



CONNECT

Community Empowerment Program

A Summary of the Research: Brooklyn and Bronx

May 2004

CONNECT Community Empowerment Program
A Summary of the Research: BROOKLYN & BRONX

Introduction

The collection and analysis of data plays an important role in the work that CONNECT is engaged in with its community partners. We have been trying to establish an understanding of the community and its perception of violence in the family so that resources can be directed towards the development of effective prevention and intervention strategies. The goals of this action-oriented research have been:

- To better understand the communities' perception of family violence; intimate partner violence and child abuse/neglect
- To assess the levels of family violence in the community;
- To provide the community with information that it can use alone or in partnership with CONNECT to develop strategies to address violence in the family.

This report represents a brief summary of that work.

CONNECT conducted formative research blending both quantitative and qualitative approaches to assess the domestic violence and child abuse and neglect needs of the communities of:

| Brooklyn | Bronx |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Flatbush▪ East Flatbush▪ Crown Heights | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Hunt's Point▪ Melrose/Morissania▪ Mott Haven▪ Highbridge |

To achieve these goals, several strategies were used:

1. Existing data sources were mined for information on social and health indicators that could be useful in guiding program development.
2. Representatives of 22 local community-based organizations (CBOs) and faith-based organizations (FBOs) were interviewed on the needs of the community around the issues in Brooklyn and 20 in the Bronx
3. Seven focus groups in Brooklyn and 6 in the Bronx were conducted with community members.
4. 119 face-to-face surveys in Brooklyn and 110 in the Bronx were administered to community residents

Community Based Organizational Needs Assessment

Following is a summary of these results:

1. Outstanding organizational needs revealed

- A basic and fundamental need for internal capacity building to respond to domestic violence and child abuse
- A lack of awareness of and linkages to networks as well as time and resources for staff to participate in existing domestic violence and child abuse coalitions.
- A need for staff development to build awareness of these intersecting issues.

2. Beyond Organizational Needs

CBOs identified a broader array of domestic violence and child abuse service needs:

| Brooklyn | Bronx |
|--|----------------------------------|
| 1. Transitional housing | 1. Non-English language services |
| 2. Community Education | 2. Mental Health Services |
| 3. Organizing | 3. Community Education |
| 4. Legal Advocacy | 4. Transitional Housing |
| 5. Greater involvement of the Faith community needed | 5. Emergency Shelter |
| | 6. Legal Advocacy |

3. Perception: Problem Severity and Need for Community Services

Most CBO representatives thought that domestic violence and child abuse and neglect were more serious where their agencies were based as compared with other areas in Brooklyn/Bronx.

4. Other needs highlighted

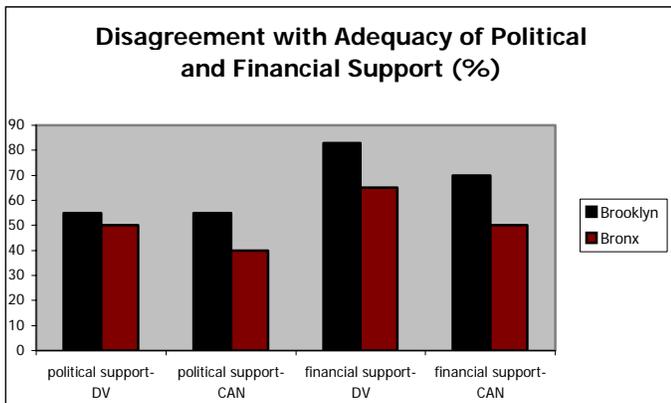
| NEED | Brooklyn | Bronx |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Community Organizing/Education | 86% | 95% |
| Transitional Housing | 77% | 77% |
| Training and Capacity Building | 67% | 58% |
| Parenting Skills Education | 72% | 75% |
| Emergency Shelter | ----- | 78% |
| Mental Health Counseling | ----- | 78% |

5. Perceptions: Formal Response Systems

Most CBO representatives rated existing systems' responses to domestic violence fairly poorly.

