A Picture of Intimate Partner Violence in the African American Community

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Overview

- Define and highlight impact of intimate partner violence (IPV)
- Highlight culturally specific contributing factors
- Highlight service provision to African American community – community response and identified needs
- Highlight a culturally specific IPV intervention targeting the African American community
- Recommendations for work with our community
Intimate Partner Violence

- CDC Definition: The term “intimate partner violence” describes physical, sexual, or psychological harm by a current or former partner or spouse. This type of violence can occur among heterosexual or same-sex couples and does not require sexual intimacy. IPV can vary in frequency and severity.
- Four types
  - Physical violence
  - Sexual violence
  - Threats of physical or sexual violence
  - Psychological/emotional violence
A Pervasive Problem in Our Society - Victims of IPV Experience Increased... 

- injury
- chronic pain
- gastrointestinal problems
- gynecological problems
- sexually-transmitted diseases (including HIV/AIDS)
- mortality
- disability
- reproductive disorders
- irritable bowel syndrome
- poor pregnancy outcomes
- substance abuse problems
- depression
- post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- heart and circulatory conditions
- worse overall general health
Occurrence/Consequences

- Women with history of IPV report 60% higher rates of overall health problems than women with no history of abuse.
- An estimate: 4.8 million IPV victimizations occur each year among U.S. women ages 18 and over resulting in nearly 2 million injuries and nearly 1300 deaths.
Occurrence/Consequences

• As many as 324,000 women each year experience IPV during their pregnancy – can lead to premature labor and birth
• Costs an estimated $8.3 billion annually: this includes direct medical and mental health care costs as well as indirect costs of lost productivity
Intimate Partner Violence

• Cuts across all races, cultures, social classes, and sexual orientations
• Until recently, limited attention has been paid to communities of color and persons from disadvantaged backgrounds in the IPV research and literature
• Limited research has addressed culturally specific dynamics which contribute to IPV
Factors That Compound IPV in the African American Community

- Racism
  - Stereotypes of African American women
  - Myth that the Black family is inherently violent/dysfunctional
  - Disempowering of African American men by larger society
  - Feeling of loyalty to Black community/family
  - Knowledge of racist legal system
- Disproportionate economic disadvantage
- Homophobia
Stereotypes

- Stereotypic images have the potential to negatively affect social relationships
- Stereotypes influence power dynamics in interpersonal interactions
- Stereotypes influence quality of service African American survivors receive
- Belief in stereotypes by African American men has been linked to increased belief in the justification of violence against their intimate partners (Gillum, 2002)
Perceived Impact of Lack of Power

• “I have to go back to the power and control though, because I think it’s exacerbated by the fact that a lot of African American men don’t have power and control in the larger society. And so they gonna have it at home, they gonna have it. They gonna have it at home no matter what.”
Legal System

- Reluctance of police to enforce the law in the interest of Black battered women
- History of racism within the legal system
- Reluctance of African American survivors to call police
- Service providers as well as survivors express an inherent knowledge of racism existing within the legal system and some expressed this as a reason for not calling the police
“On a basic level, like. I don’t know that many Black folk who want to pick up a telephone and call the police if there is a situation in their home...you have a police presence in a community that many people are distrustful of or have legitimate reason...the women are very aware that the police can be racist and so they’re afraid that if they call the police on him that the police are going to act out inappropriately.”
Disproportionate economic disadvantage

- Women of low income tend to be at higher risk
- Documented increased prevalence of IPV among African American community
- Benson and colleagues (2004) applied social disorganization theory and research on urban poverty, have argued that identified race differences between African Americans and Whites in IPV prevalence are largely a function of their location in different ecological contexts*
Disproportionate economic disadvantage

• Employment factors have also been identified as contributing to tension in relationships between African American women and men
• These include the disproportionately high rate of unemployment among African American men and negative perceptions of African American women regarding African American men and work
• These perceptions are exacerbated by their expectations of African American men to be the primary breadwinners of the household (Dixon, 1998)
Community Response to African American Help-Seekers

- Many services/interventions take a color-blind approach to assisting survivors and perpetrators - persons of color not seeking or receiving full benefit of services
- African American survivors have expressed dissatisfaction with domestic violence shelters, legal services, social services, response of church (Gillum, 2008; Gillum, *in press 1*; Gillum, *in press 2*)
- Survivors, services providers, and researchers have called for culturally specific services
Many African American women express dissatisfaction with domestic violence shelter programs.

One issue, lack of African American shelter staff.

“Shelters serve mostly African Americans while the administration and the advocates are mostly white.” - SP
"They need to have more African American women working in these programs. Especially the domestic violence shelters."

