence. None of the girls would tell an adult if they knew a fight was coming – "No." "No". "Screw that." "You don't tell". "You keep your mouth shut". Kids don't want to be seen as snitches, and there was the belief that snitches get beat up. When the question got more personal and specific ("would you tell a teacher if you were going to get jumped?"), the answers were the same – "You wouldn't tell a teacher"; "I'm hitting them with a lock – to keep it real". However, all of them indicated that they would tell their mother, if they knew ahead of time, which is often not the case.

Junior high girls. Similar to the HS girls, these younger girls indicated that if they knew they were going to be in a fight, rather than telling a teacher they would just be prepared to fight. They were also afraid of being seen as snitches, but were more likely to talk about teachers who made an effort to keep an eye on them. They noted that some teachers "are always up in your business" and indicated that students do share information with teachers that they perceive as "cool". When asked under what circumstances they would tell a teachers, they indicated that they might tell if the fighting "took it too far" e.g., using a weapon, or if a number of older kids were going

to jump a younger, smaller student. As with the older girls, these girls would tell their mom if they were going to be jumped, although one noted that it would be after the fact because you never can tell if people are serious about fighting you, or just talking



High school boys. When asked if they would tell if a fight was about to happen, all of the boys said "NO". Consistent with the other groups, the boys felt that it is dangerous to be a snitch. What would they do if they thought they were going to be jumped? Fight. Strike pre-emptively. Bring their boys. Get a weapon if they were outnumbered. Jumping someone (i.e. several people beating up one person) was seen as an act of disrespect, and one that often provoked extreme responses.

"When I got jumped, I called up all of my cousins, like we gotta handle this in the worst way. We gotta do whatever with this situation. And, I don't know, it was out of stupidity, it just be out of madness at the moment."

Most of the boys reported that they had been jumped before and thought that "jumping" was one of those circumstances that warranted gun play.

Jr. high boys. This group interpreted the question as would they tell if they were in a fight. And reported mixed feelings – some thought yes and some thought no. In response to a question about getting jumped, in addition to bringing your friends as backup one participant indicated that he would try to defuse the situation by pointing out that this dispute should be settled without involving others.

Gender Differences in Fighting

High school girls. The girls believed that there were clear differences in the ways in which boys and girls fight, and the reasons that they fight. They saw girls as engaging in much more arguing prior to the fight, giving the appearance of intending to create a scene. Girls were also seen as more likely to attempt to disfigure the opponent, and possibly because of this, as more violent. However, boy fights were seen as more serious, with a goal to physically dominate their opponent. They were also seen as more lethal. Boy fights were seen as much more likely to involve guns and shooting. Girl fighting was seen as attention getting while boys fights were seen as intending to resolve real beefs. The importance of respect for boys surfaced in this discussion, and the threat of losing a fight and the consequent loss of respect was seen as a primary reason for their weapon use. The girls also realized that weapon use escalates.

"They want to get their gun. Oh you know he said something to be disrespectful, so I gotta let this dude know, you know I gotta go up here and I gotta check him, and this is how you check him, by pulling the gun out on him. But when he see you, he's like OK, you pulled out a gun on me. This time, I'm not going to pull a gun; I'm going to actually shoot you."

There was also the perception that fighting was more important for male identity:

"Most of them get their respect from still fighting, even though they know they can't fight, they still get their respect, because they stood up for themselves."

Jr. high girls. These younger girls thought that girls fight over boys and boys fight because of the need for respect, and gangs (though this group thought that girl gangs were also a problem).

Jr. high boys. They boys saw few real gender differences in fighting, with the exception of gang fighting which they thought applied mainly to boys and gossiping which they thought applied to girls. According to them, boys and girls fight over the opposite sex, and both were concerned about others destroying the belongings.

Why Has Violence Increased in N. Minneapolis?

High school girls. "Because it's where black people live". There was a general feeling that much of the violence was related to gangs, of boys and girls responding to orders from their "big homeys", in order to "prove themselves". Perhaps related to the gang issue, having outsiders move into the neighborhood was also seen as a factor, particularly if they were "ghetto" or trouble makers. It was noted that individuals automatically put up their defenses when they don't know other people, "that's just how it is nowadays". They noted that it's hard to know who to trust, particularly when you don't have history with the individuals. And as one participant noted, if you don't know them, the assumption will be that you can't trust them: "Its never like 'oh, I don't know him so I'm going to like him'. Girls were seen as particularly untrustworthy.

It was noted that black people in particular are on the defensive when they don't know other people and that "They [black people] always feel like they gotta prove themselves".



Jr. high girls. This group thought that race may play a role in fighting in N. Minneapolis mainly because of interracial fighting (black – white, black – Hispanic). However, these girls were most likely to blame gangs and bad parenting. Bad parents were those who didn't provide for their children and those that implicitly or actively supported fighting. The parents behavior ranged from not caring if their children fought to openly encouraging their children to "prove" and defend themselves through fighting.

SOLUTIONS

On the one hand students were pessimistic about the possibility of reducing violence. However, they also saw themselves and others as having considerable agency and control over their own behavior and argued that individuals can reduce their involvement in violence by the decisions that they make. Role models, reduction in systemic discrimination, jobs, and programs and activities were seen as possible solutions to youth violence.

| | | |
|------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|
| Control personal behavior | Build Community | Proactive teachers |
| Positive role models/mentors | Jobs | |
| Education | Program and activities | |

High school girls. These girls were pessimistic about the prospect of ending youth violence and even more pessimistic about getting rid of guns:

"I really think there's nothing to be done, because it don't matter what you do, its still going down."

"...you can talk to us and blah, blah, blah but I think it's just how life is right now. There's nothing you can do about it at all."

"Its just like there's no help to the world, sorry to say."

"I don't think one of these programs are going to help; the simple fact is because everybody got their own mind."

However, when asked about their siblings' involvement in violence, they noted that older sisters "aged out" of violent behavior and fighting by their late teens. They also noted that there are lessons they give or can give to younger siblings to keep them from getting involved in violence.

For example, they would tell their sibling that its OK to walk away from a fight and that you "don't always have to prove yourself....You can stay to yourself and its OK to not have something to say about everything." Most would suggest that they avoid trouble if possible, "if trouble is one way...you go the other way", and not become involved in others' fights. However they noted that it can be difficult to avoid fighting.

None of the girls thought that guns can be controlled, and all of knew someone who had been shot.

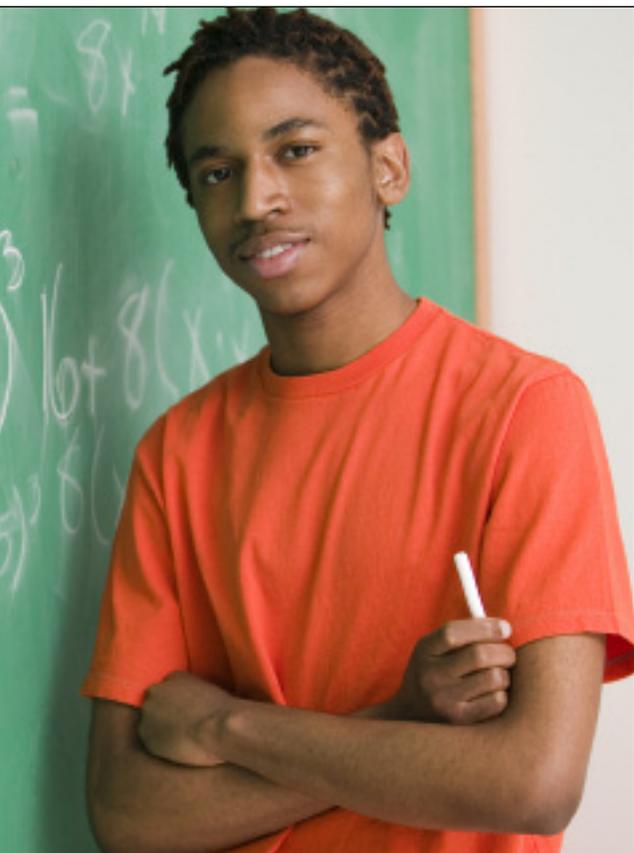
Jr high girls. These girls were much more split in their belief that violence can be stopped. Those who thought it could be stopped said that individuals control what they do and if people decide to not be violent, it can happen. On the other hand, those who were pessimistic had similar reasoning: we can't make individuals do what they don't want to do.

These girls thought that violent people should be sent to counseling and or conflict resolution, but thought that immediate attention needs to be focused on boy fighting because it's more likely to end in death. Gang members were seen as in particular need of counseling "because you have to be the dumbest person to fight over your gang". However, it was noted that many of those gangbanging were not in "real" gangs, but made up gangs.

All had messages for younger siblings: "don't start stuff", "take your own path and don't do what other people do" "stay in school", "don't be a follower, be a leader", "if somebody's messing with you, tell somebody", "don't hit first". All participants agreed that education is important (which should be the focus rather than fighting) and that is was particularly so given black people's history of being denied access to education. A focus on the future in general was seen as a deterrent to fighting:

"Lessons like what you choose to do now is going to affect you in the long run. Nobody really owes you a living. You could grow up on nothing and you could make it to something big. Nobody owes you a living; you owe yourself that. So what you make out of that is your business."

High school boys. As with the other groups, these boys believed that individuals exercise choice in their involvement in violence while also recognizing the operation of some systemic factors. The boys were able to offer a number of solutions, but were generally skeptical about the system's will to reduce violence among black youth and perceived a general lack of concern, or open hostility, for the welfare for those who look like them.



"We are all statistics. They consider us statistics anyway...so they want us to kill ourselves."

"They know what we're doing. They ain't got no problem with that. "

"Grind or die. Ain't nobody going to help your ass out. ..as a young black African American man you're a target since day one. There's already a prison for us." [37]

"We don't supposed to make it past 25."

The boys talked about the role of "choice" in joining the thug life and those factors which impacted that decision.

"Overall, it's all about identity. Who do you identify yourself as? This is what me and my mom talk about every day. If you're not a thug, if you're not a criminal, don't live that lifestyle."

The boys talked about being tired of "the life", and the costs associated with being a part of it and that education ("go to school, get good grades") could provide an alternative. However, the youth subsequently acknowledged that sometimes its not so simple:

"Well you got a choice, but sometimes you ain't got a choice.

I'm tired of the piss in the hall way and all that.....