| <u>Key Highlights</u> | |
|---|--|
| Brooklyn | Bronx |
| <p>58% rated the public education system's response to domestic violence as "not good" or "not good at all"</p> <p>62% of respondents indicated that the faith-based community was not meeting the domestic violence needs of neighborhood residents.</p> <p>45% (less than Half) thought that the police and criminal justice system was meeting the needs in an "average" or "above-average" manner</p> <p>About a third (31%) thought the criminal justice system was "not doing well at all."</p> | <p>55% rated the public education system's response to domestic violence as "not good" or "not good at all"</p> <p>15% of respondents indicated that the faith-based community was not meeting the domestic violence needs of neighborhood residents</p> <p>50% perceived the level of political support for domestic violence programming and issues to be not enough or not enough at all</p> <p>65% perceived the level of financial support to be not enough or not enough at all.</p> |
| <p>(55%) of CBO representatives thought that that the public education system was not doing well meeting the child abuse-related needs of community children. (34%) thought that police and criminal justice systems were not doing well; (48%) of respondents thought that the faith-based community was not doing well in this regard.</p> | <p>70% of CBO representatives thought that that the public education system was not doing well meeting the child abuse-related needs of community children. 40% indicated that there was not enough political support for the issue</p> |

In terms of political and financial support for local domestic violence efforts, most CBO respondents



perceived the level of political and financial support for domestic violence programming and issues to be inadequate (Chart). Similarly, most indicated that there was not enough political or financial support for the issues of child abuse and neglect in the neighborhoods (Chart, DV is domestic violence and CAN is child abuse/neglect)

CBO representatives reported a need for significant improvement in various formal systems' responses and the need for a much greater commitment of both fiscal and political resources to the issues.

Community/Neighborhood Survey

The **community resident survey** data was a rich source of information on community members' attitudes toward and knowledge of the issues of domestic violence and child abuse. The goal of the "street corner survey" was to learn about residents' attitudes toward, knowledge of and likelihood of responding to domestic violence and child abuse and neglect within their communities.

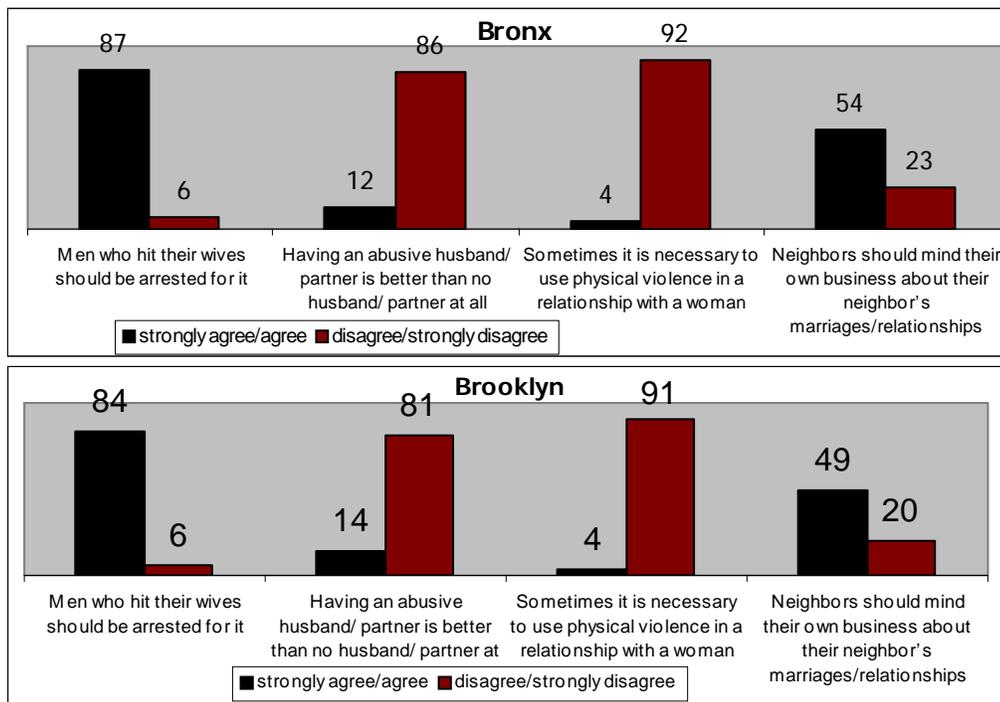
- For the most part, respondents possess fundamental factual knowledge of domestic violence, eliminating the need for extensive basic educational services.
- Instead residents may benefit from programs that tap attitudes that are more subtly supportive of domestic violence, such as the belief that fighting within relationships is "private," and that women abuse men as often as men abuse women.
- Despite limited knowledge of specific services in the neighborhood, most residents felt that they could help a friend or neighbor with a domestic violence or child abuse situation. While respondents were confident in their own abilities, there was a general lack of confidence in the child welfare and police response.
- While most residents felt that the police were doing a good job of maintaining order and preventing crime, they did not overwhelmingly report that they treated neighborhood residents fairly or justly.
- They may therefore be reluctant to involve the police in domestic violence situations, which are often characterized by a need for particular sensitivity to and sympathy for the people involved.

