



Tip Sheet: A Case for Prevention

“We cannot stop the overall flow of violence in women’s and girls’ lives by running shelters or men’s programs for batterers alone. We must address the root causes of domestic violence directly. With such a monumental task at hand, the full participation of our communities is required.”

Donna Garske, Founder,
Transforming Communities

Prevention: A Strategy Whose Time Has Come

The battered women’s movement is defined by its commitment to end men’s violence against women. It began in the 1960’s consciousness-raising activities so that they would no longer tolerate abuse and violence as part of their intimate relationships. Beginning the late 1970’s, shelter programs sprang up across the country to help women who wanted to leave abusive relationships. Later, court advocacy services were designed to assist battered women through the criminal-legal system, and support groups were formed. Many shelters also expanded services to include children’s programming and counseling as well as batterer intervention programming. This decade is characterized by increased attention to prevention programs designed to foster healthy relationships.

It wasn’t until 1968, when Dr. C. Henry Kempe and Ray E. Helfer’s book The Battered Child was published, that people began to be aware of and believe that parents and caregivers truly could and did physically abuse their children. In the late 1980’s the world started to pay attention to the issue of sexual abuse/assault of children (and adults). Over the past decade, increasing resources have been dedicated to ending child abuse and neglect. State and federally funded programs operate in schools, prisons, hospitals, places of worship and dedicated facilities targeting general or specific populations. Increasingly, these programs reflect an understanding that the problems facing families, which can increase risk to children, are complex and interconnected and require a coordinated, holistic response.

Although child abuse and domestic violence are the subjects of sweeping federal laws, no such comprehensive law has ever been enacted relating to elder abuse. The 1995 White House Conference on Aging recognized the problem and adopted a resolution to prevent elder abuse, exploitation and neglect. Promoting elder justice and protecting older Americans against elder abuse further require enactment of new comprehensive federal elder justice legislation, enhanced implementation of existing laws, and improved commitment by all levels of government and all professional disciplines.

Prevention of family violence is defined as processes that keep (prevent) individuals from becoming perpetrators or victims of domestic violence or other forms of violence in the first place. Prevention of domestic violence focuses on preventing first-time perpetration and first time victimization.

Family Violence Has Many Costs

Preventing family violence before it occurs would eliminate the need for major expenditures associated with a society that allows violence to occur.

- Intimate partner violence against women (the health costs related to rape, physical assault, stalking, and homicide committed by intimate partners) costs exceed \$5.8 billion dollars per year. The largest component of IPV-related costs is health care, which accounts for more than two-thirds of the total costs. The total costs also include nearly \$0.9 billion in lost productivity from paid work and household chores for victims of nonfatal IPV and \$0.9 billion in lifetime earnings lost by victims of IPV homicide. The largest proportion of the costs is derived from physical assault victimization because that type of IPV is the most prevalent.¹
- One study found that the total direct and indirect costs of child abuse exceed \$56 billion annually, and child neglect costs an additional \$12 billion annually. About 10 to 20 per cent of the mental health care expenditures can be attributed to crime, and half of these are for child abuse victims receiving treatment for abuse experienced in earlier years.²

Responding to violence through punishment is expensive, and often ineffective.

- The cost of the US criminal justice system's response to violence, which includes police, courts and prisons, is estimated at \$90 billion each year.³
- The amount California alone spends on punishment is staggering. CA spends nearly \$4 billion a year on prisons. Since 1984, the state has added 21 prisons and only one university campus. California already spends more to incarcerate a youth than it does to educate one. The state spends \$33,500 a year to house a youth at the California Youth Authority and \$5,000 a year to educate one in public school. The cost of incarcerating one person for a year is the same as the cost of sending 10 people to community college for a year, five to a California state university, or two to the University of California.⁴
- Getting tough with juvenile offenders by trying them adult courts does not reduce the likelihood that they will commit more crimes. In fact, youths transferred to adult criminal court have significantly higher rates of re-offending and a greater likelihood of committing subsequent felonies than youths who remain in the juvenile justice system. They are also more likely to be victimized, physically and sexually.⁵
- Although incarcerating abusers may deter future occurrences of violent crimes, it does not help prevent the children who have witnessed the domestic violence from repeating the same acts later in their lifetime.

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Costs of Intimate Partner Violence Against Women in the United States", March 2003

² United States Department of Justice, "Victim Costs and Consequences: A New Look", January 1996

³ Farrell, C., "The Economics of Crime." Business Week. December 13, 1993.

⁴ California Youth Authority; Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice

⁵ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Youth Violence: A Report of the Surgeon General. Rockville, MD, 2001.

Prevention Works and Costs Less

A number of prevention and intervention programs that meet very high scientific standards of effectiveness have been identified.^{6,7}

- The Perry Pre-school study in Michigan showed that children from low-income families who attended a quality preschool were much less likely to be chronic lawbreakers as adults. Every dollar spent on preschool saved the state \$7 in future costs due to crime, health problems, unemployment, etc. Similar costs savings were documented by the Child-Parents Centers program in Chicago.
- Syracuse University's Family Development Research Program shows a 90 percent drop in delinquency for kids who participated in quality early childhood programs.
- A study done in Seattle by University of Washington researchers showed that children whose parents and elementary school teachers had been trained in more effective parenting and teaching methods were 19 percent less likely to commit violent acts before they reached age 18.
- High school freshman boys from low-income households who were randomly selected to be part of the Quantum Opportunities afterschool program were one-sixth as likely as non-participants to be convicted of a crime during high school and were twice as likely to graduate on time.
- A study by the RAND Corporation found that parent training, graduation incentives, and home-visiting programs for at-risk new mothers were more cost-effective crime prevention strategies than the "three-strikes" law.
- The Hawaii Healthy Start researchers found that just the hospitalization costs alone for abused or neglected children averaged \$60,000 per child. From the families who were screened as being high risk, but for whom services were not available at the time, 34 children ended up in the hospital because of abuse or neglect. The study found that 28 of those children could have avoided hospitalization for abuse or neglect if services had been available for their parents. The savings in hospitalization alone for these children would have totaled \$1.7 million dollars.
- Even though comprehensive drug treatment is intensive, one study showed that it saved an average of \$4,644 per child before the children even left the hospital by preventing premature birth. Potential cost-savings associated with preventing child abuse increase the pay-off of such investment.

Investment in Prevention Matters

Despite the potential long term benefits of preventing family violence, only a very small percentage of resources are actually devoted to prevention. Furthermore, investment in prevention is highly vulnerable during economic downturns. It is critical that we commit our resources to prevention, and advocate that others do the same.⁸

⁶ Fight Crime, Invest in Kids. "New Hope for Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect." 2003

⁷ Alliance for Action, *Children's Advocate*, January-February 2000.

⁸ Department of Health and Human Services, "Emerging Practices in the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect." 2003.