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The SURVIVE Community Project: A Family-Based Intervention to Reduce the Impact of Violence Exposures in Urban Youth

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to describe the development of a family-based intervention designed to target the harmful effects of exposure to family and community violence on urban youth and their parents. The program, “Supporting Urban Residents to be Violence-Free in a Violent Environment (SURVIVE),” is a 12-week multiple family group (MEG) intervention modeled upon similar children’s mental health programs implemented with urban youth of color and their families in several major U.S. cities. The design and implementation of the SURVIVE Community Project were guided by a collaborative partnership between community members, including mental health professionals, teachers, and parents from the Bronx, and an interdisciplinary team of university-based researchers. In order to establish the feasibility and relevance of the program for urban communities, 25 families with children ages 7–11 participated in a pilot test of the curriculum. The description of the SURVIVE Community Project provided here is based on this work, and includes a discussion of facilitation issues. Implications for family-based intervention targeting urban children and families affected by violence are highlighted.

Keywords

Community violence exposure; family-based intervention; youth violence prevention; multiple family groups

Children’s exposure to and victimization by multiple forms of violence have reached epidemic proportions and, therefore, represent a major public health problem (Glodich, 1998; Margolin & Gordis, 2000). Rates of community violence and domestic violence are alarmingly high in inner city neighborhoods, with as many as one-third of pre-teen and adolescent children having been the direct victims of a violent episode and virtually all children having experienced some exposure to violence (Farrell & Bruce, 1997; Margolin & Gordis, 2000). Hence, in addition to the primary prevention of violent behavior, the development of interventions focused on reducing the harmful effects of exposure to violence is critical for ensuring the well-being of such children (Groves, Zuckerman, Marans, & Cohen, 1993).

According to the National Research Council (2002), an essential theoretical feature of successful prevention programs aimed at a variety of youth-related problems, including youth violence, should include the recognition of the interaction between the youth and the setting in which the intervention is offered (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; National

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The Bronx Community Collaborative Board was established in 1998 to oversee several federally-funded and community-based research projects, including The SURVIVE Community Project, in the Bronx, New York. It is comprised of parents, educators, and mental health professionals who work and/or live in the South Bronx, New York.

Research Council, 2002). Given the critical influence of family, social, and environmental contexts in influencing multiple youth behaviors and social interactions, failure to attend to the setting in which prevention programs are offered may result in an inability by youth to incorporate newly learned attitudes and skills into prosocial behavior in their natural environments. The development and implementation of the Supporting Urban Residents to be Violence-Free in a Violent Environment (SURVIVE) Community Project have incorporated this broad ecological principle in several ways. First, the program is offered in the community where youth live, attend school, and socialize. Second, the curriculum was developed and adapted by working directly with community members to insure its relevance to and acceptance by families in the community. Finally, and of critical importance, the SURVIVE Community Project acknowledges the essential role of parents in influencing children's lives and as such, requires the participation of parents in all groups. This intensive inclusion is intended to support parents in their primary function of enhancing youth physical and psychological safety in an extremely stressful environment (Banyard, England, & Rozelle, 2001).

THE IMPACT OF VIOLENCE EXPOSURE ON CHILDREN

Exposure to violence potentially jeopardizes the development of urban, minority children (Bell & Jenkins, 1993; Dyson, Yeung, Brooks-Gunn, & Smith, 1990; Gasch, Poulson, Fullilove & Fullilove, 1991; Martinez & Richters, 1993). In addition to its impact on children's physical and psychological well-being, violence may interfere with basic developmental trajectories by negatively impacting social, academic, and behavioral functioning and peer relationships. Possible effects of violence exposure on children can include difficult behavioral functioning or traumatic stress responses, such as aggression or intrusive symptoms respectively, which may interfere with academic performance and positive peer relationships. The experience of violence exposure also may profoundly alter children's perceptions of themselves and others. Specifically, "[Violence] affects children's views of the world and of themselves, their ideas about the meaning and purpose of life, their expectations for future happiness, and their moral development" (Margolin & Gordis, 2000, p. 446).