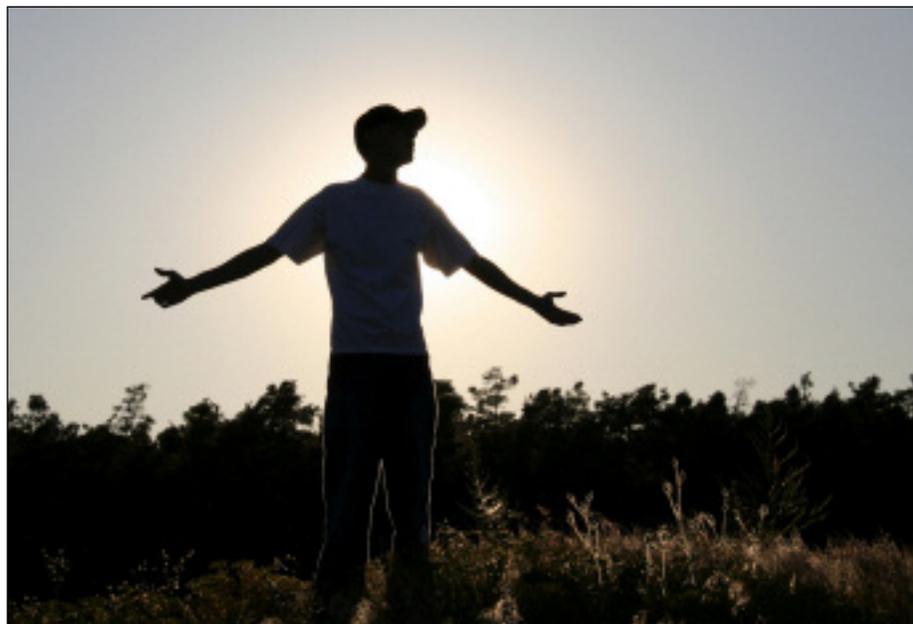
.....Ya'll making the shit seem to easy like its just yeah, yeah, I could do that.

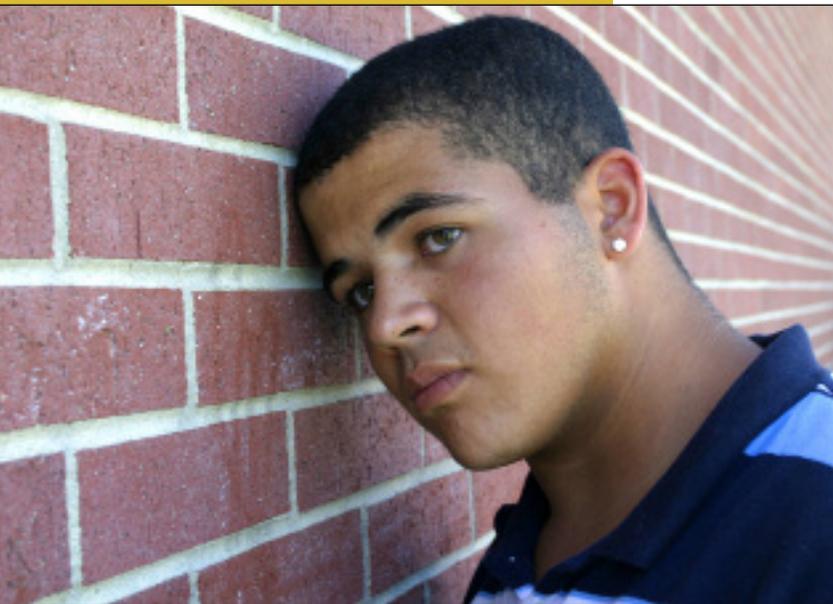
It ain't that easy.

It hurts. It hurts to see your mom on welfare, Section 8, and she can't help herself out, cause she's doing the 9-5, and you feel like, you feel like hey, its your fault."

The boys noted that it was easier to make good choices when encouraged by adults and when they had good role models. "Everybody just need one positive role model in their lives that they can follow".

The boys particularly saw the importance of father figures for black boys ("....their mom's raised them but their mom can 't really teach them how to be a man"). However they noted that fathers, nor big brothers, were always good influences.





"...I got a father figure in my life. I live with my dad now. He teaches me stuff but he don't at the same time, cause I know what my dad do. He doing everything; you know he's still trying to eat, too.

"Big brothers, they're not always the answer. ...I got three big brothers, as a matter of fact. My big brothers have never told me nothing. You know when I started smoking they ain't never say 'no, you can't smoke that'.

While recognizing the importance of adult mentors and role models, the youth were pessimistic about the presence of such in their lives. Teachers were often seen as not caring and other sources of inspiration were missing:

"Try your best and you're going to make it. But we're not hearing that from people; we're not getting inspiration, influence from nobody."

The youth seem open to adult influences and expect the adults in their lives to check them when they do poorly. Seeing others doing badly was seen as a source of inspiration - "the wrong thing influence you in the right way sometimes" as you don't want to go down that same road.

There were clear strains of despair, and some hopelessness, in their discussions about the solutions to violence, and, implicitly, their futures. (Its not clear if they young men were talking about their personal circumstances, or the general landscape for urban youth.)

"...and these after school programs, they probably don't even want you there. And ya'll telling us to get off the street."

"But we got nowhere to go."

"What are we gonna be? In the house with my momma and my momma's smokin' crack. My momma's doing this, my momma's doing that. I don't want to be there"

"They're [parents] kickin us out."

"My dad putting his hands on me and my momma always kickin me out."

"Don't have a daddy, so you looking to the streets for love."

The young men almost plaintively asked for help throughout the interview:

" We trying, but damn, they're not giving us opportunities. We live in the street, so that's how we get it. Simple as that. We don't wanna go through all the job applications no more, its an easy fast way to get it, get an 8 ball." [9]

We're trying. We're trying our best to stop doing what we're doing, but in the long run we're not getting helped out ...

We need help...

I've signed 15 applications and didn't get one phone call back.

And you know how I look at it man, fuck help. Man, this has been going on way before us."

Jobs and after school activities were seen as a way to keep kids off the street and keep them out of trouble. For example, one student described a job as providing safety because work keeps kids from getting bored, and it also removes the profit motive for involvement in potentially violent incidents.

"Like if you got more money, like over north, for a kid to do something to make money, they going to do it. They going to leave those streets alone and they going to come make that money."

There was a keen interest in more after school activities on the north side that would "bring people together".

"You all need more recreation , more park boards, you need all that... you see all I do is go to school and go home. It ain't no after school programs that interest me or nothing.

There was interest in sports teams (football, basketball, baseball) and even a north side orchestra. They saw these activities as potentially competing with gang membership. However, the students were generally pessimistic about the chances of getting these things:

"Ain't nobody gonna direct no money for all this shit. They not."

"We just young and black black people. We just dumb ass black people; that's how they look at us."



The youth recognized the role of agency and choice in their involvement in fights and the thug life. One student noted that he had never been involved in a fight because he didn't start fights ("I ain't no shit starter").

Middle school boys. Possibly because of the age and relative inexperience, the middle school boys seemed to have more difficulty addressing the issue of hypothetical solutions. Suggestions for reducing violence included talking to those with guns and explaining the consequences of their behavior, and longer prison sentences for those involved in violence. Unlike older kids, they saw a role for police as community representatives who explained the consequences of violence, particularly for the perpetrator. These children saw violence as resulting from lack of knowledge that could be remedied by more information and helping perpetrators think through the consequences of their actions and see that things will end badly for them. They recognized the role of anger and thought it would help if the anger could be released in a less harmful way (punching bags, shooting targets). Their recommendation for a recreation center seemed to be a combination sports and therapy facility. The youths' solutions became more concrete when asked what they would do to help younger siblings avoid violence situations.

Recommendations for younger siblings included being a good role model and keeping the little ones busy – "keep his mind occupied" – mainly through sports. The boys noted the importance of youth understanding that "there's stuff you could do and...still have fun without doing bad things".

"You could have fun doing the right things and then still be as much fun, as if you was doing something bad, probably even funner. So you know just keep him occupied with sports, so they won't even think about the streets."

The boys would also counsel their younger siblings to, in general, be good kids – stay away from guns, sit down on the bus, do what the teachers tells them to do, stay away from trouble makers.



Individual interview girl #1. One high school girl who reported that she rarely got into fights was asked how she managed to avoid those situations. She indicated that she would use conflict resolution skills (e.g. asking what's the problem) or walking away. This student also noted the importance of after school programs. When asked why there were few fights at the alternative school that she attended versus her previous public school, she credited the small size of the school and proactive teachers who monitored and intervened in conflict situations. She believed that the teachers' genuine caring made students more tolerant of their interference.



Individual interview girl #2. This high school student also attended an alternative school and believed that there was less violence there due to its small size which mitigated against the development of cliques. Apparently, fewer students often translates into 'less drama'. As for her personal approach to avoiding fights, she suggested not instigating. In response to the direct question "What do you do to keep yourself safe?", she responded "I stay in the house".

Individual interview boy #1. Witnessing a relative's slaying at age 11, this high school student seemed particularly tired of the thug life, realizing that it often ends badly and hurts those close to you. His recommendation for solutions ranged from specific individual actions to change at the neighborhood level.

"It ain't even about getting out of this environment. People always say they want to get out of the hood. I don't think we should get out of the hood. I think we should change the hood and embrace it, but make it change too in the right way, in a positive way...this [is] home and we're proud of it, you know."

One suggestion for community change was engaging the help of "powerful black men" to serve as mentors and role models.

"...a lot of people don't even think about being doctors nowadays...they think about ... drug dealers and stuff. I think if ya'll do stuff like come to school and embrace us and show us that it is a route and a better way to go than admiring the drug dealers and, you know, the people that do stupid stuff, instead of the positive, I think it would help us in the long run."

The student talked of the role of joblessness and subsistence wages in causing violence but also how individuals must share some of the blame for the choices that they make. Education was seen as a key to betterment and he revealed how a close call led him to being more serious about his schooling, and to less involvement in dangerous activities in general. As a result of the incident, in which he almost got shot, he is now more serious about school, seeks out after school and extra-curricular activities, and avoids old gangbanging friends.

"The only thing we're getting out of this is jail and death and that's the promise....and I'm getting sick and tired of it, losing friends almost every other week and stuff and it gets aggravating and it gets tired to me. I think this shit just need to stop".

" I ain't heard – as many people, as many grown men as I hang out with that I know sell drugs – I haven't heard nobody yet that can tell me 'I sold drugs and got out of it clear..I got out and nothing happened to me'....You don't hear none. You're hearing [of] a 30 year old hustler that just got killed on 32nd or something".

The importance of relationships was apparent throughout the interview and this youth suggested using these relationships in violence intervention work. Seeing how ones behavior impacts close others, particularly caregivers, was seen as a prime deterrent to negative behavior:

"I love my momma, but if I'm out here doing this, it's not showing that I love my momma. Its showing that I'm going to stress her out and have her cryng...when it comes down to it, that's all you really got to feed us is how it's going to affect the person that's taking care of you. That's what hits us. We don't care about what the teachers' thinking and what ya'll are thinking about us, to tell you the truth. Its about how our parents feel. "

In discussing the impact of mentors, the young man emphasized the importance of relationships. Noting that boys often join gangs because the absence of good family relationships, he noted the importance of having someone to sit down to talk to on a regular basis – "just talk to me about how do I feel about this society, basically what we're doing now". Having that conversation with successful black men was seen as critical to helping youth understand how to get out of poverty and violence, as well as providing the motivation to do so.