Thus, future education and intervention efforts should focus on communicating information on existing neighborhood resources and practical and informal strategies for helping battered women and abused children. In terms of child abuse, the survey revealed the need to clearly differentiate abuse from discipline and to educate residents on existing resources for troubled parents.

Respondent Demographics

| Demographic | Brooklyn | % | Bronx | % |
|------------------|--|-----|--|-----|
| Neighborhood | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ East Flatbush ▪ Flatbush ▪ Crown Heights | 34% | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Hunt's Point ▪ Melrose ▪ Mott Haven ▪ Others | 27% |
| Sex | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Male ▪ Female | 58% | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Male ▪ Female | 44% |
| Race | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Black/African-American ▪ White/European-American ▪ Native American/ Alaskan Native ▪ Asian/Pacific Islander ▪ Other (mostly mixed) | 70% | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Black/African-American ▪ White/European-American ▪ Native American/ Alaskan Native ▪ Asian/Pacific Islander ▪ Other (mostly mixed) | 55% |
| Ethnicity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Latino ▪ Caribbean and Others | 44% | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Latino ▪ Caribbean and Others | 66% |
| Household Income | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Less than 20K per year ▪ 21 to 30K per year ▪ 31 to 50K per year ▪ 51K or more per year | 23% | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Less than 20K per year ▪ 21 to 30K per year ▪ 31 to 50K per year ▪ 51K or more per year | 65% |
| Marital Status | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Married ▪ Living as Married ▪ Not living together ▪ Not in relationship | 24% | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Married ▪ Living as Married ▪ Not living together ▪ Not in relationship | 23% |

1. Attitudes toward Domestic Violence



We asked respondents a series of questions designed to assess their attitudes toward domestic violence. Results indicated a fairly low tolerance of the use of violence in intimate relationships.

2. Domestic Violence Knowledge

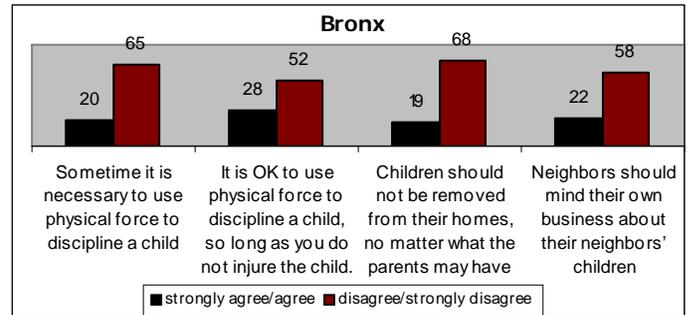
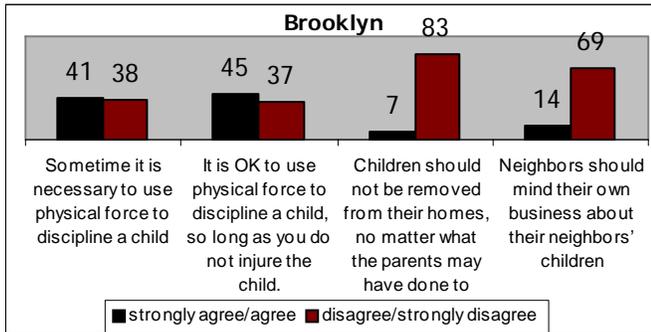
Generally, respondents' knowledge of intimate partner abuse facts was accurate, with some notable exceptions; for example, a significant portion believed that the majority of intimate partner murders were of men and not women and another third believed men to be physically abused as frequently as are women. Thus, the idea of sexual symmetry in intimate partner abuse appears to be common. This indicates a need to refine education efforts to help communities recognize the difference between physical violence, per se, in a relationship (either in self-defense or otherwise) and the phenomenon of "abuse," which is chronic, patterned, instrumental and used to control an intimate partner.