The experience of multiple traumatic events during childhood, such as those events experienced by youth in inner-city communities where violence is endemic, has been referred to as "compounded community trauma" (Horowitz, Weine, & Jekel, 1995). According to these authors, compounded community trauma, including the direct witnessing of domestic and community violence, has been linked to the development of childhood post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety disorders, and adolescent substance use. For example, in the Bronx, New York, community served by the SURVIVE Community Project, results of a study involving 79 adolescent girls of color revealed that these participants had experienced between 8 and 55 different types of community and domestic violence events, with the mean number of violent events being 28 (Horowitz et al., 1995). Sixty-seven percent of those participating in this study met criteria for PTSD according to the American Psychiatric Association's (1994) *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV). Given such findings, the development of interventions designed to mediate or prevent the consequences of compounded community trauma is clearly needed (Bell & Fink, 2000; Richters & Martinez, 1993). Because programs targeting exposure to multiple forms of violence are scarce, the SURVIVE Community Project was developed as an important effort toward the goal of narrowing the reach of compounded community trauma among urban youth and their parents.

MULTIPLE FAMILY GROUPS AND THE ROLE OF URBAN PARENTS

The SURVIVE Community Project also builds upon a growing body of research suggesting that urban parents play an important role in protecting youth from being exposed to violence, as well as buffering the impact of such exposures when they do occur (Bell & Fink, 2000). In addition to having a critical impact on the development and functioning of youth, experiences of interpersonal and community violence also are presumed to affect parental mental health and functioning, including the process of parenting itself. Because parents are not able to protect their children fully from violence exposure in some urban and familial environments, the primary parenting role of protector can be undermined (Margolin, 1998; Margolin & Gordis, 2000). Similarly, because parents may be traumatized by the very same experiences of violence to which their children are exposed, they may be less effective in supporting their children's resilience and post-violence recovery (Garbarino, 1993).

On the balance, however, there is evidence indicating that parents rearing children in inner-city environments can and do adapt their parenting strategies to limit the influence of the neighborhood on their children in order to enhance developmental outcomes (Jarret, 1997; Osofsky, Wewers, Hann, & Fick, 1993). For example, urban parents often increase supervision and monitoring efforts in an effort to minimize their child's exposure to neighborhood violence (Bell & Jenkins, 1993). To accomplish this goal, such parents may foster connections with local churches and youth programs to aid them in their efforts to monitor their children. Further, in some urban communities, parents have responded to high rates of community violence by organizing efforts to protect children on their way to school and became "human shields" (Bell & Fink, 2000; Bell & Jenkins, 1993). The SURVIVE Community Project incorporates findings from a robust literature supporting the relationship between parental involvement and youth well-being (Gorman-Smith, Tolan, Zelli, & Huesmann, 1996; Henggeler, Schoenwald, Pickrel, Rowland, & Santos, 1994; Pynoos, Steinberg, & Piacentini, 1999) in its aim to support parents both individually and in their parental roles as protectors and teachers. Specifically, SURVIVE assists parents to do the following: (a) identify adaptive strategies for self-care and the care of their children in a violent environment; (b) obtain an increased awareness of the impact that being exposed to violence has for them and their children; (c) provide appropriate structure for their children; and (d.) enhance their communication with their children. In these ways, the SURVIVE Community Project seeks to strengthen the effectiveness of the parent-child relationship.

In order to capitalize upon and support the critical role parents have in shaping youth outcomes, the SURVIVE intervention utilizes a multiple family group (MFG) format. McKay, Quintana, Kim, Gonzales, and Adil (1999) have identified the following features of multiple family group models: (a) the inclusion of children, parents and a facilitator; (b) a focus on a specific problem; and (c) the facilitation of interaction processes and exchanges between-and within-families. Although multiple family groups originally targeted families with a mentally ill member, MFG models are now being used successfully with well-functioning families and families with children (Dennison, 1999). More specifically, MFG programs have been developed for families facing contemporary social and urban problems, including HIV/AIDS (McKay, Baptiste, Coleman, Madison, Paikoff, & Scott, 2000), maternal substance abuse (DeVoe, Dean, Joyce, McKay, & Bronx Collaborative Board, in press), death of loved ones through homicide (Lyon et al., 1992 as cited in Dennison, 1999), and to address behavioral problems in urban children (McKay et al., 1999). Very few interventions implementing family-based (Tolan & McKay, 1996) or dyadic approaches have been evaluated although a few have described group intervention with children who have witnessed domestic violence (e.g., Rabenstein & Lehmann, 2000; Wagar & Rodway, 1995). With this in mind, the SURVIVE intervention was designed as a family-based

approach to address violence exposure and includes an evaluation component built into the curriculum.

