

Community Violence and Intimate Partner Violence: Understanding and Addressing the Connections

Uncovering the Intersection of Community Violence and Intimate Partner Violence: ALSO's Story

While coordinating services for youth and families on Chicago's Northwest side more than ten years ago, the Alliance of Local Service Organization (ALSO) realized the devastating impact of community violence on those families and began to take action by implementing prevention programs to end street violence through initiatives like the CeaseFire campaign, a community violence prevention program targeting those at risk of shooting or being shot.

Recognizing that violence is pervasive and spans beyond the streets, in 2007, ALSO expanded its violence prevention and intervention efforts to include intimate partner violence. By working to end violence more broadly, ALSO began to see connections between violence on the streets and violence in the home. Today, ALSO's mission is to end violence in the homes and streets of communities nationwide.

Because of ALSO's integrated focus, community violence outreach workers and domestic violence victim advocates pay particular attention to how violent acts co-occur and interact with other forms of violence. Addressing a single violent act as connected to a larger pattern of violence on the streets and in the home informs ALSO's approach to eliminating violence overall.

In 2009, a series of apparent gang-related shootings and homicides came to ALSO's attention. Community violence outreach workers collaborated with domestic violence staff to uncover that the homicides were connected to each other, fueled by an ongoing domestic violence case. However, these cases were not an anomaly. Further analysis of apparent gang violence revealed connections to unreported cases of domestic violence.

Other Examples of the Connections

In one case, a gang involved man attempted to use community violence outreach workers to mediate a relationship with an opposing gang, which was providing protection for his former girlfriend. By requesting a mediation, the man was attempting to gain access to his ex-girlfriend. In other cases, family members of battered women have retaliated against their loved one's abusive boyfriend; because the battered woman's family and her boyfriend were from opposing gangs, the violence that erupted in the streets appeared to be a typical gang-related conflict.

These examples are not unique. An analysis of conflicts in ALSO's catchment area in 2010/2011 revealed that at least 11% of the conflicts mediated by community violence outreach workers were connected to intimate partner violence.

Gaps in Services for Both Women and Men

In 2010, ALSO established a Violence Prevention Working Group comprised of domestic violence agencies and community violence outreach workers to explore service gaps for men and women affiliated with gangs.

Through this Working Group ALSO learned that gang-affiliated women, or women who are involved with gang-affiliated men, may not seek services from local service providers. Issues related to crossing gang boundaries to receive services outside of a “safe” area, or fear of the repercussions of a breach in confidentiality may create barriers to service access.

Additionally domestic violence agencies may not be accustomed to receiving referrals from community violence outreach workers, positions traditionally filled by men. Without an interagency referral system in place, domestic violence victim advocates may question the validity of a referral from a community violence outreach worker.

Community based services for men who batter are scarce. Batter intervention programs are oftentimes limited to court referred participants only, leaving a service referral gap for those whose violence against an intimate partner has not come to the attention of the courts.

Recommendations for Service Providers

The Violence Prevention Working Group is establishing a system for ongoing collaboration to address domestic violence among gang-involved men and women. Included here are preliminary recommendations from the Working Group.

Cross-Train

Community violence outreach workers are trained to intervene in gang violence, but may not be trained to recognize how men who batter exert power and control over their intimate partners, or the multiple ways in which intimate partner violence fuels, or is masked by, gang violence.

Likewise, domestic violence victim advocates may not know about the dynamics of gang violence and how best to help victims who are involved in gangs, or are the intimate partners of gang-involved men.

Local domestic violence and community violence service providers can share information and provide support through cross training and ongoing consultation. Community violence staff can participate in standard 40-hour trainings to get grounded in the dynamics of domestic violence. Typically, such standardized trainings don’t exist related to the dynamics of gang violence, so ongoing consultation is key to professional education. Also, each can help the other screen for risk factors by examining screening tools and reviewing approaches to client: worker interactions for gang-involved men and women.

Collaborate

Helping domestic violence victims access safety and other supports requires that victim advocates understand their needs. Likewise, when victims come to the attention of community violence outreach workers, workers must be aware of the best available local resources, and connect victims with services in a way that is optimally supportive to the victim and is in keeping with the domestic violence agency’s protocols.

Collaboration is best achieved through an ongoing interagency relationship. Local work groups or task forces comprised of domestic violence victim advocates and community violence outreach workers may be established or amended to include a focus on

addressing domestic violence among gang-involved men and women. These workgroups can be used to cross train and to establish guidelines for work with victims. Also, interagency agreements can be developed to guide the referral process and information sharing.

Confidentiality

Both community violence outreach workers and domestic violence victim advocates manage sensitive information in their work with clients. To maximize safety for all involved, collaborating agencies confidentiality guidelines should be shared and reviewed. In instances where providing services to a victim may put the victim, staff, or community at risk, community violence outreach workers and domestic violence victim advocates should develop safeguards to account for such instances. Given that implementing these safeguards may mean involving the police, community violence outreach workers and domestic violence victim advocates should discuss how their agency policies and practices about involving law enforcement may impact their collaboration.

Other Considerations

To more fully understand the prevalence of domestic violence among gang-involved men and women, both domestic violence agencies and community violence agencies should modify their data collection strategies to include related screening questions. Additionally, screening should trigger a referral to existing resources, either within the agency or in the community. If those resources do not exist, then screening should be carefully constructed to match the capacity of the community to respond effectively to domestic violence among gang-involved men and women.