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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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.
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

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.

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.

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
• 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 unhealthful 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

- Crime Solutions [www.crimesolutions.gov](http://www.crimesolutions.gov)
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network [nctsn.org](http://nctsn.org)
- 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.
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?