METHOD

Participants

Twenty-five families were recruited to participate in the SURVIVE Community Project through public schools and service programs at a local community health center in the Bronx. Families were eligible if they had at least one child between the ages of 7–11 years, and the child was willing to participate in the program. Although the intervention was designed for all types of family structures, all families who chose to participate were female-headed, single-parent families. Mothers were reimbursed \$10 per session for their participation and \$15 for completion of pre- and post-test assessments, in addition to receiving a meal for themselves and their children at each session. Childcare for younger children was provided on site. Group size ranged from 4–7 families each.

The average age for mothers was 38 years ($n = 24$). They had an average of three children under the age of 18 each. Twenty-four percent ($n = 6$) had not graduated high school or earned a GED. Thirty-two percent ($n = 8$) had reported receiving public assistance in the last 18 months. The average income from all sources in the last 18 months for mothers ($n = 23$) was reported as \$1248. The average child age was 10 years ($n = 24$). Forty-four percent of the children ($n = 11$) were African-American, 52% ($n = 13$) were Hispanic, and 4% ($n = 1$) were of mixed racial background. Sixty-six percent of the children in the sample were female ($n = 21$).

Program Description: SURVIVE Multiple Family Group Intervention

The SURVIVE multiple family group intervention is a 12-week series of sessions in which parents and children meet both together as families and in separate meetings. The multiple family groups are co-facilitated by university-based researchers, including social workers and psychiatrists, and members of the community, all of whom receive required training on the effects of violence on children and parents, the SURVIVE curriculum, facilitation issues, and crisis intervention procedures. Each group session is structured into four parts. Sessions begin with a warm-up period, which provides an opportunity for the families to connect with each other and to share updates about issues that have come up for their families and communities since the previous group meeting. It is during this period that recent community-based trauma, such as a shooting or a murder that has occurred in the neighborhood, may be reported. When such traumas are identified, specific crisis intervention procedures are followed. These procedures are discussed more completely below. Following this warm-up period, families and facilitators share a meal together, after which parents and children attend separate groups for about one hour. In the final component of each session, parents and children reconvene to participate in discussion and activities together.

Session topics were identified and prioritized by community partners, whereas the university-based researchers provided input regarding up-to-date information on the mental health effects of violence exposure, knowledge about the dynamics of violence, the order of sessions, and group facilitation issues. The first half of the SURVIVE program is designed to provide participants with general psycho-educational information regarding trauma responses for parents and children, coping, self-care, and problem-solving. By addressing these topics and processes first, it was hoped that families would develop skills to assist them in addressing more difficult and intense issues specific to multiple forms of violence exposure, which are addressed directly in the last five sessions. Further, by allowing the

group to develop through group process, it was hoped that the families would be better able to rely upon each other as sources of useful support for the remainder of the program and beyond.

In addition to providing some scaffolding to families in terms of information and social support, the SURVIVE program emphasizes three primary strategies for enhancing the physical and psychological safety in considering the effects of violence and in approaching circumstances that may involve or lead to violence, including: (a) safety planning; (b) risk assessment in circumstances that may involve or lead to violence; and (c) harm reduction in the context of violence exposure or conflict. Thus, in each session, issues related to the physical and emotional safety of all family members are addressed. The focus on safety and risk assessment is introduced in the first session, when parents and children are asked to create a list of safe people to contact and contingency plans for communication in case of emergency. Parents and children review the list together and are encouraged to place it somewhere visible in the home. Later in the curriculum, families create a family “Survival Kit,” in which family necessities are gathered for easy access in the event of an emergency. Because of our location in New York in the aftermath of September 11th, families have been eager to put together both emergency contact lists, contingency plans for communication among family members, and “Survival Kits.” The goals and content for each session are described below. Sessions 2 and 11 were designed for program evaluation purposes in which parents and children are asked to complete pre- and post-test assessments. However, in this phase of the project, these sessions were utilized to identify and test appropriate measures and to establish feasible administration procedures for evaluation within the target community rather than to formally evaluate the program. Formal evaluation of the SURVIVE curriculum is underway with a larger sample of families.

