

National Center for Injury Prevention and Control  
Division of Violence Prevention



# Understanding and Preventing Violence

*Summary of Research Activities*  
*Summer 2013*

## Understanding and Preventing Violence

Violence is a public health problem that has a substantial impact on individuals, their families and communities, and society. Each year, millions of people experience the physical, mental, and economic consequences of violence. The good news is that violence is preventable.

The Division of Violence Prevention (DVP) within CDC's Injury Center works to prevent injuries and deaths caused by violence, so people can live life to the fullest. As the only federal agency that focuses on stopping violence before it starts, DVP monitors and tracks violence trends, conducts research to identify factors that increase or decrease the risk for violence, develops and rigorously evaluates innovative prevention strategies, and supports the widespread use of evidence-based prevention approaches. This critical work helps us prevent child maltreatment, intimate partner violence, sexual violence, youth violence, and suicidal behavior.

This resource only summarizes DVP's current research that is supported by cooperative agreements, contracts, and grants. This research fills critical knowledge gaps and strengthens our ability to prevent violence and its consequences. This document does not summarize DVP's surveillance or programmatic activities that are important complements to research and critical components to preventing violence. For additional information about DVP's activities and resources to prevent violence, visit: [www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/index.html).

## Understanding What Protects or Increases Risk for Violence

### Understanding What Protects Against Suicide or Increases Vulnerability

The potential for suicidal behavior is increased by some life experiences, and some individuals are at higher risk. DVP's research is identifying these risks as well as protective influences. For example, DVP and the Department of Defense and Veteran Affairs are working together to understand risk factors for suicide among active duty army personnel. DVP is also providing funding to researchers at Kent State University to identify suicide risks and protective influences experienced from childhood through young adulthood using data from four longitudinal studies. Researchers at the University of Rochester Medical Center are examining the direct protective and buffering effects of social and community connectedness on suicidal behavior by adolescents and young adults. Findings from these studies can guide future development of prevention strategies for vulnerable groups.

### Identifying the Social and Community Risks for Youth Violence

The likelihood of youth engaging in violence—including bullying, fighting, and gang related violence—is influenced by youth's skills and experiences as well as characteristics of their relationships and community. DVP is supporting research by its Academic Centers of Excellence in Youth Violence Prevention (ACEs) to better identify and understand these broader risk and protective influences. For instance, Virginia Commonwealth University is examining whether a lower density of alcohol outlets and restrictions on the sale of single-serve beverages are associated with fewer fights by high school students and lower rates of ambulance pick-ups for violent injuries experienced by youth. Researchers at the University of Chicago are examining the connection between youth violence and neighborhood social processes and characteristics, such as norms about the acceptability of violence, mobility, and economic viability. This knowledge is critical to guiding the development of new prevention strategies that can lead to community-wide reductions in youth violence.



## Protecting Against Teen Dating and Adult Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence

More is known about what increases the risk for partner and sexual violence than what protects against it from happening in the first place. DVP is filling this knowledge gap. Researchers at Wayne State University are working with students in 16 middle and high schools to identify modifiable protective factors for teen dating violence, such as emotion regulation skills, attitudes about gender roles and violence, and school and community supports. Researchers at the University of Rochester are investigating factors that influence intimate partner violence when one or both partners are deaf. DVP is also supporting researchers at Georgia State University to study individual, school, and community factors that increase or decrease the development of sexual violence perpetration by surveying approximately 1,500 college students from 30 universities. This knowledge can inform the development of violence prevention strategies for teens and young adults.

