

City of Los Angeles Domestic Violence Task Force

Promoting Prevention, Targeting Teens



**Authored By: City of Los Angeles Domestic Violence Task
Force Children's Committee**

**Co-Chair Ellen Sanchez, M.Ed., Director of Community Outreach,
Violence Intervention Program**

**Co-Chair Emily Austin, Division Manager, Prevention Services
Peace Over Violence**

Date: October 10, 2008

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary and Recommendations	3
Los Angeles City Domestic Violence Task Force Report	4
Testimonials	8
Stories by Facilitators	11

Executive Summary and Recommendations

The Los Angeles Domestic Violence Task Force, Children's Committee has completed a review of teen dating violence studies. During our examination of current statistics and trends in teen dating violence and violence prevention, we developed several recommendations for the City of Los Angeles.

Some of our key findings include:

- Teenagers and tweens (11-14) are experiencing a high rate of violence in their relationships.
- Experiencing violence in teenage relationships is connected to various high-risk behaviors, such as decreased academic success, increased use of drugs and alcohol, increased unprotected sex, and higher rate of teenage pregnancy.
- Technology (internet, cell phones, etc) plays a big role in teen dating violence abuse, and should be a part of any prevention strategy.
- Educating youth about teen dating violence is central to preventing violence in teen and adult relationships.

Recommendations

We have developed the following recommendations for the City of Los Angeles and key city policy makers. These recommendations are:

- Expanding proven violence prevention programs to all secondary schools in the City of Los Angeles.
- Providing funding for the administrative and material costs of running teen dating violence prevention leadership clubs.
- Requiring mandatory training on teen dating violence awareness, response and prevention for all city employees who work with youth.
- Requiring all law enforcement officers be trained and educated about teen dating violence, the appropriate response to teen dating violence situations, and timely and serious enforcement of teen dating violence restraining orders.

Promoting Prevention, Targeting Teens

Los Angeles City Domestic Violence Task Force Report

Why Focus on Teen Dating Violence?

After a quarter century of groundbreaking work on behalf of victims of domestic violence the field has achieved a competent level of understanding of the problem, and systems such as law enforcement, healthcare, and child welfare are beginning to create policies and programs to address their many needs. Substantial progress has been made in crisis response and intervention, provision of services for adult victims, and in criminalization of domestic violence. As we work to continually improve such services and systems, we must focus our work on identifying strategies and building the resources necessary for **stopping the violence before it begins**.

Investigations thus far make it clear that the work of **prevention involves focusing those resources on adolescents and young adults**.

We know the extent of harm done to children experiencing family violence, and the number hurt is at least 3 million American youth (www.endabuse.org). The trauma impairs every aspect of their lives - their ability to focus and learn in school, their physical health, their social and emotional development, their ability to form lasting and trusting relationships, their sense of self and of their future. For many it results in depression. And, it is the primary indicator of future victimization or perpetration of dating and domestic violence. Studies tell us that **1 in 5 teen relationships are abusive**, with physical health consequences for the victims that include substance abuse, eating disorders, sexual risk taking, pregnancy and suicidality (Silverman, 2001).

Adolescence is a formative period, one in which normal development involves exploring sexuality and intimacy and defining one's moral values. It is precisely the time to provide opportunities to experience the support of adults and other youth in building a vision of and skills for healthy relationships. It is a pivotal moment. If we do nothing, emerging evidence tells us that patterns of violence and victimization may

become set and difficult to reverse later on. **It is the critical period to provide comprehensive intervention** that offers young men an opportunity to expand their understanding of masculinity to one that includes strength and power without violence and for young women to establish expectations of respect in their relationships, for both genders to create and embrace a vision of intimate relationships that rejects violence.

Youth are the key to ending the cycle of domestic violence. By focusing on teen dating violence awareness and prevention, we provide adolescents with a chance to heal from past abuse, gain support for creating a model for themselves and their peers of equitable, caring relationships, and serve as leaders in the prevention of violence in their communities. The work is multi-faceted. It requires changing social norms among youth culture and among the adults in their lives who do or should provide critical support and guidance.

By providing programming to young people that addresses interpersonal violence in their lives, we not only help prevent violence in their future relationships, we also affect their ability to stay in school and enter the work force, and avoid criminal behavior, substance abuse, and too early pregnancy. Prevention efforts must focus on this age group, and be a part of as many institutions in their lives as possible. Success is directly related to infiltrating teen culture. (Promoting Prevention, Targeting Teens, Family Violence Prevention Fund).

What Does Teen Dating Violence Look Like?