3. Individual Responses to Domestic Violence

In terms of how respondents would react to a friend or neighbor who was experiencing domestic violence, most respondents felt that they could help a woman in such a situation. However, very few respondents (Bronx 23% and Brooklyn 28%) actually knew of a place in the neighborhood where a woman could go for help. In terms of respondents' self-reported likelihood of intervening in various situations, nearly half of the respondents indicated that they would "do something" if a man was hitting his wife on the street or a couple was fighting and it appeared that the man was about to hit the woman.

4. Attitudes towards Child Abuse, Neglect and the Use of Corporal Punishment

We asked a series of questions designed to assess neighborhood residents' attitudes towards the issues of child abuse and neglect and the use of corporal punishment. These data indicate that the vast majority of participants agreed that friends, neighbors and relatives should do something if a child is being harmed by their parents. Thus, although a plurality of respondents expressed support of "corporal punishment," the majority exhibited strong beliefs that harming a child is unacceptable and should be



prevented by friends, relatives and neighbors.

5. Child Abuse and Neglect Knowledge

Respondents' knowledge of child abuse facts was generally accurate. A small portion incorrectly believed in the greater danger to children from strangers than family members and the same portion believed that witnessing abuse did not make a child more likely to become either an abuser or a victim.

6. Individual Responses to Child Abuse and Neglect

In terms of how respondents would react to an abusive or neglectful friend or neighbor, most respondents felt that they could help their friends or neighbors with child abuse; however, just over a quarter actually knew of a place in the neighborhood where a parent could go for help with the issue.

7. Opinions about Police and Child Welfare

| Questions asked | Brooklyn | | Bronx | |
|--|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| | Positive | Negative | Positive | Negative |
| ACS is generally fair to families in its handling of reports of child abuse and neglect. | 21% | 25% | 46% | 19% |
| The police treat the people of this neighborhood fairly | 24% | 42% | 33% | 31% |
| The police respond appropriately to situations where couples are physically fighting in this neighborhood. | 26% | 22% | 45% | 23% |

We asked residents to assess the helpfulness and effectiveness of various formal systems and agencies, such as the NYC Police Department and the Administration for Children's Services.

Significant portions of

respondents had no opinion on ACS, indicating that perhaps their experience with or knowledge of the agency was limited. However, the remaining respondents were divided in their opinion of ACS. In general, the police were rated well in terms of their ability to maintain order and prevent crime; however, fewer respondents rated them well in terms of their ability to respond fairly to neighborhood residents. The plurality of respondents had no opinion on the appropriateness of the police response to domestic violence situations in their neighborhood.

Focus Group Results

CONNECT facilitated focus groups in order to establish a deeper understanding of attitudes towards violence in the family that might reflect opinions of differing groups of community members. The material generated through these directed conversations was rich and detailed; far too detailed to be fully described in this report. Following is a brief summary of some of the most compelling results of these discussions.

There were seven focus groups held in Brooklyn and six in the Bronx. They were made up of individuals representing youth, clergy, health providers, members of faith communities, community professionals, women representing specific ethnic groups and men. In general the focus groups revealed that awareness and understanding of the prevalence and dynamics of domestic violence and child abuse were strong in the neighborhood. While many suggestions as to causes of domestic violence and child abuse centered on the individual characteristics the suggested responses tended to focus on breaking the pattern of violence that is passed on from generation to generation. Recommendations highlighted various forms of assistance and community education. Several groups identified economic dependency as a cause of women's staying in domestic violence situations and indicated that programs to increase economic self-sufficiency could be helpful. Communication and coalition building was raised in several community member groups as ways to provide support for victims of violence, momentum for building a response and mechanisms for change.