## Clarifying the Connections between Different Forms of Violence

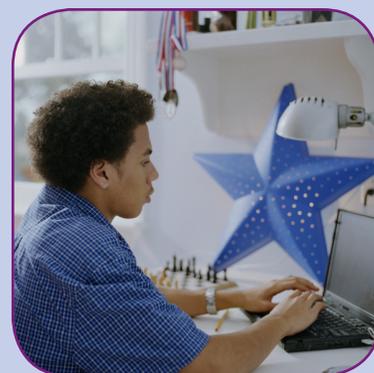
Different forms of violence have common risk factors, such as poor problem-solving skills and family conflict. DVP researches the links between child maltreatment, bullying, dating violence, sexual violence, and suicide in order to better understand the development of risk and protective influences and to identify opportunities for prevention. DVP is supporting researchers at the University of Colorado at Boulder to examine the developmental pathways and intergenerational connections between child maltreatment and intimate partner violence. Researchers at Kings College, University of California-Davis, University of Maryland, and University of Washington are also supported to examine the intergenerational transmission of child maltreatment with four longitudinal studies (*E-Risk Study*, *Family Transitions Project*, *Rochester Youth Development/Intergenerational Study*, *Lehigh Family Study*) and to investigate the role of safe, stable, and nurturing relationships (SSNRs) and social contexts in reducing child maltreatment. This research can lead to strategies that simultaneously reduce multiple types of violence and that interrupt the development of violence-related behaviors.

## Examining the Economic Impact of Violence and the Efficiency of Prevention Strategies

Prevention science that helps us to understand and respond to public health problems includes recognizing the broad costs of violence and the cost-benefit of prevention strategies. For instance, DVP's research has shown the total lifetime cost (health care, child welfare, criminal justice, and lost productivity and earnings) of child maltreatment is \$124 billion each year. DVP scientists are currently examining the impact of child maltreatment on health-related quality of life and long-term costs. DVP also is collaborating with Quality Resource Systems to develop the first national, comprehensive estimate of the societal costs of sexual violence against women. This research can inform our understanding of the impact of violence and strengthen the economic evaluation of violence prevention approaches.

## Recent Findings about Risks and Protective Influences

- Risk factors for suicide among active duty army personnel include intimate partner problems, job-related stress such as recent combat exposure, mental health distress, and substance use.<sup>1</sup>
- Alcohol and drug use are risk factors for gang membership by youth while parental monitoring and youth's confidence in their abilities to cope with conflict are protective factors.<sup>2</sup>
- Among middle school students, strong associations exist between bullying perpetration and subsequent sexual harassment perpetration and between homophobic teasing and co-occurring bullying perpetration and later sexual harassment perpetration.<sup>3</sup>
- Youth who purposely watch, read, or visit websites depicting violent x-rated material are six times more likely to report engaging in sexually aggressive behavior.<sup>4</sup>



## Testing New and Innovative Prevention Strategies

### Preventing Abusive Head Trauma

A leading cause of death from child maltreatment is abusive head trauma, but little is known about how to effectively prevent it. DVP is supporting evaluations of two promising state-wide approaches. Researchers at Pennsylvania State University are examining a program in 16 counties that educates parents of all newborns before leaving the hospital about violent infant shaking and the feasibility of booster sessions delivered to parents during well-baby health care appointments. The second study, being conducted by researchers at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, is an evaluation of the *Period of Purple Crying* program, which educates parents of all newborns leaving the hospital and at the first well-baby visit about normal infant crying patterns, how to respond to crying, and the dangers of shaking. The *Period of Purple Crying* program also includes a media campaign to reinforce program messages. Findings from both studies will inform whether broader use of these types of strategies can prevent abusive head trauma and save lives.



### Expanding the Reach and Accessibility of Child Maltreatment Prevention Strategies

Strategies that effectively prevent child maltreatment and promote healthy child development are available but typically provided only to families with known risks. DVP supports the development and evaluation of approaches that increase the accessibility of evidence-based strategies and help all parents develop positive parenting behaviors. For instance, DVP is developing *Essentials for Parenting Toddlers and Preschoolers*, which uses a web-based platform with videos, interactive activities, and other resources to help parents of children aged 2-4 years develop safe, stable, and nurturing relationships with their children. DVP is also working with partners to evaluate the implementation in Pitt County, North Carolina and Berrien County, Michigan of *Triple P*, which is an evidence-based system of strategies for communities to enhance parents' abilities to raise their children in safe, loving, and engaging environments. The goal of the *Triple P* study is to identify and address barriers to widespread use of effective strategies. DVP also is examining strategies to prevent child maltreatment through other service delivery infrastructures. For example, *Early Head Start* (EHS) as a primary prevention strategy for child abuse and neglect is being examined by researchers at Portland State University to determine its impact on specific subgroups of children and families; how children in EHS and controls differ on timing, type, severity or chronicity of maltreatment experienced; and what characteristics of the program are associated with better outcomes. Researchers at Tulane University are evaluating the effects of two interventions (*Triple P-Level 2* and *Play Nicely*) versus usual care among parents receiving Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) services on parenting behaviors linked with child physical abuse. Finally, DVP supports formative research about how to better engage fathers in effective parenting and child maltreatment prevention programs, including an evaluation of *Fathers Supporting Success in Preschoolers* by researchers at Queens College and an evaluation of *Engaging Fathers* by researchers at Washington University. All of this research can help us understand how to increase access to prevention approaches that work to prevent child maltreatment.