"Show us the Porsche without the drugs; show us the Bentley without the drugs. Show us its 'not as hard as ya'll think it is and ya'll could do this just by simply going to school and getting all your Ps and Qs and doing what you gotta do' ".



However, he also thought it was important to hear from those whose lives have been ruined by drugs and violence. Referring to the impact that this can have, he commented: "sometimes the worst of the worse can turn out to be the best of the best, for other people."

Not unlike other research participants, this student talked about the positive impact of participating in the focus group. The group gave him an opportunity to voice his opinion but also to build a sense of community with other young men whom he did not know.

".....them two would've probably been in a beef or something or...there would have been a shootout between us because we didn't know each other or he was in this certain spot and I'm from this certain area. It could've led to that. But ya'll brought us together and we spoke. We spoke to each other about how we felt and now everybody had no animosity towards each other. Every time I see them, I'm going to walk up to them and show them love, you know, how ya doing? How are these streets treating you? We gotta come together you know. This helped me out a lot."



Individual Boy#2, middle school. This youth talked extensively about the importance of role models in reducing youth violence – "no matter if they're a kid or adult, anybody needs a role model to be successful". When asked to describe a role model, he was very clear about the necessary characteristics:

"A role model could be any age. If you know how to walk and talk and do the right things in life, then I think you're a role model....the role model should be like not in trouble, you know laid back, but still having fun...doing the right things...showing the other person that you can have fun without doing bad things, but still having fun and showing that person like even though you're 20 some years old, you can still be in school, go to college...I think if the role model does that it'll like reflect to the other person, make them want to do it."

Individual Boy #3, middle school. This youth talked about adult monitoring and a strong support system of relatives that kept him out of trouble.

Table 4. Providers' Perceptions of the Causes of Youth Violence

| | | |
|------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|
| Control personal behavior | Build Community | Proactive teachers |
| Positive role models/mentors | Jobs | |
| Education | Program and activities | |

Female Providers, N=6

The tape recorder malfunctioned and there is no audio recording of this group. Information presented is taken from the proctor's notes taken during the session and the facilitator's notes taken immediately after the session.

The providers were asked a series of question about the causes of violence in North Minneapolis, what they thought might be some solutions to the violence, and providers' roles in reducing and addressing the violence. Though not asked specifically about girls, most of these women worked with girls and their answers often appear specific to females. Regardless of the specific question, much of the discussion in the group focused on the importance of adult-child relationships and the role of intergenerational family dysfunction. However, these women reported many positive instances of impacting the lives of these high risk youth, and believed that these children could be reached through consistent, positive adult relationships.

Causes

The providers saw 'self-hatred' and anger as the source of much of the youth violence. The anger was seen as resulting from a deprivation of things and relationships, and resentment toward others that were seen as more privileged in these areas. Many students were seen as lacking basic living necessities – adequate food, clothing, shelter. Relationships with parents may have been poor, as children are parented by increasingly younger mothers (and grandmothers) who often don't have good parenting skills and who do not spend enough time with their children. The providers talked about girls never having gone to the grocery store with their moms, of parents refusing to come to the school or court on behalf of their children. The parents, primarily single mothers, were seen as having many issues of their own which prevented good parenting – drugs, untreated depression and other mental health problems, relationship problems. Parents were seen as not teaching children appropriate behavior and often serving as models of inappropriate behaviors. [overwhelming loss of family and prayer replaced with alcohol, drugs, sex...].

Furthermore, the providers thought that things were getting worse for the children. The providers thought the violence is getting worse because the deprivation is getting worse, oppression is overwhelming, education system is not working, mothers are getting younger, and the children's nutrition is poor. Many of the children that they see have a profound sense of hopelessness,

manifested in a feeling of "I don't care". It was also noted that these girls have experienced considerable trauma. One provider told a story of having taken 'her girls' on an outing to see the popular film "For Colored Girls..." which includes a very disturbing scene in which a distraught father drops his children out of a window, to their death. One of the girls in the groups was overwhelmed by this scene which reminded her of a similar incident that she had with her dad.

Girl Fighting

These providers thought that girl violence was more prevalent than boy-violence and that they were more likely to use weapons. The weapons found in girls' purses included razors, box cutters, mace, and lots of things in socks – rocks, locks, pool balls etc. They noted that boys are more likely to use just their fists, but are also more likely than girls to use a gun.

Solutions

These providers saw relationships as key to reducing youth violence – show children that you care, establish trust, set limits, and be consistent in their lives. The providers talked about developing trust and showing caring by talking the youth's language, and taking the time to listen and to show that you are interested enough in them to hear what they Engage in behavior that communicates to them that "I see you, I notice you, I care enough to say think about doing this differently". They noted that trust develops through sincere interactions with the kids, and taking time to get to know them. The ability to "speak their language" was considered critical in order to understand what they are saying but also to make oneself understood. Sharing one's background and personal history was seen as an effective way to build rapport. The need to be vigilant about the children's actions and constantly correcting their behavior was seen as important, and establishing relationships and bonding also gave workers leverage to provide incentives and to deliver sanctions. Outings were important for the girls and not being allowed to go if one had done something wrong was a powerful deterrent to acting badly.



Most of the participants talked about "leaving the four walls" of their agencies or schools and doing fun things with the girls. Such outings facilitated bonding and gave the girls exposure to events and places that they otherwise would not have seen, in addition to providing positive reinforcement for good behavior. One provider talked about taking "her girls" to the Gucci shop to "see what the real thing looked like". Others talked about taking the girls to plays, concerts, movies. One worker said that "her girls" seemed to really like just hanging out in the agency's kitchen and cooking with her. The connections that the providers established with the youth, males and females, was seen as an indication of the children's intense need for adult nurturing.

One participant talked about her success in getting parental buy-in and support. Explaining how she managed to get "complete parental participation", an elementary school teacher described how she calls parents at home, gives them her cell phone number, and generally lets them know that she cares as much about their children and they do.

Effective Fight Intervention



These women believed that they could effectively intervene to prevent fights in their schools. All believed they would know when a fight was about to happen because the students "tell everything, can't hold water". It was noted that one simply has to listen and be able to decipher what was being said (i.e. translate colloquiums and slang). Once they realized a fight was imminent they would de-escalate the situation using the following steps: talk to the parties separately before they are put together, monitor the situation to see how it's going, talk to friends of the parties, particularly group leaders, to make sure they are supportive of the process and outcome. Fight prevention may involve scare tactics. One provider talked about showing girls a fist full of hair braids – complete with hair follicles attached – that were snatched out of a girl's head during a fight. She noted that initially the girls make light of the incident, but are eventually quite sobered by the prospect of being disfigured in this fashion.

One of the last questions asked participants to describe what they would do to reduce youth violence in N. Minneapolis if they had an unlimited amount of money. One responded that she would do the same thing that she does now, namely have good personal relationships with the children. Another said that she would provide good grocery stores and decent nutrition, noting that given these children's fast food diets that it's a wonder they can learn anything. One would give them all the material things they lack – as a hook to get them to come to her program where she is absolutely certain that she can change them. Another would establish a parenting program, and one would give them "Utopia".

Male Providers (N=6)

Causes

These providers saw poverty - through its relationship to frustration, neglect, powerlessness, and anger - as sources of the violence. Children's perceptions of wealth disparity contribute to their feelings of powerlessness and anger and involvement in activities to get resources, activities which may involve violence. The introduction of crack-cocaine into the community, and with it opportunities to get easy money, was seen as a contributing factor to both crime and child neglect ("You have two things - smoke it or sell it"). The introduction of drugs brought guns and a greater sense of territoriality and the need to protect that territory. Some members of the group saw the introduction of drugs, and subsequent mass incarceration of black men, as part of a conspiracy to destroy the black community and to undermine gains and solidarity from the black power movement.

Young men were seen as neglected by their 'parents, teachers, and communities', and then neglecting their education which has historically been a pathway to economic success for black people. Allowing students to leave high school at age 16 was seen as a major mistake as was disallowing corporal punishment. However, the respondents noted that physical punishment must be administered under the right circumstances and that children are often time whipped for the wrong reasons, which simply exacerbated their violence. One participant, after recounting how he got whipped as a child (usually for stealing, lying or disrespecting grown-ups) noted:

"...now people are beating kids because they messing with the parents. Because they disturbed them, cause they talk too loud. ..its about personal freedom and time management of the parents, not about the learning experience."





“Oh, you smoked my weed.”

“And you whipping for the wrong reason, because you get tired...you just snapping cause you snapping.”

Frustration and hopelessness were seen as underlying causes of youth violence. The frustration resulted, at least in part, from police harassment and contributed to an anger that primed individuals to be aggressive with others:

“Whether we doing something or not, ... [police] run up on us to harass us, you know what I'm saying. And threaten us, jump on us for whatever and then take off and leave and laugh. We frustrated. We so frustrated in the community cause they [police] doing it all over the community so when I see you I'm so mad anyway. So when I see you I have a problem with you just cause I'm mad. “

Participants talked about a sense of hopelessness among the kids, of " young people who do not believe that things can be better for them" .

“These kids feel like 'I'm not anything, I'm not going to be anything. My parents aren't anything and they're not going to be anything' . Its hopelessness. This hopelessness is killing the kids, its killing the community.”

Youth were seen as lacking moral training - that would teach values and respect for people - that would come from church attendance and a general lack of exposure to events and places.

"Man, 65% of my kids that I see in this environment I work in, the only time they go to church is to a funeral...70% have not been on the river and the river is 4 miles away. So their exposure is very limited to their hood. They go the Mall of America and back...they never been north of Brooklyn Center, west of Golden Valley or east of St Paul, unless they driving back to Illinois or Gary or some place for a funeral.”

'Dissing', or disrespecting one, was seen as a source of violence but youth were seen as having a rather narrow concept of respect – "...respect for them means don't disrespect me"

The general culture of violence in this country was seen as interacting with deprivation to contribute to youth violence:

If you look at America's history there has been one shooting match from Plymouth Rock to the West Coast and our children see that. ..Isis somehow shown in society that if it is worth having, it's worth taking. And someone has it and you want it or you need it, you can justify taking it – if you're stronger, faster, quicker.

The availability of guns was seen as a relatively recent phenomenon in the community and one that contributed to the violence. The group commented on how easy it is to get a weapon, noting that in the 'hood' a gun is easier to get than a book or fresh produce. One participant recalled the following exchange with a youth in his program:

“Let me tell you something. I can walk out of here and just about with any shit I got in my pocket – using his language – I can get a gun. If I got \$10 I can get a \$10 gun. If I got \$50 I can get a \$50 gun. If I got \$200 I can get almost any kind of gun I want. He said ' but I got to walk 3 miles to get a apple.”