- Teen dating violence occurs in all types of relationships, and crosses all economic, ethnic, and gender lines. In fact, unlike in adult domestic violence, both boys and girls report being victims and perpetrators of teen dating violence at similar levels.
- Nationwide, nearly 10 percent of high school students report being hit, slapped, or physically hurt on purpose by their boyfriend or girlfriend. (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2007)

- 1 in 3 teenagers report knowing a friend or peer who has been hit, punched, kicked, slapped, choked or physically hurt by their partner. (Teenage Research Unlimited, 2005)
- Young women ages 16-24 are almost three times more likely than any other age group to be a victims of intimate partner violence. (U.S. Department of Justice, 2001)
- Nearly 80 percent of girls who have been physically abused in their dating relationships continue to date their abuser. (Teenage Research Unlimited, 2005)

What Risk Behaviors Are Associated with Teen Dating Violence?

- Victims in dating violence are not only at increased risk for injury, they are also more likely to engage in binge drinking, suicide attempts, physical fights, and sexual activity (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2006)
- 1 in 4 teenage girls who have been in relationships reveal they have been pressured to perform oral sex or engage in intercourse. (Teenage Research Unlimited, 2005)
- In a national study, researchers found a correlation between history of physical abuse and an increased rate of pregnancy, verbal abuse, and unprotected sex. (Journal of Adolescent Health, 2005)
- In a study of 734 adolescent mothers between the ages of 12-18, one of every eight pregnant adolescents reported having been physically assaulted by the father of her baby during the preceding 12 months. (Journal of Maternal & Child Health, 2000)

Where Does Teen Dating Violence Happen?

- Teen dating violence is happening in our homes, communities and schools. In one study, 43 percent of victims of teen dating violence reported that the violence

occurred on school grounds. (Molidor and Tolman, 1998)

- Twenty-five percent of teens in a relationship say they have been called names, harassed, or put down by their partner through cell phones and texting. (Teenage Research Unlimited, 2007)

Why is Teen Dating Violence Prevention Education Needed?

- Only half of all tweens, age 11 to 14, claim to know the warning signs of a bad/hurtful relationship. (Teenage Research Unlimited, 2008)
- Teens are not turning to authority figures (parents, teachers, law enforcement officers) for help if they are in an abusive relationship. If trapped in an abusive relationship, 73 percent of teens said they would turn to a friend for help; but only 33 percent who have been in or known about an abusive relationship said they have told anyone about it. (Teenage Research Unlimited, 2005)
- Eighty-one percent of parents do not think teen dating violence is a big problem among teenagers or admit that they do not know if it is an issue. (Knowledge Networks, Social Control, Verbal Abuse, and Violence Among Teenagers Survey, December 2000)

In conclusion, teen dating violence is happening in our community and is the key to preventing domestic violence and ending dangerous cycles of violence. The prevalence and seriousness of teen dating violence must be addressed in all facets of our contact with youth.

Testimonials by Youth Participants in Peace Over Violence Programs

“My best friend since elementary used to go to high school here. She started dating this older guy who was a really bad influence on her. He was controlling, and he wouldn’t let her talk to me. After a while she dropped out of school in ninth grade, and he started to pimp her out. She calls me sometimes in the middle of the night crying, asking me to come pick her up from some dirty motel. I go get her and tell her that she doesn’t have to be a prostitute anymore, but she is too afraid to leave and she goes back to him. I don’t know what I can do to save her... And I’m scared that one day I will get a call that she is dead.”

--11th grade female high school student

“I used to be in an abusive relationship with my boyfriend. He used to beat my ass in front of my kids. Now I think my daughter is in an abusive relationship. She is afraid of her boyfriend because he checks in on her all the time and tells her what to wear. One day she was crying and I asked her what was wrong, she told me he had hit her. I couldn’t get mad at her, I feel it is my fault because that is what she saw at home with me.”

--Female ex-gang member, survivor of teen dating violence

“When growing up I used to see my dad and uncles beat their wives and girlfriends, and I thought to myself, ‘That shit is never gonna happen to me.’ So when I got in relationships, if my man would show any sign of aggression or even getting loud with me, I would beat him first before he could do anything to me. Because I saw violence growing up, I became the violent one in my relationships.”

-- Female ex-gang member, teen dating violence perpetrator

“I loved my boyfriend, and I was going to protect him, no matter what. I would carry his drugs for him. And I was there when my boyfriend and his homeboy car jacked this car. I protected him until the end. During my trial, the DA got him and his

friend to testify that it was all my idea to steal the car. I couldn't believe it. He totally sang, just for his own plea bargain."