Several themes will be briefly discussed. First the ***roots of domestic violence and child abuse and neglect*** emerged as themes in several groups. The transmission of both forms of violence from generation to generation was identified by several participants across the groups. For example, one youth focus group participant said:

"... Sometimes it just happens, it's not like it's planned. But sometimes its like, say you were abused as a little boy and you just do what your father did to you, even though you really don't want to but it happened to you so you think well this is what I gotta do because I got it. I think it's probably passed down from generations."

In the same group, another young male participant described being physically abused by his father as a child and subsequently being violent with his sister, as a way to **"toughen her up."**

Other causes of domestic violence were discussed. For example, several participants across groups identified power struggles and efforts by men to maintain their power and dominance within the home as leading to domestic violence. One participant in the male focus group remarked:

"Now it takes two paychecks and another half paycheck to make the family work. And if the woman has to go out and work, I think that brings about a lot of the tug-of-wars between the power structures in the household."

Gender roles played an important part in the **youth focus groups** in the Bronx. Both young men and women agreed that the sexes should not be treated differently but as soon as specific situations were presented that consensus began to erode. Some members asserted that males were **"physically stronger"** and that there were **"certain things that men can do that women can't"**. There was also an understanding of tradition and that many of the ways boys and girls are treated is a result of traditions and customs. The concept of strength became a theme throughout the youth focus group.

“Men are physically stronger...that’s why society takes it like that, (men) should take care of their families cuz it’s like society knows that you can take more, you can work harder”

But the reality of young women’s lives was evident as well when a young female responded:

“From what he said, I understand that’s how society look at it... Well I have two kids of my own and neither of their fathers are there. So ..I have to do what they all should be there doing.”

Their suggestions about how the community could respond to the problem of family violence and teen dating violence included statements like:

“ a program of people who actually went through the stuff”

“an outreach team on the streets giving out information to their peers”

“ In order to prevent it you’ve got to have closeness in the community”

“ More programs to keep kids off the streets, to keep their minds on something”

One of the most significant issues that was raised in the Bronx group for young men was the perception of female privilege. Their comments reflected a combination of their sense of women’s ability to be sexually manipulative, the perception that females were safer in the community especially in the context of the police and more employable.

“ ...let’s say a male wanted to get a job in a clothing store, he wouldn’t get it as fast as a female would because she’s gonna make them jeans sell faster”

“ Girls get more advantages because they can walk outside at night without getting checked. A black man walks out and you gonna get checked 30 or 40 times by the police...”

The youth felt that a teen network led by teens would provide a positive forum for working on these issues. They expressed a preference for preventive approaches that targeted children. Many felt that it was too late for adults and expressed a great deal of empathy for the needs of young children. ***“ if you reach the kids they find out that that’s wrong... The kids, they need our help.”***

Immigrant women expressed difficulties with language and culture. They discussed being from cultures in which men were given privileges and women were expected to put up with abuse. They felt that education, economic assistance and housing were all ways that immigrant women could be assisted. In the Bronx, these women felt that child abuse was very pervasive in their community. There was a consistent feeling that their lack of English language skills kept them isolated and prevented them from seeking help as well as being able to intervene when they saw abuse.

Women’s lower social status, their lack of economic power and the burdens of being primary family and child caregivers were identified as both causes of domestic violence and reasons why women are unable to escape such situations.

Men were able to reflect on why they found it difficult to ask for help with family violence.

“Ego, Ego would be the main thing, cuz a man thinks he is always in control”

“The men, no, I don’t think the men will go (to a group). There is a sense of pride, their sense of embarrassment”

“The community, it’s normal for it to happen. So its kind of facilitated by the culture.”

“ I just say that the culture perpetuates the action to keep going because so many people are involved in it, they just cover each other’s back.”

They also felt that any interventions for men should not be based on group work due to their sense of flow that would impact on the male ego. Outreach could be done asking men to participate in efforts designed to **prevent** domestic violence however without targeting anyone as a perpetrator. Community wide forums focusing on prevention were the highlights of their discussion.