### Preventing Suicide with Connectedness

Suicide is a leading cause of death, but very little is known about how to effectively prevent it. DVP is leading efforts to better understand whether increasing social connectedness for at-risk individuals can lower the risk for suicide. DVP works with researchers at the University of Michigan to evaluate the *Links to Enhancing Teens' Connectedness* (LET's CONNECT) program, which focuses on youth aged 12-15 years who are at elevated risk for suicidal behavior due to low interpersonal connectedness, a recent history of bullying others, or a recent

history of being bullied. *Let's Connect* teams adolescents with community and natural mentors to actively facilitate and support the adolescents' engagement with community organizations and activities to decrease the risk for suicide. Researchers at the University of Rochester are receiving funding to evaluate *The Senior Connection*, a suicide prevention strategy designed for older adults who are socially disconnected or feel that they are a burden on others. This strategy pairs these at-risk seniors with peer volunteers with the goal of increasing connectedness and decreasing suicide risk. This research is ground-breaking and could help reduce suicides among vulnerable groups.

### **Evaluating Economic and Environmental Change Approaches to Prevent Violence**

The social, economic, and physical characteristics of neighborhoods and communities influence the likelihood of violence, but little is known about the effectiveness of strategies to address these broader community risk factors. DVP's research is addressing this gap. For example, researchers at the University of Pittsburgh are receiving funding to evaluate the impact of a community economic development initiative on rates of youth violence and crime in urban neighborhoods. DVP is also supporting the RAND Corporation to evaluate the effects of school choice and school finance reform on community violence. DVP is working with researchers at ICF Macro to evaluate the impact of Colorado's state-supervised, county-administered Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program on child maltreatment and other child health outcomes over a 20 year period. Results of these research projects will inform strategies that strengthen the health and safety of communities.

### **Comprehensive Youth Violence Prevention in High-Risk Communities**

Youth violence is caused by numerous factors, and its prevention requires multiple strategies that are systematically identified and implemented by many community partners. DVP's Academic Centers of Excellence in Youth Violence Prevention (ACEs) connect academic and community partners to implement and evaluate strategies to prevent violence in high-risk neighborhoods. The ACEs are taking the best available research evidence, implementing these strategies as part of a comprehensive approach, and then assessing their impact on assault, homicide, and other youth violence outcomes. The ACEs are a catalyst for prevention efforts in the communities that they serve. Their development and evaluation of innovative partnerships and prevention strategies are also creating new approaches that other communities can utilize and informing how national reductions in youth violence can be achieved.

## **Recent Findings about Individual, Family, and Community Violence Prevention Strategies**

- An evaluation of the *Coaching Boys Into Men* program showed that high school male athlete participants increased intentions and positive behavior to intervene on peers' dating and sexual violence behaviors relative to control athletes.<sup>5</sup> At the one-year follow-up, the perpetration of dating violence was also less among program participants.<sup>6</sup>
- *Families for Safe Dates* is the first family-based teen dating violence prevention program and was effective in promoting changes in the family context to support the prevention of dating abuse, decreasing teens' acceptance of dating abuse, and preventing dating abuse victimization.<sup>7</sup>
- Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) had a 12% drop in robbery rates, an 8% drop in violent crime overall, and 32% fewer arrests over time compared with non-BID areas as well as cost savings due to reduced crime rates, arrests, and prosecution-related expenditures.<sup>8</sup>
- The average rate of ambulance pick-ups for intentional injuries declined from 13.1 per 1,000 residents aged 15-24 years to zero when alcohol beverage licenses were restricted and increased to 5.3 per 1,000 residents when restrictions were removed.<sup>9</sup>
- Baltimore's *Safe Streets* program, a street-level outreach and conflict mediation strategy, resulted in fewer homicides and non-fatal shootings in most implementation communities and less acceptance to use violence to solve conflicts.<sup>10</sup>