--16-year old female, sentenced to 10 years in prison

"I thought it was really sweet when Tony called all the time to see what I was up to. He would get upset and sometimes even cry when he saw me talking to other guys. After going out for a few months, he started telling me what to wear and calling me a slut if I wore a cute shirt or short skirt. He would call me lots of names. One time he attacked a guy in my math class who was asking me about homework. I tried to break up with him, but he would cry and promise to stop yelling at me. He said that he couldn't live without me and that he would kill himself if I left him. When I finally broke up with, he followed me around at school and his friend wrote "slut" and "whore" on my locker. I was so scared that my mom transferred me to another school."

--17-year old female

"I found Peace Over Violence when I was 17 and it completely changed my life. Before I got involved with Peace Over Violence I never thought about the future. Lots of people in my life thought I was a screw-up because I had been expelled from three different schools due to fighting and having a record of vandalism since I was 14 years old. Back then I only cared about spraying my name on every wall and fighting those who tried to stop me. Soon enough, I was in and out of community service and on a path to the East Lake Juvenile Detention Center. When I got my classes for my junior year in high-school, I automatically thought, 'here comes another school I'm going to get kicked out of, so why not just ditch.' To my surprise, my first period class was an elective Peer 2 Peer counseling with Leona Smith from Peace Over Violence. I was amazed by all of the students who were in the same boat as I was and who were in trouble. When I first attended the class I wasn't trying to participate, but little by little I started to like it and really got into it. I asked my counselor if I could take it again, she said yes. My second semester, Peer 2 Peer became a safe place where I could talk about anything, even things I had never told anyone. We also talked about subjects that I had never imagined like: violence against women, sexual harassment,

and teen dating violence. I asked Leona if there was anything I could do at the agency, she introduced me to Frank Blaney, who is the coordinator for Men of Strength club and soon enough, I joined the program. I started telling others how I learned that ‘my strength is not for hurting.’ I stayed in school and became the first in my family to graduate from high school and go to college.”

--Male, 19 years old, now a Youth Educator at Peace Over Violence

“After getting involved in the My Strength club, I started to take school seriously because I realized that I want to be a responsible man. My Strength club changed my view of what it means to be a man. Now I feel that a real man is one who takes care of business. Now I’m going to graduate this year, and I got into Trade Tech.”

--17-year old male in My Strength program

“About five months ago my dad died. I’ve been in My Strength for two years and that club is the only place where I can be honest and open about it. I can share how difficult my dad dying is in that group. I was able to be sad without other guys in the group thinking I was weak or that I was less of a man.”

--18-year old male in My Strength program

Stories from the Violence Intervention Program's Between Men/Between Women Program

SAM (as told by Youth Services Coordinator)

Earlier this year we got a call at the Violence Intervention Program/Santana House Youth Action Center from a middle school requesting our help. A student had been accused of abusing his girlfriend, and a domestic violence charge was pending. I first met with the young man, Sam, one morning in mid-February. I explained to him that I work with young men in L.A. in groups where we talk about relationships and work on healthy relationship skills. I explained to him that my work was about prevention of relationship, domestic and sexual violence, and described the confidentiality of our conversations. During this meeting, Sam told me he was in the 8th grade, and that he and his girlfriend were both popular honor students who volunteered at school.

Sam had been accused of choking his girlfriend. A neighbor had witnessed the incident and called the school security officer. School staff reported that this young man and woman had a history of trouble. They were often seen in the hallways arguing and fighting, often to the point of disrupting school. When I first met with Sam he spoke of rage. He described a rage that almost had a life of its own. Once his rage was focused on a target he felt it could not be redirected, because when he got to that state he could not hear or see anyone other than his target. Sam also shared the fact that this rage was often directed at his brother. He not only had fist fights with his brother, but also often used objects at hand around their home as weapons. Sam and I spoke for an hour and a half at our first session. He was living with his father and his surviving brother. He shared that he very recently lost his older brother in an accident. He said that his mother was addicted to drugs and that she came in and out of his life. He also shared with me that as a child he had been a victim of sexual violence. His only previous outcry had been a few years earlier when he confided in a friend about his abuse, only to have that friend betray his trust and tell other children. Children teased him and he responded with violence. Neither his family nor his teachers ever learned of this harassment or intervened.

After our first session I was very concerned that Sam was a high risk to his girlfriend. Sam and I had several individual conversations. We worked through the problems with his mother and how he could loathe her addiction and her choices but still love her as his mother. We also started working on some things he could do to control his anger.

Sam and I met about eight times over a 10-week period. By the end of our work together, he was reporting progress at managing his rage. He was working with his girlfriend on his jealousy and control issues, and they were trying to socialize more with other friends. He was regularly trying to use techniques for controlling anger, and was fighting less with his brother. Sam also agreed to seek outside counseling, and his father supported him in doing so.