The participants were asked specifically about school violence. These providers, most of whom were associated with an alternative school, indicated that there were very few fights in that school because staff were able to intervene before violence occurred. Hostilities are controlled by working to make the students a cohesive family, emphasizing that they should not form cliques or bring their outside cliques into the school, and making the school a neutral place that they respected. In addition, staff can predict when violence is about to occur by listening to students' conversation, and then intervening directly with the participants to defuse the situation.

These male providers saw gender differences in the causes of the violence, and its manifestations. Boys violence was seen as caused by the girls' instigating – 'its about what this girl has said to somebody else and they came back and said it to them so you got two of these thugs and everybody go everybody's telephone cause they call each other on the phone and threaten each other. In an interesting analysis, one participant indicated that boys are developing a 'female mentality', from being raised in single parent homes, suggesting that this makes them quick to take offense and easy to provoke. Girls were seen as fighting because they were jealous of each other appearance.

Solutions/Interventions

The participants noted that change must occur at the systemic and individual levels. Systemic change would involve eradicating poverty, increasing funding for youth programming, and eliminating the drug and gun trade in black communities which some saw as 'designed' to destabilize those areas and which had major impact on black families abilities to parent their children.

“You have to change the root causes of what makes the community the way it is. ...the waves are coming in. Ok, there's cocaine coming in by the train load and guns coming by the train load. We can get a kid, we can each get three maybe. But you got to stop the waves if you want to stop violence.”



More individually oriented solutions were positive relationships with adults, work, and youth involvement in organized activities.

Many of these men had been helped by positive role models and mentor, served as mentors, and believe that positive adult relationships were essential to saving these at risk youth. One participant noted that all of these kids are under the influence of someone – positive or negative. "Whether they banging or not, you going to be a part of somebody". Positive outcomes occur when they are influenced by an adult who is "safe, sane, and stable". This person need not be a parent, and the more sources of support, the better:

"Could be a school, could be a church and the more of them that they have around them supporting them in one way or another, the better chance they have."

Many in the group talked about important individuals in their lives, often "street guys" who lectured them on them importance of staying in school and out of trouble. This underscored their belief that being a mentor or good role model was not tied to education or training but a commitment to the children. Those who had been in the 'life' were seen as appropriate youth worker who could relate to the children and, again, be 'safe, sane, and stable'. While mentors are usually thought of as volunteers who work with kids..... one suggestion was to professionalize the role of mentor, paying individuals to work with these youth. This will allow for the use of adults who may be unemployed or underemployed to do this as their job.

"...those people need to be able to earn a living so they can do it. They got to be able to earn a living.. about 35 – 40 K a year. Give them that to help the kids stay out of Stillwater. You'll have a whole bunch of people who talke their language, who look like them, who understand what they are going through and who can be the kind of mentor they see."



They also talked about kids who had 'beat the odds' and done well despite adversity, at least partly as a result of their involvement in programs.

Participants were asked two important questions regarding mentoring: 1) how does one get youth to accept help from mentors, and 2) how does one get adults to serve as mentors? The participants were clear that children bond with adults whom they think genuinely care about them. Trust was seen as essential, growing out of the mentor's reliability and dependability: "Be there. Show up. Keep your word with them". As for why they served as mentors, the participants responded that they were giving back in response to someone having reached out to them at a crucial point in their lives, and told stories of the ways in which they had been helped. All of this was summed up as love:

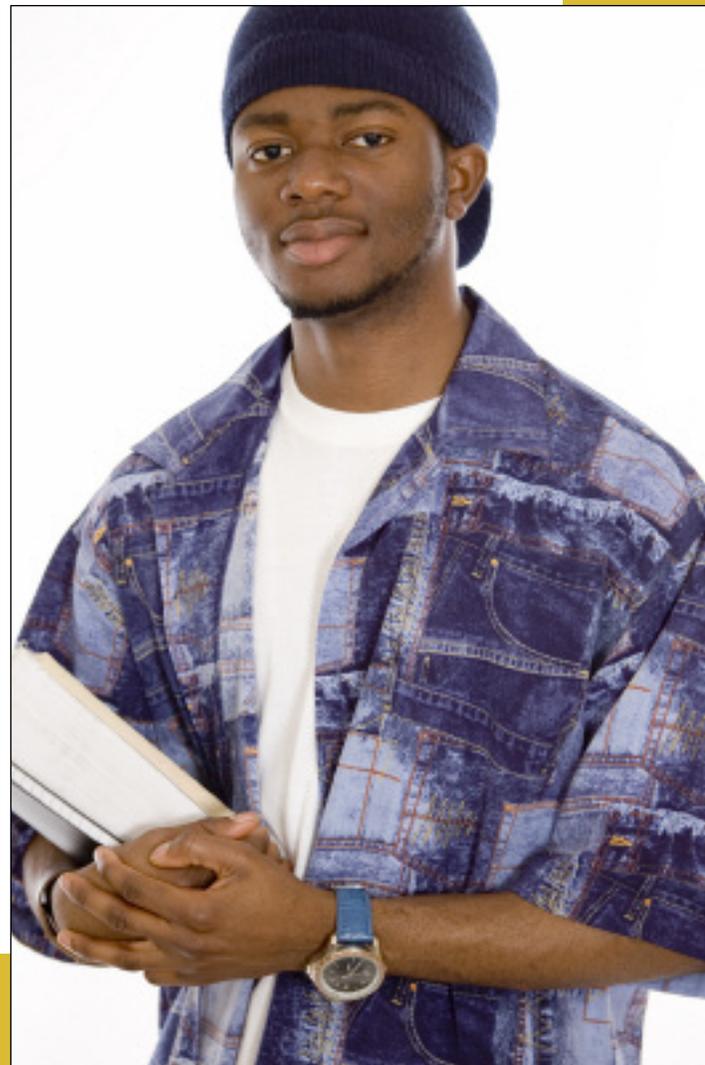
"...the common denominator is called love. Love was happening in all those cases. And it's still active today... kids recognize it...cause I love you I'm going to show up every time [and] I'm going to kick your tail when you get out of line. "

The availability of safe social activities was seen as important in reducing youth violence. Activities such as midnight basketball, places like the Y and boys and girls clubs. These activities get youth off the street and occupy their time, but also allows them to build relationships with each other based on trust and respect. They noted that it is important to get the different cliques to engage in activities with each other, or maybe even harmless activities against each other. One participant commented that feuding cliques could engage in paint ball fights to settle their disputes.

One participant asked what could be done to engage large numbers of kids in these positive activities, to which another responded "I believe that if you build it they will come".

"We have an opportunity for kids to be around each other, have positive activities. Make it 'ain't no weapons coming up in here, ain't no drugs coming up in here, and if you do the drugs you're going to be put out and you can come up in here when you're clean'... [then] they will come and enjoy wholesome activities."

The eradication of poverty was seen as critical to the reduction of violence, recognizing that much youth violence may be connected to crimes related to economic gain. It was noted that youth often times engage in these activities in order to contribute to the support of their families or to support themselves and not be a financial burden to their families.



Jobs for youth would provide some much needed money for them, but would also provide a sense of purpose. It was argued that kids with jobs or engaged in other constructive work e.g. "learning how to help build a house, or rehab a house, or something like that", would be less likely to risk these opportunities by getting into trouble or committing infractions in school. As one participant commented, "The baddest social service program is a job".



The participants saw opportunities in working with individual youth and believed that they knew how to defuse volatile situations involving kids that they knew. First, the intervention had to occur before the hostilities got too far along. For youth in their programs, they would pull the parties aside and counsel them.

"You can intervene. You can pull them to the side.... grab a booth and put them in it and we squash it right then and there."

They may also intervene in street violence, but must exercise caution, and recognize the volatility of those situations, and of youth.

"Off the streets, you don't intervene because you going to get killed. [but] if you knew what was happening before they go heads up you might pull them to the side and be like 'don't even go there tonight because it already heated or whatever. Let me take you. Let's go to the show. Come to my house and let's sit around and watch TV or something'. Keep them out of that environment cause its still heated...once you calm down, you think better. Cause these kids react at the drop of a dime and they react without thinking."

The participants thought that kids could be taught to recognize their triggers and thus control their aggressive behavior:

"I find that when kids understand what they are all about, when they begin to understand what triggers them, when they get that, then they go 'oh, I've seen this before, I know what going to happen here', [then] they can make some better decisions for themselves. And those kind of skills are just invaluable."

One participant described one successful program based on the Health Realization Model, learned by workers that is used to teach kids that they have a choice in how they behave.

Some of the participants reported using a "scared straight" approach, and noted that youth often change when confronted with the reality of death and dying. One worker collects obituaries and news clips of incidents which he then 'throws out on the table'.

“People start picking through them and you can see the changes on their faces when they see the consequences. When they see that everybody got killed.... It really does slow them up.”

This same worker used to take youth to visit the morgue.

“..that changed a lot of kids, right there. When they see what happens to them, then it changes, cause kids don't see it. They don't see it when they put a bullet through them. Half of them got their eyes closed when they shoot them, their heads turned. What I'm saying [is] that once they see it, you see a change....I mean from then on, you see a change.”

The participants felt that many of these at risk violent youth were amazingly resilient and wanted to change their lives, but would need a great deal of help to do so. They also felt that many more adults would be willing to help, but they were afraid of these children. (...”you got this fear among the people in the community who normally want to be a positive influence). While they were aware of the potential danger in working in these areas, they also noted the necessity of the work and that, perhaps, these children are not as dangerous as they make themselves appear:

We have to stop being afraid for our lives and just approach these kids because so many times, when you do, they're just big old teddy bears.

Conclusions

In many ways, the providers' and youths' responses mirror each other. Both spoke of the importance of adult mentors, and the need for more activities and jobs. Both understood the underlying role of poverty and deprivation as contributing factors to violence. And despite some bravura on the part of the youth, there appeared to be a genuine desire to move beyond their current circumstances and a sincere hope that adults would help in that process. Providers spoke of the amazing resilience of these youth and seemed genuinely committed to continuing their work with and on behalf of these children.

THE CONFERENCE

ENDING YOUTH VIOLENCE: A NEW GENERATION OF IDEAS



The second part of this project was a community forum to share the results of the research and to get community and expert feedback on these results. This day-long meeting, was held on October 20, 2011 at the Holiday Inn –Metrodome in Minneapolis. A total of 144 registered for the conference, including many youth and young adults, and over 50 agencies were represented.