## Family Approaches to Preventing Intimate Partner Violence

Family environments can create risks for or buffers against future violence. DVP is evaluating a number of innovative approaches to help at-risk individuals and families stop violence before it starts. DVP is providing funding to researchers at SUNY Stony Brook to conduct a randomized controlled trial of *Couple Care for Parents*, which is a self-directed program that builds healthy relationship skills of parents with newborns in order to reduce the potential of partner violence in the relationship. Researchers at the Boston VA Research Institute are receiving funding to evaluate *PTSD-Focused Relationship Enhancement Therapy*, which is a group-based approach for returning veterans from Iraq or Afghanistan and their partners and addresses PTSD symptoms, anger, and problem-solving skills. Researchers at John Jay College are being supported to examine the long-term impact of a preschool family intervention (which showed promise in reducing early childhood risk factors for delinquency and peer violence) on sexual and dating violence experiences in adolescence and young adulthood. University of North Carolina researchers are evaluating *Moms and Teens for Safe Dates*, which is a dating abuse primary prevention strategy for teens exposed to adult intimate partner violence in their homes. Findings from these studies will inform ways to act early to prevent the occurrence of dating and intimate partner violence and promote health.

## Preventing Sexual Violence among Youth

Sexual violence is a pervasive problem that has broad and long-lasting impacts on health, yet we lack effective prevention strategies. DVP is supporting the University of Kentucky to conduct a population-based, state-wide randomized controlled trial of *Green Dot* in 26 high schools. *Green Dot* is a comprehensive bystander approach focused on the primary prevention of teen sexual and dating violence that uses social norms change strategies and skills training for peer leaders. Researchers at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign are receiving support to conduct a randomized controlled trial of *Second Step: Student Success Through Prevention* in 34 middle schools. This classroom-based curriculum is implemented throughout 6th, 7th, and 8th grade and addresses the shared underlying risk and protective factors for bullying, sexual harassment, and dating aggression. In a second randomized controlled trial, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign researchers are comparing *Second Step* and a gender-enhanced *Second Step/Shifting Boundaries* program on violence perpetration, bystander behavior, and peer attitudes about violence. DVP also is working with Safe Place to evaluate *Expect Respect Support Groups* in preventing sexual and dating violence among at-risk middle and high school youth. Researchers at Rutgers University are receiving support to investigate the effectiveness of *SCREAM Theater*, a bystander intervention focused on reducing sexual violence among college students. This research will provide critical knowledge about strategies that stop sexual violence.

## Screening for Intimate Partner Violence

Many professional organizations recommend screening all women for intimate partner violence in primary care settings as a way to identify potential victims and to prevent the negative health outcomes of partner violence. Whether screening leads to better health, help-seeking, or prevents the recurrence of violence is less clear. Previous research by DVP examining whether screening for intimate partner violence and giving women information on partner violence resources improved health found no differences between participants who included women who were screened and provided a resource list, women who were not screened but given a resource list, and a control group. DVP is currently funding the Collaborative Research Unit at Stroger Hospital to evaluate the impact of screening for these participants within a 3-year period. Results can inform strategies to identify and support women experiencing intimate partner violence.



## Promoting Healthy Teen Relationships

Teen dating violence has significant negative effects on short- and long-term mental and physical health, and unhealthy teen relationships increase the risk for adult intimate partner violence. DVP developed *Dating Matters*—a comprehensive teen dating violence prevention program for youth, their parents, educators, and the neighborhoods in which they live. The program engages local health departments and reinforces skills taught to parents and youth through evidence-based programs with educator training and a communication campaign that uses social media and text messages. *Dating Matters* is being delivered in approximately 45 middle schools across 4 high-risk, urban communities and is being evaluated for its effectiveness in reducing the risk for physical, emotional, and sexual violence among teens and its cost effectiveness. This work will help guide and strengthen national efforts to stop dating violence.



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