ANDREA (as told by Prevention Program Social Worker)

Andrea is a 16-year old, Latina female, who participates in Between Women at her community day school. Andrea appears timid and almost afraid to engage with her peers in group. She listens attentively while others share their stories of relationships that have taken control of their lives. As the weeks pass, Andrea appears to become more comfortable with her peers but still is hesitant to share her personal stories. She appears confused at times as the facilitator points out controlling behaviors that teen partners exhibit. She has so many questions to ask but is too afraid. Time goes by and she begins to build rapport with the facilitator. Soon, she is meeting with the facilitator individually to discuss issues that she is unable to share with the group.

Andrea begins to share her life story little by little and soon finds herself talking about the abuse and neglect she has lived with for years. She speaks of her parents in a negative manner and explains how she spends most of her time in the street with friends. There is no structure at home, no rules, and no discipline. Andrea soon begins to talk about the one meaningful relationship with her boyfriend. The person she gets high with, the person she breaks rules with, and the only person who seems to “care.” Her boyfriend has lived a similar lifestyle. He has dropped out of school

and appears to have no motivation. He spends most of his time in the streets as well. The facilitator suspects that the relationship is not as healthy as Andrea portrays it to be.

It takes a few weeks before Andrea begins to talk about the control and influence that her boyfriend has on her. She describes how her boyfriend goes through her cell phone on a daily basis to check her incoming and outgoing calls as well as her text messages. He demands to speak to someone, a friend, her sister, etc. to confirm that she is at the place she claims to be. He lives across the street from Andrea. He keeps a close eye on her, keeping track of when she leaves her home, the time she arrives, who she leaves with, and how she is dressed. He has also made it a priority to build a good relationship with her mother so that he can use her as an ally in controlling Andrea. Despite the fact that Andrea is aware of the red flags she refuses to let go of this relationship. She states that regardless of his controlling behaviors there are times that he makes her feel loved. She truly believes that he cares for her and she would rather have that feeling for a moment of her day than not have it at all.

Andrea continues to limit her personal experiences in group, but does listen carefully to what others say. She has lived a life of violence both in her home, her school, and her community. The cycle of violence is evident in her life and she walks around with deep wounds from the abuse she has endured. Despite the many obstacles that have crossed her path, she shows resiliency in her ability to overcome the struggles of daily life. She continues to participate in Between Women and continues to meet with the facilitator in hopes that she will one day heal from her wounds and begin a new life, away from violence.

LILIANA (as told by Prevention Program Social Worker)

Liliana is a 17-year old Latina female who has participated in Between Women for several semesters. She appears confident and radiant among the rest of the group. She's a leader but is not aware of it. She shares her dreams and sets goals for herself, striving to be that individual that others have told her she will never be. Liliana is getting ready to transition out of the community day school she currently attends. As she sits with the facilitator they discuss her achievements and focus on preparing her for college. It wasn't too long ago that Liliana sat with the facilitator, tears in her eyes, as she spoke of the abuse she endured as a child. She

recalled the hangers and belts hitting her vulnerable body. She remembers hiding in the closet as her mother beat her sister, hoping that she wouldn't be found. Years later, she finds herself in a relationship with a male gang member who appears to care for her. Liliana states, "If he didn't love me, he wouldn't be jealous or take the time to call or check up on me." For months she is intrigued by this person, who is almost a replica of her parents. She is blinded by his "love" and fails to identify the signs of an unhealthy relationship.

Liliana continues to meet with the facilitator, and as they explore her past she begins to make a connection with her current relationship. She describes her boyfriend as "controlling, jealous, and crazy." She describes moments where he would become angry while driving and would accelerate the car to scare her. Other times he would become physically aggressive towards any guy who looked at Liliana. This was her definition of love. A powerful male with the ability to manipulate, intimidate, and bully any individual, male or female, who came across his path. She interpreted his behaviors as "protective and caring."

Today, she acknowledges that her relationship was a façade all along. She begins to realize that the cycle of violence has taken over her life and unknowingly has taken over her relationships. With the support and encouragement from peers she decides that she has endured enough pain in her life and needs to break from that cycle. She returns to group a week later, more radiant than ever, as she shares with the group that she has broken off the relationship that began to control her life. Although some are skeptical about her ability to remain distant from this individual she is determined to start a new life. She now talks openly about her ex-partner's controlling behaviors and the extreme measures he took to ensure that she would fear him and never leave. Other group members appear to be empowered by her words and perhaps will make an attempt to break the cycle of violence that has taken over their lives.