Moderated by Bill English from the Action Research Team, the conference program consisted of welcomes from various offices, a presentation of the report by the study's PIs, Drs. Oliver Williams and Esther Jenkins from the Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community, and invited presentations from Dr. Carl Taylor, Professor of Sociology at Michigan State University and Dr. Deanna Wilkinson Associate Professor of Human Development and Family Science at The Ohio State University, both nationally recognized experts in the field of youth violence prevention. Carl Taylor's work has been primarily with gangs in Detroit; Dr. Wilkinson works with community organizations to reduce youth violence in Columbus Ohio. These presenters were asked to talk about their research and ways to reduce youth violence, and to respond specifically to the study's findings. Their bios are included and their written responses to the research findings are in Appendix A.

The remainder of the morning was taken up with a presentation by the former Superintendent of Red Wing Youth Correctional Facility, Otis Zanders and several youth who had spent time at the institution, and a lively roundtable/panel discussion of the report and issues related to local violence prevention. Participants on the panel included a state senator, a representative from the police department, and several community activists, in addition to the academics.

One of the highlights of the conference was the afternoon breakout sessions in which individuals met in small groups to brainstorm the following questions: "What is working?" (in the area of youth violence prevention) and "What are your visions for the future?" (for youth violence prevention). There were a total of four groups: youth, service providers and members of the faith community, peace officers, and education and community members. Note takers captured the discussion in the groups.

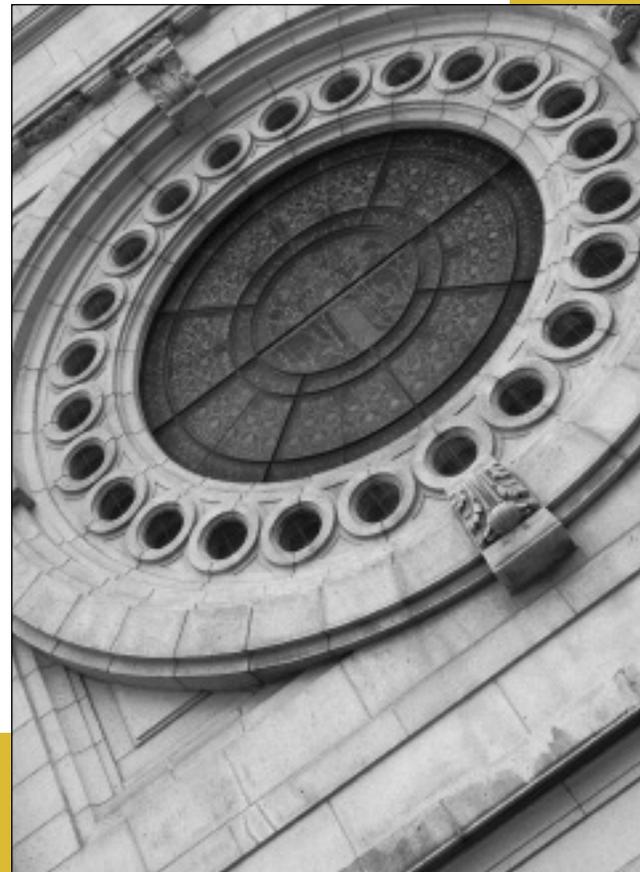
Summary of Breakout Group Discussions

Youth Group

In terms of what is currently working, members commented on the value of collaboration, culturally/ interest specific programs, and youth having someone to talk to. They were concerned about the lack of jobs and activities, poor relationships with law enforcement that included harassment, and youth not receiving enough support from parents. In addition to addressing these areas of concern, their vision going forward included working with gang leaders, empowering and motivating youth, highlighting better role models, job training, workers who can relate to the youth, and more collaboration.

Service Providers and Faith Community Group

In terms of what is currently working, this group talked quite a bit about the value of treating trauma and grief for children and their families. In addition, they noted the effectiveness of community organizing, gang intervention, jobs, *Streetworks* which provides a model of collaboration for homeless youth, and winning youths' trust. Their vision included providing safe places for youth to share, funding for existing programs that work, work with families, culturally appropriate peer educators, and 'true' collaboration characterized by respect and consistency. Before leaving the meeting, this group developed a listserv of those interested in continuing the work.



Education and Community Members Group

This group thought that several organizations in the city were effective in preventing violence, along with: fathers' program, mentoring and positive adult influences, voting and involvement in electoral politics, good family relations, early intervention, having law enforcement officers involved in the community, and after school programs. Their vision for the future included more support for parents, a focus on entrepreneurship and wealth generation, elimination of relationship violence that children often model, resources for parents whose children are gang involved, full sustainable funding streams, and a recreation center for youth to get help and resources.

Peace Officers Group



This group believed that a number of approaches had proven effective in reducing youth violence: outreach, youth employment, the city's *Blueprint for Action: Preventing Youth Violence*, educating people on youth violence, programs that encourage positive relationships between youth and adults, programs for youth, keeping kids in school, and positive peer pressure. Their vision included better training for social workers, evidence based outreach programs, police – community relationship building, and a genuine openness to understanding and addressing cultural differences.

Evaluation of Conference

A few weeks after the conference, an evaluation was sent to program participants via email. The questionnaire asked four open ended questions: what parts of the conference were most useful, what should be done differently in the future, what are the most important next steps in ending youth violence, and specifically what would be most helpful in their personal work in ending youth violence. A fifth question asked if the respondent was willing to participate in a collaborative effort to develop an action plan to eliminate youth violence in zip code 55411. A total of 27 evaluations were returned.

Part of the Conference Most Useful

Participants cited the breakout sessions, the roundtable panel, the speakers, being able to network with others in the field, and hearing the research findings. They were particularly impressed with the presentations by the youth from Red Wing who had histories of involvement in gangs and violence.

What Should Be Done Differently

There was a strong feeling that some parts of the conference (roundtable, question and answer period, and breakout sessions) were dominated by a few individuals. To prevent this, participants suggested 'facilitated' or structured discussions in a small group format that would allow everyone to participate and be heard. Participants thought that youth, those on the program and in general, should be allowed more time to speak. Participants wanted more time and opportunity for networking, and more focus on interventions and 'solution-focused ideas' and less on describing the problem. Several respondents did not like the location, noting that it was too formal and inaccessible to community groups, and thought that the conference should have been held in North Minneapolis.

Important Next Steps

Recommendations included more engagement of youth, more police involvement, collaboration among agencies, follow through on the suggestions from the conference, and support of existing programs. Youth engagement included more job and education programs for youth, but also getting them involved in designing and implementing solutions.

Most Helpful in Your Work

Interest in Collaborating Attendees' responses to this question included hearing more from youth, finding out more about the history of gangs in Minneapolis, and knowing more about intervention programs and resources. They were particularly interested in more opportunities for collaborating with others working in the field.

Interest in Collaborating

Only one of the 27 respondents said "no" to this question; 96% of the respondents were interested in working in a collaborative effort to develop the action plan to move forward in eliminating youth violence in 55411.

Moving Forward: Next Steps

Responding to attendees clearly stated desires to maintain the momentum from the conference, the local members of the Planning Committee continued to meet, reviewing the evaluation and discussing conference feedback they had gotten through various channels, and planning their next steps. As a result of presentations and discussions at the conference, and feedback about the meeting, the group developed a list of action items that they will pursue:

1. Bring community leaders and advocates together to forge a strong advocacy group that will move forward together on youth violence prevention and policy efforts.
2. Provide a forum for community advocates, youth and family serving agencies, schools, government representatives, law enforcement, and faith-based organizations to exchange information and ideas, and craft a common advocacy agenda.
3. Advocate for:
 - youth and family employment opportunities
 - youth recreation opportunities.
 - elimination of illegal gun sales, for example, reconsideration Project Ceasefire.
 - organizations and individuals who are helping youth avoid or leave gangs.
 - youth violence prevention programs consistent with Youth Violence Prevention Workgroup findings and recommendations of coalition partners.

One of the most consistent messages that came out of the conference was attendees desire to continue to meet and work collaboratively to support each other in the work and in shaping interventions. Towards that end the committee has invited conference participants to a lunch meeting on February 24, 2011, to move forward with developing plans to end youth violence in zip code 55411.



Experts’ Responses to Focus Group Data

Two nationally recognized experts in youth violence reduction were asked to read and respond to the focus group report, and, based on their knowledge of the literature and their own research, to offer suggestions for addressing youth violence in North Minneapolis. These scholars presented at the daylong conference. Their written responses to the focus group reports, and the conference, are attached.

Carl S. Taylor, Ph.D.

Dr. Taylor is Professor of Sociology and African American and African Graduate Studies, and Senior Fellow in University Outreach and Engagement at Michigan State University. Dr. Taylor is a nationally and internationally recognized scholar on urban youth and gang violence and has conducted research in Detroit on these topics for over two decades. He is the principal investigator for the Michigan Gang Research Project and served on the Michigan Juvenile Justice Committee for more than ten years. Dr. Taylor has published numerous articles on youth and gang violence and is the founder and senior editor of the *Journal of Urban Youth Culture*. He is the author of *Dangerous Society* (1990), *Girls, Gangs, Women, and Drugs* (1993), *Jugendkulturen and Gangs* (Youth Culture and Gangs) (1998), and *Growing Up Urban* (2006).

Deanna L. Wilkinson, Ph.D.

Dr. Wilkinson is Associate Professor in the Department of Human Development and Family Science at The Ohio State University. She has directed several large scale research projects and has received research funding from the National Institute of Justice, the National Science Foundation,

and the Centers for Disease Control. She has published widely on youth violence prevention and is the author of *Guns, Violence and Identity among African American and Latino Youth* (2003). Dr. Wilkinson is the founder of the OSU Youth Violence Prevention Advisory Board (YVPAB), a coalition of 100+criminal justice, social service and community leaders working to develop new strategies to intervene with high risk youth in Columbus, OH. She is the 2008 recipient of the Society for Research on Adolescence Young investigator Award.

A response to the Minneapolis Youth Violence Prevention Project report

By Carl S. Taylor, Ph.D.
Michigan State University

Understanding Youth Violence

This report was based on the findings from the community investigation in North Minneapolis. The focus groups coupled with individual community members was designed to bridge the gap between the targeted community and the City of Minneapolis.

Introduction

This report captured the community at large in North Minneapolis. There was a balance of community organizations that was inclusive of those residing in the North Minneapolis section. This collaboration included various organizations that were anchored by the University of Minnesota's Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community (IDVAAC). This point shows that such a base is critical to an objective research effort to clearly find factual data from the community at large. Included was the Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee that in many states regulates the funding, disseminating of data relevant to reducing juvenile violence. This organization along with key community individuals and organizations set the tone to conduct such an investigation.

The principal investigators for this undertaking were both seasoned researchers who were part of IDVAAC. Dr. Oliver Williams and Dr. Esther Jenkins are experienced research scholars who understand the challenges of conducting such research. While the focus was in North Minneapolis the research team consisted of a diverse group understanding the significance of inclusion, diversity of the City of Minneapolis, and the region of Minnesota.

