

# **African-Americans and Violence**

## **WHAT IS VIOLENCE?**

Injuries (including homicide and suicide) are the leading cause of death and disability for people aged 1 to 34 years in the United States. Violence is the threatened or actual use of physical force or power against another person, against oneself, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, or deprivation. Violence has become a national epidemic and a major public health issue, although federal statistics indicate some violent crimes have decreased substantially.

Homicide rates soar in neighborhoods where there are high unemployment rates, poor educational infrastructure, and a lack of social connectedness. Homicide continues to be a major cause of death in our African-American community and is particularly evident among our young men. Firearms are used in 75% of all homicides in the United States. In San Mateo County, the homicide rate for African-Americans is 29.3 per 100,000 population, compared to 2.5 per 100,000 for whites.

In a 1998 study by the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School for Communication, 64.8% of the 405 African Americans surveyed viewed domestic violence as one of the most serious issues facing their community. Approximately one in three African American women are abused by a husband or partner in the course of a lifetime. Of the women who die from domestic violence, 28% are African American.

## **RISK FACTORS**

Researchers have identified a number of factors that increase children and youths' risk for becoming involved in serious violence during adolescence. For children under 13, the most important factors include: early involvement in serious criminal behavior, early substance use, being male, a history of physical aggression toward others, low parent education levels or poverty, and parent involvement in illegal activities.

Once a child becomes an adolescent, different factors predict involvement in serious violence. Friends and peers are much more important for adolescents, and friendships with antisocial or delinquent peers, membership in a gang, and involvement in other criminal activity are the most important predictors of serious violence for adolescents.

In the United States, minority males bear most of the burden of homicide victimization. In 2004, among males aged 15 to 19 years, the homicide rate was 3.0 per 100,000 among white non-Hispanics; 6.9 per 100,000 among Asian/Pacific Islanders; 17.2 per 100,000\* among American Indian/Alaskan Natives; 25.9 per 100,000 among Hispanics; and 56.9 per 100,000 among Blacks.

## **PREVENTION**

There is not one strategy alone that can combat the problem of violence. Social scientists have demonstrated that racial segregation, racism, social isolation, drug and alcohol consumption, and media violence all contribute to the likelihood of aggressive, violent behavior. Most public health practitioners and community activists agree that a program to attack violence must include strong, multi-disciplinary approaches.

## **SIGNS & SYMPTOMS**

- loss of temper on a daily basis
- frequent physical fighting
- significant vandalism or property damage
- increase in use of drugs or alcohol
- increase in risk-taking behavior
- detailed plans to commit acts of violence
- announcing threats or plans for hurting others
- enjoying hurting animals
- carrying a weapon

## **DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT**

We can help change these disturbing patterns by being good role models for our children and making sure they do not witness violence in the home or have access to weapons and that they learn non-physical ways of resolving conflicts and take pride in themselves and their heritage. But we also have to reach out to less-fortunate families by helping at local recreation centers and after-school programs, and by supporting programs that teach parenting skills and conflict resolution.

## **RESOURCES**

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [www.cdc.gov/ncipc/](http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/)

National Criminal Justice Reference Service: [www.ncjrs.gov](http://www.ncjrs.gov)

National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center: [www.safeyouth.org](http://www.safeyouth.org)

"Youth violence is a Public Health Issue":  
<http://odphp.osophs.dhhs.gov/pubs/prevrpt/01spring/Spring2001PR.htm>

"Duelling and Youth Violence":  
[www.boston.com/news/globe/editorial\\_opinion/oped/articles/2007/04/30/dueling\\_and\\_youth\\_violence](http://www.boston.com/news/globe/editorial_opinion/oped/articles/2007/04/30/dueling_and_youth_violence)

Prevention Institute: [www.preventioninstitute.org/vp\\_projects.html](http://www.preventioninstitute.org/vp_projects.html)

MedLine Plus: [www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/teenviolence.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/teenviolence.html)

## **FOR MORE INFORMATION:**

Contact the African-American Community Health Advisory Committee at [gbrown@aachac.org](mailto:gbrown@aachac.org) or call (650) 696-4378.