

# Exposure to Violence and Traumatic Events:



**A SIGNIFICANT ISSUE FOR PREGNANCY  
PREVENTION PROGRAMS**

Expanding our Experience and Expertise:  
Implementing Effective Teenage Pregnancy Prevention Programs  
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# Agenda



- **Goals of the workshop**
- **Scope of the problem**
- **Effects of violence on children and youth**
- **Strategies for programs**
- **Evidence-based interventions**

# Objectives



- **Understand importance of addressing exposure to violence.**
- **Identify role that staff can play in responding to exposure to violence**
- **Describe evidence informed programs and strategies**

# Scope of the Problem



## National Survey of Children Exposed to Violence\*

- 20% witnessed an assault in their family
- 30% witnessed an assault in their community
- 49% experienced 2 or more types of victimization
- 8% experienced 7 or more victimization types
  - This group defined as polyvictims

\*Finkelhor, D., Turner, J., Ormrod, R., Hamby, S. & Kracke, K. (2009, October). Children's exposure to violence: A comprehensive national survey. *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*.  
[www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles/ojjdp/227744.pdf](http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles/ojjdp/227744.pdf).

# Scope of the Problem



- Children who experience one form of victimization are much more likely to suffer other types of victimization during their lifetime.
- Exposure to multiple types of victimization underlies high levels of distress.

Finkelhor, D., Turner, J., Ormrod, R., Hamby, S. & Kracke, K. (2009, October). Children's exposure to violence: A comprehensive national survey. *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*. [www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles/ojjdp/227744.pdf](http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles/ojjdp/227744.pdf).

# Effects



- **Adverse Childhood Experiences study**
- **Exposure to violence part of a constellation of risk factors linked to poor outcomes**
- **Youth exposed to violence are more likely to become teen parents.**

Vuong, L., Silva, F., Marchionna, S. (2009, August) Children Exposed to Violence. *FOCUS*.  
<http://www.nccd-crc.org/nccd/dnld/Home/focus0809.pdf>

# Effects



- Youth exposed to physical or sexual abuse are more likely to have a rapid repeat pregnancy.
- Victimization is linked to delinquency, mental health issues, substance use, suicide among others.
- Early exposure to violence is associated with perpetrating violence as an adult.

# Why is it important for prevention programs?



- **Addressing consequences can prevent intergenerational transmission, decrease risk of multiple victimization and improve outcomes.**
- **Failure to address lifetime exposure to violence compromises quality and effectiveness of programs.**

# Warning Signs



- **Teens are often rebellious or may be loud because they are finding their voices.**
- **Warning signs can be distinguished from typical behavior by associated functional impairments, severity, persistence and pervasiveness of behavior.**
- **Concerns about labeling—need to recognize signs of concern.**

# Warning Signs



- Reactions can be immediate or appear later
- Differ in severity
- Cultural differences
- Risk factors (i.e. poverty, child neglect, drug use)
- Protective factors (i.e. stable family relationships, participation in prevention programs)

# Warning Signs



- Hypervigilance (tense, on guard)
- Hopelessness
- Frequent nightmares
- Drug and alcohol use

# Warning Signs



- Engaging in violent, risky behaviors
- Feeling intense fear
- Expressing suicidal thoughts
- Constantly recounting event

# Build Program Capacity



- **Understand impact of trauma on children and families.**
- **Create opportunities to talk about what happened (rather than punish for behavior.)**

# Build Program Capacity



- **Revisit policies and procedures**
- **Have intake, screening, observation and interview practices**
- **Refer adolescents with a history of exposure**



# Strategies for Pregnancy Prevention Programs

# Engage Adolescents



- **Get and stay in touch with participants**
- **Establish trust**
- **Do not make commitments that cannot be honored**

# Engage and Retain Adolescents



- **Convey an understanding of the youth language and culture**
- **Avoid blaming: reframe situation in terms of relational factors (not personal failure)**

# Respond Appropriately to Disclosures



- **Provide a safe space to talk**
- **Listen with compassion**
- **Use power of relationship to correct unhealthy and wrong views of the incident**
- **Clarify what you will do with the information**

# Disclose Legal Requirements



- **Balance legal requirements without violating trust**
- **Balance growing autonomy from families with respecting critical role of parents (and other caregivers)**
- **Mandatory reporting**

# Support Staff



- **Secondary traumatic stress, burnout, compassion fatigue**
- **Supervision**
- **Consultation**
- **Safe space to talk and listen**

# Build Collaborative Relationships



- **Young people are in communities, not programs.**
- **Schools, school-serving organizations, faith based institutions, businesses and government agencies.**
- **The more formal and informal systems that are involved, the more likely changes will “stick.”**

# Facilitate Access to Evidence-Based Practice



- Evidence-Based Practices for Children Exposed to Violence. A Selection of Federal Databases.
- [www.safestartcenter.org/pdf/Evidence-Based-Practices-Matrix\\_2011.pdf](http://www.safestartcenter.org/pdf/Evidence-Based-Practices-Matrix_2011.pdf)
- Crime Solutions [www.crimesolutions.gov](http://www.crimesolutions.gov)
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network [nctsn.org](http://nctsn.org)
- Promising Practices Network on Children, Families and Communities [www.promisingpractices.net](http://www.promisingpractices.net).

# Summary/Key Points



- **Children's exposure to violence, crime and abuse is pervasive in the United States.**
- **A growing body of literature supports connections between exposure to violence and later mental, cognitive and physical health.**

# Summary/Key Points (continued)



- **Programs can build their capacity to respond in more effective ways to children's exposure to violence.**
- **Some evidence-based interventions have been successful with vulnerable groups that share many of the risks associated with unintended pregnancies.**



**Questions or Comments?**