One of the underscores of this investigation was built on the fact that North Minneapolis is 18% of the city population. Its glaring distinction was the urgency of the data showing youth accounted for 20% of the homicide rate. (Fact, while youth accounted for 20% of the city's homicide rate, the majority of the victims and perpetrators resided in North Minneapolis). As the

conference took place on October 18, participants were in agreement with the urgency of such a conference and meeting of the community at large to find solutions. This step is similar to other professional approaches held in urban cities in America. (cite)

Method

The methods employed in this study were applied successfully. In similar investigations the principal investigators followed the practices of social scientists in gathering information. For example, an investigation in Detroit, Michigan, a longitudinal study into the lives of youth who were represented as successfully involved with community based efforts compared to youth involved with the juvenile justice system as delinquents, gang members, school dropouts, and poly drug user's utilized a similar methodology (Oto, Taylor, Lerner). In a work book designed for youth workers the methodology high lighted in Growing Up Urban, similar methodology and field research tools was applied in determining how to communicate with urban youth (Taylor, Smith, McNeil, Taylor). This usage allowed this study to better understand the language and symbols that community youth were communicating to researchers, investigators, and interviewers. This certainly gave credence to this examination of the distressed community.

Youth Responses

This was an excellent means of examining precisely what youth were saying in this report. The exchanges were authentic and varied to show the diversity of how young people feel in both school and the overall community. Herein it is possible to understand the depths of the challenges faced daily by youth. Overall, safety of their environment was the main theme. The questions were successful in allowing young people to express answers that spoke volumes individually and collectively. This point underlines that even when youth are in different roles such as an engaged student vs. a young person marginalized by poor school attendance and dysfunctional home front there was a shared desire to have a safe haven in their community. The interviews gave an impression that a "shadow of fear" lurked in many youth, and adults in certain "hot spots" in N. Minneapolis.



Unfortunately the interviews with youth established the reality of death in many young lives. This section revealed that while the discussion overall was good the reality of macho attitudes amongst some young males still revealed deeper challenges for this community. It is here that this report is comparable to other field studies in urban America. This study revealed from its survey that there is an atmosphere that is not care-free nor child friendly as the literature has stated for the past decade. (cite)

Concerns about police or Cops are crazy

There was a mixed response to the subject of police authority. Some youth were comfortable with police, however, older youth both male and female revealed a general distrust that is not unlike other urban center attitudes of youth towards police agencies. (cite) Here is an important factor that must not be ignored since it is one of the most sensitive issues confronting many urban communities in the United States. This section is critical in planning for success in the future.

School

The school relationships proved to be constructive for those in school for the most part. Good reporting of how students felt school was a safe haven. Overall dissection of what was going on in school with youth connected well with adults, teachers. Talk with males was fruitful and established fertile ground to grow successfully. However, there is no indication about drop out rates, per se how many youth were not in school or marginally attending? This section was solid, could have went farther and deeper into who was in and out of school and why?

CAUSES OF YOUTH VIOLENCE

Disrespect

This section parallels with other urban reports of urban youth violence challenges (cite). This theme of "Disrespect" is quite common, yet, complex in understanding the breakdown overall of what 'Disrespect' means to youth, community at large in N. Minneapolis? While quite common in other cities this subject can vary as it did in this report. How are youth defining the word, meaning of 'disrespect'? Recently interviews in Detroit, Michigan, the mayor, police chief found youth discussing this perception of being "disrespected" by both peers, adults and society overall. Ironically, some urban youth who are in universities are feeling a sense of disrespect as is the overall African American communities across America. There is a sense of not being considered as a real bona fide American community by many in society. Whether this is true or not this is the perception for many African Americans especially in urban cities. (cite)

Disrespect is a major theme in this report as it relates to what many urban youth are experiencing in N. Minneapolis.

Opposite Sex

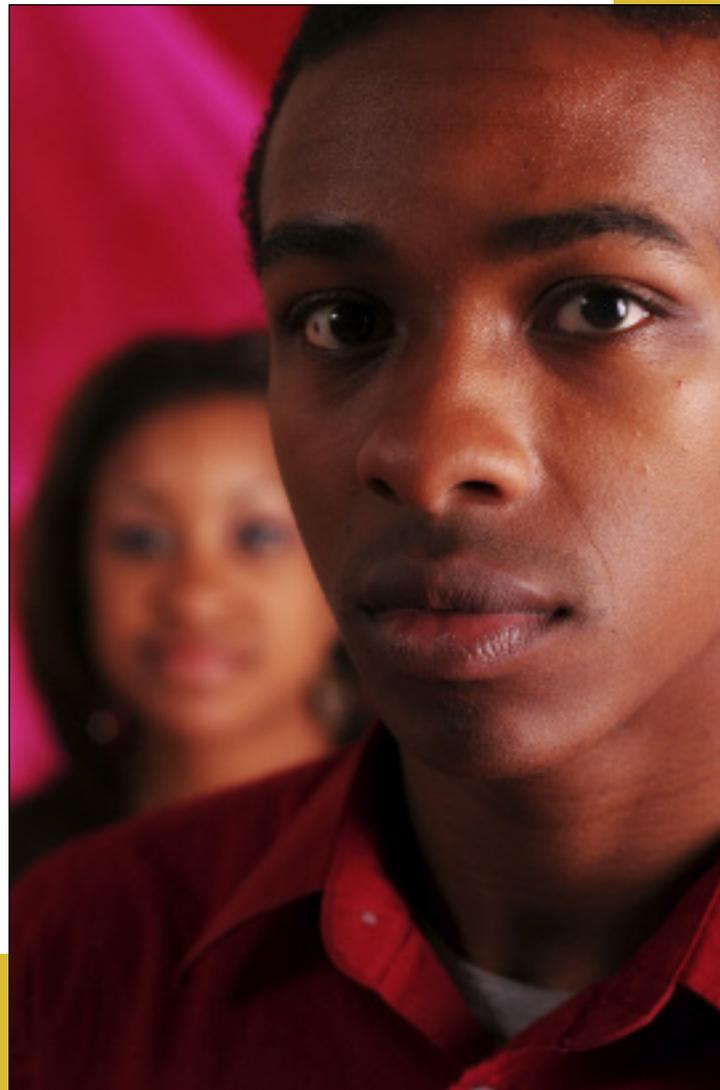
This section theme of opposite sex is an age old story. The striking point is that an old game of impressing girls or vice versa finds itself being haunted by violence capable of great harm. The infusion of the street justice or consideration over-rules the African American traditions of Southern Christian conservative morality. The impressions of street culture coupled with the media-entertainment industry including the video game factor allows a support that is meaningful in lieu of many poor families lacking skills, methods to balance out a world of negative images that mislead youth to rally around the violence, barbaric charge of being hard, tough, macho to gain the popularity of females or others in distressed communities. Macho identities and hip hop are the influences of many urban youth especially African American.

Financial Need

This section proved to again parallel with national reports about male youth. Boys reported a great need to be able to have funds to live a normal life. Needless to say the fact of an impoverished segment in North Minneapolis is fertile ground for delinquency when both young males and females have no means or support since many of their families are struggling to survive daily. This rationalization in many urban reports has a theme of hoodlums, thugs rallying around the theme of "by any means necessary or MOB which is Money Over Bitches". This report shows how 'thug life' is misrepresented as an acceptable means for the young people in this community. Illicit narcotics commerce coupled with auditioning for seriously dangerous jobs as drug dealers or enforcers again is part of what many urban researchers warn against if nothing is done (Third City, MSU Press, 2012).

Ecology/ Witnessing violence

This section is riveting in its honesty that is typical for much of what young men and women are saying in actual interviews of those in distressed communities (Third City). It is clear that their quality of living, decision making is impaired by violence. It is no less critical than any war torn environment. Much of what is said about violence falls into the useable factors in similar urban communities. This section con-fers and reinforces the depth of the complexity of violence as it is growing daily in these communities that are living with such uncertainty of random, recreational, and premeditated violence. The more critical fact is that this behavior has become entrenched, expected and normalized by many young people in such situations (essay Normalization of Ignorance and Violence and Death).



Electronic Media

Technology has become an ally of sort in the theater of urban youth violence. Now while youth culture at large is involved in showing their physical battles on the internet it is common practice in many urban communities of varied sizes that find the cell phone, video cameras, still pictures all easily accessed by the latest technology to enable even elementary age computer literate children to participate and observe. Another correct point in this overview.



Trauma

This section is accurate in relation to national trends including the underground observations that are not always easily documented. There is an overwhelming sense of violence taking its toll on this community. Unfortunately, this again is similar, if not identical to what is happening to many distressed urban communities. It is the summation of an ecologically distressed community. The youth may be able to acknowledge what is wrong, what it feels like and yet, still not be able to articulate exactly what is happening to them or their peers, families and community at large.

Weapons or "I just want to know, what is the reason with the guns all the time?"

This section like others reflected that urban youth are not homogeneous on the subject matter of weapons or violence. Many want to understand what is propelling this violence and where are the weapons coming from...while on the other end there are youth who embrace the weaponry and its ability to give them power. Again, it is exactly what we have found in other similar communities. The note on girls needs more examination in order to make certain that it is not deeper, as deadly and similar to the males. The self prophesy of guns creating an atmosphere for more guns is accurate. The whole subject of weapons is actually quite old and the discussion has been lacking in a deeper sense, forever it seems.

NOTE: Tough guy comments are not accurate in that tough guys are seriously tough without guns historically. This 'gun' made tough is a problem indeed, however, it is someone that is suddenly tough because they have secured a weapon. This point needs more detail in the future.

Reluctance to Tell Adults or "Snitches get stitches".

Another key agreement of youth culture in these types of communities. This is national and is not anything not expected, unfortunately. Telling on the transgressors is taboo, dating back decades in urban communities. Not at all surprising and actually expected by many who study this fact of urban street life (Taylor 1990). The accuracy of this report is consistent and well done, it is reflective of what is being said and done. The precise reports of youth trusting some adults with violence information parallels what is going on nationwide. Tattling is the origins of the much discussed dilemma that has taken on a new disconnect in the last decade (Children Defense, 2004)

Solutions

The response is similar to national responses of urban youth. However there is need to stop and understand that this response is more intelligent, more typical of youth who are harmed. Here is where we need more of a balance of the youth who are not simply defending themselves from violence. Here is where the case becomes radical in bringing those who are the assailants to the table. We rarely for an assortment of good reasons give an audience to the invaders and hunters of the communities in question.