Another theme that emerged focused on *existing responses to domestic violence*, whether they were effective, what they could look like and how they had changed over time. The following comment, made in a group for **Jewish women**, is just one example of the kinds of comments that were made in several of the focus groups. One participant indicated that the response of rabbis within her faith had improved but more work was needed.

“...There’s a new thing that a lot of the rabbis now have a sermon on domestic violence. But still, rabbis still do not want to believe there is domestic violence. So, we’re halfway there, but there’s still a long way to go. The education is getting better. It’s not there yet.”

In addition, ways of working domestic violence education into sermons were discussed and described. In this context, concerns around further stigmatizing and criminalizing men of color were raised. Thus in the **Christian women’s group**, one participant stated:

“ We have to be very careful with our male brothers. That they don’t feel that they are being bombarded. We want to do it in a way that it comes across as a general type of thing ... And there are so many [approaches] that you could take. How to respect your wife. How to love your wife. How to love your children.”

Resistance to specific domestic violence education and programming arose in other groups as well. In a group with **health care providers**, there was discussion of the resistance that they faced to instituting programs for battered women in their work setting. One participant described simply starting a program within her hospital without any support or even permission; after her program was profiled in the hospital newsletter she was rewarded with additional space for the program by the hospital vice president.

“So I learned, of course within reason that sometimes it’s best to just go on and initiate it and depending on if you get good feedback people will go along with it. I was fortunate that I didn’t get egg on my face or I’d probably be looking for a new job right now.”

Finally, as within the survey results, we encountered considerable debate as to the definition of **child abuse vs. “discipline.”** This debate emerged most heatedly in the **youth group**, where a young boy gave an account of being hit as a child and was confronted by other group members with the assertion that he had been a victim of abuse, not an age-appropriate disciplinary tactic. The child denied this victim status and offered a detailed description as to why he “deserved” the assault and how he learned from it. Another youth group member attempted to differentiate between abuse and discipline:

“My version of child abuse is if you discipline your child to the extent you leave marks

on their body. If you want to hit them that's one thing, but there is no reason that you should hit them so hard that you would leave a mark or a scar or something on their body. ... When you discipline a child you are telling them what's right. Like say you beat them because, let me see what the situation is, like they do something, you know, they stole something. You're not beating them because you want to; you are just beating them because you want to teach them, stealing is not right. When you do domestic violence it's like you are just beating them sometimes for no reason. Like you are doing it for something to hit. When you discipline you are usually telling them right from wrong. I think there is a difference, a fine line."

This particular conversation points to some of the most deeply held and difficult attitudes towards violence in the family. In addition to concrete assistance this represents some of the belief systems that must be addressed to offer an effective strategy of prevention.

Discussion and Conclusions

Each section of CONNECT's research revealed some important information about the neighborhood's current response to domestic violence and child abuse and their needs for new and different responses. Collectively, the data informed CONNECT's role in building the neighborhood's internal capacity to respond. Further, it identified where resources could be directed to help both individual residents and organizations working within the community respond to these issues. The community needs assessment, focus groups and the survey revealed that while knowledge and awareness of domestic violence and child abuse may be relatively high, specific and culturally appropriate resources of these resources were sorely lacking. Community members do not generally know where women and families can turn for help with domestic violence and child abuse; community-based organizations need assistance developing basic responses within their agencies. Based on this information CONNECT built networks, organized community events, provided multiple educational opportunities for staff of cbo's as well as community residents. The focus groups revealed that culturally specific resources and services were few or non-existent. Issues like language barriers and the lack of appropriate or adequate transitional housing and shelter space continue to be problematic. Stemming from these findings and our prior experience, CONNECT worked with partner organizations to develop screening and service delivery systems within community organizations that would address these needs. Connecting individuals and organizations as well as assisting them to develop and fund programs emerged as one of the key supports that CONNECT could offer to these community organizations and their residents.

CONNECT would like to gratefully acknowledge the fine work of Victoria Frye, PhD who helped conceive the methodology for our original research and, in particular, worked on the analysis of Brooklyn data.

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