"I think, I don’t know, if more African American women as therapists and counselors and work in these environments, they can help you, you know? It would give us more of a relief to discuss our problems, and you know, make it easier for us to talk to people…"
Churches

• Women believe that the churches should offer resources to help women in domestic violence situations

• “If the churches... can see just that it is so many women even in the church that is married to alcoholics and drug addicts, all that kind of stuff, and they go to church on Sunday and beat you up on Sunday night...If the ministers of the churches offered the programs (it would help)...First thing we gonna say is ‘Please God don’t let him kill me’.”
Churches (cont.)

- Survivors also find strength to break free from and/or remain free from abusive relationships through their participation in church services and activities.
- “I go, we went to church…and I just eventually grew a relationship with God…It took me a long time. God was probably the only person that helped me get on my feet and stay away from being abused and being took advantage of by men...”
Asha Family Services

- Culturally specific domestic violence agency which targets the African American community
- Located in Milwaukee, WI
- Founded in 1989 by an African American woman who is a domestic violence survivor
- Offers holistic approach to serving African American families
Culturally Specific Components

- Environment/Culture
- Representative staff and board
- Respectful interactions
- Religious tolerance – spiritually based
- Effectively responding to cultural dynamics
- Differing help-seeking behaviors
- Mental health issues and African American survivors
Culturally Specific Components

- Curriculum
- Family-centered
- Understanding the needs of African American survivors
  - Holistic
  - Prison outreach
Family centered approach

• “...I usually look for stuff that’s gonna benefit me and my children...when I...become involved with it because my children are very much me...very much me...I got eight kids. I can’t hardly do too much a nothin’...without mine...so for me...it would have to be a place where my whole family could be involved. If my kids can’t be there, I ain’t too much thrilled about being there because...my job is to be the mother and to raise’em and to be with’em. How can I possibly be with them when I’m with you, and you ain’t got nothin’ for them?”
“...because most black people um, men and women, but most black women were raised in church, raised spiritually, you know...And that part brings a whole 'nother meaning to the, you know, changing your life...I think that’s very necessary...I do...Because I need that in my life...Me personally, I need that. Without the spiritual part, it would just be another group...You know?...I don’t need just a group...I need a foundation, and that’s what the spiritual part gives me, a foundation.”
“Black women need it. We need help ‘cause…not too many people that like to help us…You don’t find too many groups out here like to help Black people. A lot of us Black folks don’t get too much help.”
“...Yeah, because black people, black women understand other black women. Ain’t no way a white woman understands what a black woman going through...So, it’s good for Black women to be together...if you’re dealing with going to a group with a white woman [facilitating], it’s going to be hard.”
Curriculum is Afro-centric

- “It makes me more comfortable because everything is pretty much African-American like the setting and just everything pretty much that we discuss and stuff it’s...more relating to African-Americans and how we deal with situations and how we can better deal with situations. How we was brought up and stuff like that.”
Afro-centric environment

• “...you’re a little more comfortable...I just feel more comfortable...when I come in someplace, you know, that makes me feel like, okay, yea, you know, I can come here...”
Holistic approach

• “...They don’t only deal with domestic violence issues, they deal with all of it. And I experienced that because I have more than just that issue. I have drugs that I was doing, I don’t do anymore. I had an attitude issue. I was raped a long time ago. So they deal with all of that...”
Mainstream Services vs. Asha

- Culture of organization not welcoming to African Americans
- Insensitive to process of leaving an abusive relationship
- Structural barriers to adequate assistance
- Non-supportive environment

- Culture of organization welcoming to African Americans
- Sensitive to the process of leaving an abusive relationship
- Structures which increase ability to assist
- Supportive environment
Mainstream Services

- Culture of organization not welcoming to African Americans
- “No. I was not comfortable there at all, and part of it had to do with the sterile [White] environment…the umm…those penny loafer shoes.”
- “…everything in their surroundings was based on, you know, the white culture…”
Recommendations

• Men in our communities bond around non-violence and respect for their partners and hold each other accountable.
• Support women in our community, our sisters, friends, and daughters who disclose abuse.
• Condemn any form of violence which occurs in our communities (racism, gender-based violence, youth violence, homophobic violence, child abuse, incest, community violence).
IPV programs (shelters & batterer interventions) can increasing the number of qualified people of color on their staff – reflect population being served

Curriculum of such programs should incorporate aspects of culture and culturally specific dynamics of violence

Create affirming environments for service provision and healing

Culturally specific and culturally competent IPV services
Recommendations (cont.)

• Address issues of racism within the legal system which causes some survivors not to call the police
• Address issues of racism and social disorganization which compound manifestation of violence within the African American community
• Incorporation of spirituality/church into domestic violence intervention programs – voluntary
• Churches can offer services specifically to assist survivors such as support groups – IPV interventions located within churches in the African American community
Thank you for your time and attention

Questions & Discussion