Control personal behavior

This section is rather homogenized, much too bias in that it talks as if everyone is in agreement with the notion of being 'good,' need to broaden the inclusion of the dark side of this challenge (Taylor, 2011 *The Darkside of the Third City Youth*). Many urban youth especially young males do not sense there is any problem with their personal behavior. In the essay, based on conversations with young and older males speaking about their street experiences, the term 'War Parties' was developed to address what collective groups of these males considered themselves, not necessarily gangs, just a group of guys hanging out everyday. Many were like minded street warriors by their thinking. These groups had older youth as leaders whose main connection was a street brethren and a tribal sort of unorganized effort in their daily survival in urban America. War Parties are small collective groups that move throughout neighborhoods like a small tornado of social ills. Their daily existence is about survival mostly by means of crime; shake down of students going to school, breaking and entering of residences, and commercial property as targets, and preying on anyone or anything considered weak. War Parties declared war on anything not within the small circle of participants. (*Dark Side of the Third City*, 2008, *Journal of Youth Culture*).





Education, build community

Good section and solid responses from urban youth. This community shows an understanding of some of their youth. Another dimension is needed to show the outsiders and outlaws in the youth community. This will include the socialization of the families who are attached, strongly many times, to anti-education and anti-social value systems that are at the core of the problem many times.

Mentors, role models, and relationships

Here this report echoes what many studies have championed for urban youth. Urban America in many communities are faced with tough challenges that include guns, hard illegal dope and recreational marijuana, that is actually a greater challenge due to the street and popular culture rhetoric that it is harmless and not really illicit narcotics. Mentoring based on a positive youth development philosophy is greatly needed. This section hears those voices of youth wanting adults in their lives. Excellent responses from youth, however more is needed to confront this issue at large. Mentoring can exist in the communities with a negative counter movement that has always existed. Organized crime and unorganized crime is a reality that few mention or even acknowledge. Adults' deliberately enticing and luring youth into negative and criminal behavior is a reality. This point is more reason for strong

positive youth development both traditional models and non-traditional models. It is here that a needed discussion about value systems which means that street values are included in an understanding of what role models mean in the larger picture of America.

Proactive teachers

This segment reaffirms the fact, good strong teachers are very much part of the solution. They are with students more than families during the day from 7-4 during the week and are critical in students' overall development and education. Teachers are part of this whole issue regardless if they admit it or not. Teachers have historically played a pivotal role in many successful young people lives. Ironically, many negative experiences from community members including educators have put many youth into a mindset that no one cares or worse that they have been forsaken, forgotten and cursed by the community at large.

Teachers are wanted by youth, despite what many may think. This segment parallels with the OTO Project that underscored the need for adults in young people's lives.

Jobs, programs, and activities

Distressed communities need jobs, programs, and activities. Recent reports regarding youth employment has found it critical to engage in such positive activities. Programs after school, during school, and even programs for youth who are not in school would help to reduce the violence.

Adults response

This part of the report was aligned to the overall findings of this evaluation. Everything said by the adults chimed with the youth assessment. It is parallel to other national data and especially underscored similar findings in the longitudinal study with the OTO survey with Taylor and Lerner in Detroit. I point out Detroit since it is comparable with a sense of urgency to support the findings in this report.

CONCLUSION

The final report provided a window into the problem of youth violence in the North Minneapolis community. I have read this report and had my two colleagues Pamela R. Smith and Cameron Herman who are active in urban community research in Michigan review it also. The following x points underscore the overall project. This accounting of focus group and individual interviews with youth and adult providers proved to be an excellent report in understanding the challenges this community is facing.

1. The voices of young people were strong, diverse, and authentic. There were male and female interviews along with diversity within both groups, which included working middle class, impoverished class, and street class of those involved in crime and prison culture. It did not show an in-depth discussion of sensitive issues such as homosexuality or socio-economics beyond the actual community. One question comes to mind, is this community confined physically to their own territory? Is North Minneapolis segregated by any means such as race, gender, or class? Voices were strong; another dimension of inclusion should consider those who are charged as the assailants, troublemakers, or at times criminals. What are their viewpoints, causes for participating in the destructive theater?
2. The adult section was strong, poignant, and realistic of what is going on. The voices of community folks and professionals resonated with an undercurrent that may want to consider the 'others' meaning the adults who may be part of the problems facing North Minneapolis. Can more be learned from the parents, families, and friends of the wrong side of the track segment of this community?

3. The voices of both groups were similar in their views of what was wrong. This alone made this effort solid and promising. In concluding it might improve the future action if a more in-depth involvement of a female perspective overall is included. Violence is something that is connected strongly in similar projects in the literature of domestic violence. Both investigators Dr. Williams and Dr. Jenkins bring excellent skills and understanding of the intersections of social and economic factors that connect to housing, families, employment, and education as girls, young women and female based life experiences are both dominant and diverse. This report began to touch on many of these areas. It is an excellent dialogue in understanding the deep rooted complexity of urban violence.

In conclusion, the final report did an excellent job representing how the fundamental base of North Minneapolis youth and adults are challenged by youth violence. The strong involvement of a knowledgeable community coalition of The City Inc., Juvenile Justice Advisory, Institute of Domestic Violence in the African American Community, Phyllis Wheatley Community Center, and the University of Minnesota's Urban Research and Outreach/Engagement Center proved a valuable asset for this report. This undertaking of many community individuals gave a historical presence that made the report more valuable and sensible. Understanding clearly that disputes and conflict will arise at times. Overall, understanding the challenges for the mission of defeating youth violence benefited greatly by the dedicated work of Mr. William English, Mr. Fred Easter, Ms. Freddie English, Ms. Carries Wasley, Dr. Oliver Williams, Dr. Esther Jenkins, Dr. Sara Axtell, and Ms. Makeda Zulu-Gillespie. This was a great undertaking with a foundation laid for meeting the challenge of youth violence with clarity and authority based on solid data from the community.



Addressing youth violence in North Minneapolis: A Response to the Minneapolis Youth Violence Prevention Project Report

By Deanna L. Wilkinson, Ph.D
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This paper provides a response to the report prepared and presented in Minneapolis on October 21, 2011. I will share my reactions to the research project as well as my observations of the presentations, discussion, and challenges that may face the collaborative as they move to the next phase in their process. I will also share some suggestions on capacity building to facilitate the implementing evidence-based interventions based on knowledge of the research literature and experiences in attempting to implement a particular evidence-based intervention in Columbus, Ohio.

Addressing urban youth violence in neighborhoods that are disproportionately burdened by high rates of violence is one of the greatest challenges of the modern era. There is a growing body of research literature documenting the life histories of youth growing up in violent neighborhoods. There are numerous benefits of incorporating information on the lived experience of youth who have been exposed to violence and the perspectives of practitioners who work closely with those youth. These data provide valuable insights into how the local youth violence problem compares to the existing knowledge about key issues that need to be addressed. A grounded understanding of the local youth violence problem can be extremely helpful in shaping prevention and intervention strategies. The questions posed in this study, served an important purpose of laying the ground work for community action by identifying specific needs that can be addressed to reduce the youth violence problem in North Minneapolis. I will share my general reactions to the findings and then some specific reactions to what might come next.



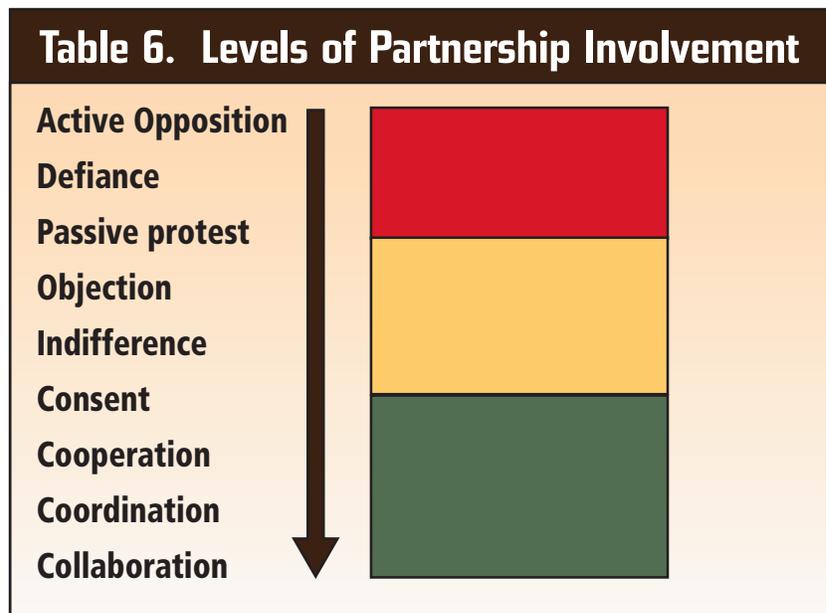
- **A Snapshot.** The study consisted of focus group and key informant interviews with youth and practitioners. The sample was not meant to be representative of all youth or practitioners in North Minneapolis but rather was purposefully selected based on convenience and relevant experiences. Information that was gathered referenced violence generally and therefore did not appear to be specifically situated in context of a particular neighborhood.
- **Same Themes, Different Samples.** The responses suggest that the youths' perceptions of the problem and suggestions for the solution are very consistent with what has been found in other settings, from larger samples, from samples that were more deeply enmeshed in violent behavior, and from older groups.
- **Beliefs are Consistent across Generations.** The perspectives of practitioners were very similar to youth which speaks to how beliefs, attitudes and behavior are communicated and experienced across generations. Those individuals who work directly with at-risk youth are usually in touch with their concerns and have a unique perspective on both the challenges and opportunities in reaching youth. Both groups focused on a combination of individual, situational, and structural determinants of violence. The particular questions that were posed did not probe into specific intervention or prevention strategies beyond general categories such as mentoring youth, improving policing behavior, and increasing opportunities for activities and employment.
- **Problem identification doesn't always lead to problem solving.** The results left me wondering how the team would go from the information gathered on the problems and suggestions for strategies to any specific type of intervention strategy. Because the information gleaned

was somewhat general in nature, I wondered about the very specific "conditions on the block" for youth at risk and for youth at high risk. For example, what opportunities are there already for mentoring, employment, or dealing with police harassment? How many youth are currently connected with mentors, employed, and engaged in positive activities in the high violence areas. What's the capacity for increasing these activities and connections? An important step would be to involve youth who are engaged with agencies map the assets within the community. What do young people know about the opportunities that exist in their communities? What opinions do young people have about the particular providers? What can be learned from the success stories? What can be learned from the challenges? Who reaches the truly marginalized and highest risk individuals well? What types of outcomes have the existing programs produced? Have there been formal program evaluations, are agencies implementing evidence-based strategies, or are agencies at least doing self-evaluation for quality improvement? What strategies or programs exist that are specific to violence prevention?



The conference held in October 2011 provided an important forum for a larger conversation with diverse members of the practitioners and resident community. As an outsider invited to share my research and experiences, I was very pleased to participate in the event. The greatest strength of this team is the passion, depth of knowledge, commitment to the community, and strong leadership team. I was impressed by time, energy, and deliberate mindfulness that went into planning the sessions and activities. There are many struggles and challenges that get in the way of collaborative community-based violence prevention efforts that often derail or otherwise hamper effective implementation. My sense from moving through the crowd, listening to table conversations, and observing the group dynamics on that October day the team has already laid the groundwork for community change but more work is needed to maintain the movement.

Scholars have concluded that collaborative efforts are really worth the effort and if implemented successfully can reduce crime and violence. Not all community partnerships are made equal. It is important to recognize that partnership quality varies. Dennis Rosenbaum (2006) described a continuum of partnership qualities from negative: active opposition, defiance, passive protest, objection; to neutral: indifference; to positive: consent, cooperation, coordination, and collaboration.



According to Rosenbaum, partnerships are more successful when they...

- Have a history of funding and network of organizations in place
- Face a limited presence of intractable violence problems such as gangs
- Are near commercial areas with potential for economic development
- Are working with more stable, less transient neighborhoods
- Concentrate on a narrowly defined target population or area
- Leverage other resources (i.e. sufficient “treatment dosage”)
- Build community trust and buy-in
- Have strong leadership
- Have the right mix of “weeding” and “seeding” (simultaneously)

Rosenbaum notes that a strong leader will: (1) Find commonality of purpose/mission; (2) Establish clear roles and responsibilities; (3) Resolve conflict and create atmosphere of mutual respect, equality, cooperation; (4) Encourage “bottom-up” problem solving; (5) Build the capacity of local organizations; (6) Bring the most knowledgeable and appropriate agency representatives to the table; (7) Engage in strategic data-driven planning; and (8) Encourage ownership of the partnership. Rosenbaum’s work on this topic is especially relevant to the Minneapolis team. He has shown that beyond reducing violence, interagency community partnerships can: build public-private linkages; increase public awareness of (and participation in) anti-crime initiatives; Strengthen local community organizations; Permanently alter the way agencies “do business” – strategic planning, data-supported decision-making, prevention, interagency cooperation, and community participation in local governance.

As I listened to the different speakers involved in the conversation it reminded me of some of the same struggles we are facing in Columbus, Ohio. No matter who is framing the problem, calling the diverse group of people together, collecting or analyzing the data, or leading the meeting there will always be people who disagree with the agenda or feel slighted not to be involved in a particular way. There will always be multiple perspectives on both the problems and solutions. Some individuals are interested in engaging in partnership collaboratively and others prefer to be oppositional. The challenge is for people to learn how to work together respectfully for a greater good despite competing agendas or egos. The Minneapolis team has outstanding leadership, vision, knowledge, and credibility. We need to learn more about how to be effective despite predictable implementation challenges.



I can speak from my understanding of the research literature but also from my failures and challenges in trying to build a collaborative community-based violence prevention initiative. I began the work that I am currently doing with a firm grounding in the experiences of young men caught up in violent lifestyles in high violence neighborhoods. My perspective was also shaped by several other experiences I had that included studying grassroots community organizations organized to fight drugs and drug-related violence in their communities, studying two police organizations that were early reformers during the initial problem oriented policing reform years, studying medical staff working with hospitalized victims of youth violence, and studying the social structure of service delivery for youth violence prevention/intervention. I am constantly self-critical in all of the work that I am engaged in because there is no recipe book to follow for this work and it is necessary to learn from mistakes along the way.

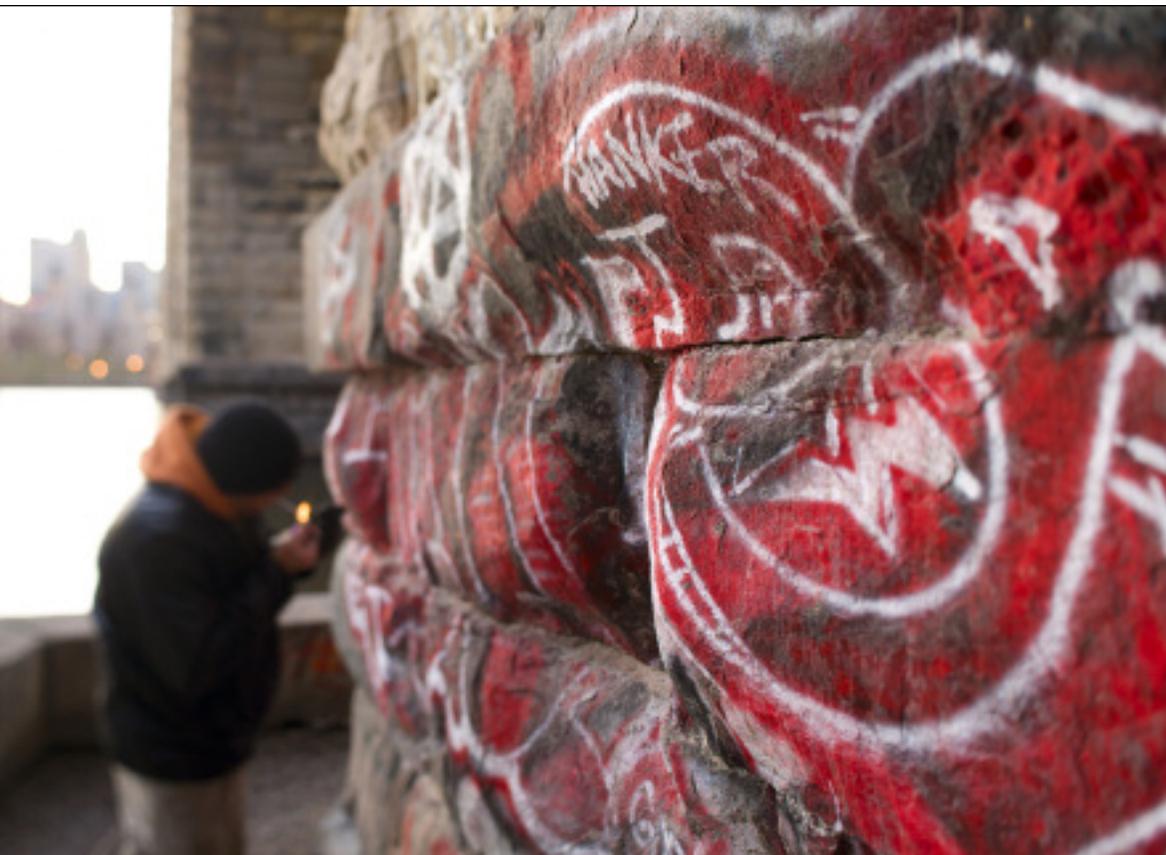
The approach that we have developed represents a particular data-driven, researcher-involved strategy that focuses on capacity building. The research team conducts problem and asset/resource analysis in close partnership with the community partners so that the information that is shared is usable at the grassroots level. One problem we face in Columbus has been my leadership. While many people have come to the table because of what I had to offer as an expert on the topic of youth violence, others simply object to me being the leader of a movement to improve the conditions in the Black community. Many feel that I am not the “right” leader for this initiative. I KNOW that I am not the right leader. This initiative needs multiple leaders with credibility with different audiences but ultimately must be owned (and run) by community people. Some of my own research shows that those individuals with the greatest reach in the community to disenfranchised and marginalized youth are not connected to highly level elite institutions in the community who have greater capacity to secure funding, serve large numbers, and lobby for more resources (Venkatesh, 1997). Most of our challenges come back to the issue of building strong partnerships that function collaboratively to move a shared agenda forward with a long term goal in mind. This work takes time –the relationships are fragile.

Because there so many potential partners and so many moving parts of a dynamic community having a team to nurture and keep watch over each action, each major decision, and each step is vitally important. I have to constantly remind myself that I am just one voice. I have to listen to the voices around me. I have to seek out voices and viewpoints that differ from my own and listen. I have to know when to be silent and when to scream as loud as I can. I have to be able have people on my team who can communicate with people who don’t want to talk to me. The best way for me to be effective is to teach others and share the insights that I have gained from the teachers I have had –gun offenders, community activists, researchers, professors, drug dealers,



addicts, case managers, murderers, rapists, victims, survivors, doctors, nurses, police officers, counselors, preachers, guards, therapists, politicians, judges, prosecutors, and public defenders. I believe each of the perspectives has taught me something different about what is needed for lasting community change. I am still putting all of this together in my day to day work as in Columbus, Ohio. My experiences have been wonderful in preparing me for this work however it is the relationships that I have with people on the East side of Columbus that are my most important teachers. I see myself as a student for life. Knowledge without true partnership, true connection to people will not be enough. Partnership without knowledge isn't enough either.

As I shared in my presentation, my coalition has endorsed a public health approach modeled after CeaseFire Chicago. I lead them to this model based on what I learned from interviewing 416 gun offenders in NYC. We considered several other alternatives. We analyzed the crime data in Columbus to identify the most appropriate community for this initiative. We also worked to build relationships in the focus community through social service, faith-based and grassroots organizations. We identified people who were credible messengers to high risk individuals who were at the greatest risk for shootings or being shot. To date, we have yet to secure funding to support the hiring of outreach workers and violence interrupters. We have been able to hire a community activist to coordinate our community mobilization and public education campaign. We devoted most of our energy at the grassroots level unfortunately we failed to establish key support from some of the political leaders



A Final Note on Experts' Feedback

Dr. Taylor and Dr. Wilkinson complimented the planning group on their work and noted the importance of hearing the voices of the youth and community in developing interventions to address youth violence. They noted that the findings from the focus groups and individual interviews were quite consistent with findings in the literature. However, both scholars brought an insight specific to their orientation to the field, and made useful suggestions in going forward.

While noting that *"this accounting of focus group and individual interviews with youth and adult providers proved to be an excellent report in understanding the challenges this community is facing"*, and in *"understanding the deep rooted complexity of urban violence"* Dr. Taylor noted that there are important segments of the community that were not represented in the study. He commented several times on the need to hear more from the perpetrators of the violence in the community – the "invaders and hunters", "the outsiders and outlaws in the youth community" and believed that there is "more to be learned from the parents, families, and friends of the wrong side of the track segment of this community". In addition, he recommended that we delve more deeply into the female involvement in youth violence.

Dr. Wilkinson was impressed with the effort of the team but noted that the information gathered was somewhat general and wondered how the group "would go from the information gathered on the problems and suggestions for strategies to any specific type of intervention strategy". She made several suggestions for getting more exact information on "conditions on the block" that could be used to develop specific interventions. Much of Dr. Wilkinson's paper focused on developing community collaborations to address youth violence, of the type that was already in evidence at the conference.

The challenge is for people to learn how to work together respectfully for a greater good despite competing agendas or egos. The Minneapolis team has outstanding leadership, vision, knowledge, and credibility. We need to learn more about how to be effective despite predictable implementation challenges.





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