Week One: Defining Violence and Understanding Its Impact on Children and Families

In the first session, families are oriented to the goals of the SURVIVE program, the structure of each session, the role of facilitators and expectations of families, including interactions with other families and guidelines for maintaining confidentiality. In addition, families are encouraged to voice their hopes and expectations for the group, to consider whether they would like to participate in SURVIVE, and to identify how the program could meet the needs of both the parents and children in their families. The overall goals for the first session are, therefore, to orient participants to the purpose and format of the group and to support the families in deciding whether or not they would like to participate in the project. Families are fully informed of the evaluation component of the project and are engaged in discussion about how their participation and feedback helps to improve SURVIVE. Because the SURVIVE Community Project was developed as an evaluation project, informed consent from parents and assent from children are obtained during the first session. Facilitators and families then become acquainted with each other through a series of ice-breaking activities. Once these introductory goals have been accomplished, families share a meal, after which parents and children meet in their separate groups.

As in all groupwork, the first session sets the foundation and tone for all future sessions. Because the focus of the SURVIVE program is safety, including emotional safety, both the parent and children’s groups are asked to create ground rules which govern discussion, interpersonal behavior, and the management of conflict that invariably arises during group sessions. First, parents and children identify and define rules that they want for their own groups, a process that provides group members with some ownership of and responsibility for how the group will function. If members do not raise the issue of confidentiality, the facilitators introduce the topic and encourage an in-depth discussion of what confidentiality is, how members and facilitators can maintain confidentiality, and when it must be broken as defined by the law. In summary, facilitators emphasize that all discussions “stay in the

group” unless a parent or child is in danger of being harmed or harming him or herself. Children’s right to confidentiality is also emphasized, meaning that children are not required to share the specifics of their group discussions with their parents, and in fact, may not reveal the personal details shared by other children about themselves or their families. These rules are then posted on the wall at the beginning of each group. Members are free to propose new rules and are encouraged to check their own interactions and those of other group members in relation to the rules.

At the end of the first session, families participate in an activity entitled “The Family Game,” which is a playful and non-threatening way for families to share benign information with each other and become more comfortable participating in the group. Families are often given “homework,” which typically involves a family-centered activity. At the close of the first session, families are asked to spend time during the week to create their own family “Survival Kits.” Although facilitators provide very basic guidelines about important elements of the survival kits, families are encouraged to consider and include materials and documents that are specific to the needs of the individual members of their own families. Families have reported that they enjoy this activity, and are able to complete the kits with input from all members of the family, regardless of children’s ages.

Week Two: Measures/Surveys (Pre-Test Assessment)

Although the long-term purpose of the inclusion of pre- and post-test assessment in the SURVIVE curriculum is build in the capacity to evaluate program effectiveness, it was first necessary to establish the relevance of content as well as the feasibility of administration in a measurement package for families in the target community. In order to accomplish this goal, several variations of the measurement package were administered to families and modifications were made according to participant feedback and facilitator observation. The pre-test is placed by design into curriculum to increase the likelihood of obtaining evaluation data. Thus, during the second session, families share a meal and complete the surveys. Otherwise, no curriculum is provided.

The measurement package for the pre-test is designed to obtain the following information from parents and children: (a) standard demographic information about each family, (b) parent and child reports of violence exposure and direct experience with violence, including previous trauma such as child sexual abuse or rape, (c) parent mental health, including symptoms of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress, (d) parenting, (e) family communication processes, (f) child mental health, including post-traumatic stress symptoms, and behavioral functioning, and (g) knowledge about the effects of violence exposure on youth. Prior to beginning the pre-test, the purpose of the assessment is discussed and the families are given the opportunity to ask questions. Both the parents and youth are encouraged to give honest answers and are reassured again that the information they provide will remain confidential within the limits of the law. Questionnaires are administered individually with staff available to provide assistance at any point. Upon completion of the pre-test, families are debriefed and any individual who appears to be distressed is provided with additional care and follow-up. To date, no reports have been required to the Administration for Children’s Services (ACS), the city’s child protection agency, although a small number of families has been referred for additional counseling. All families are provided with referral information as a requirement of informed consent and standard procedures for protecting human subjects.

Week Three: Identifying the Effects of Violence and Taking Care of Ourselves

In this session, the topic of violence exposure is introduced explicitly with a significant emphasis on stress management and self-care in the context of living with both everyday

stresses and with the added stressor of being chronically exposed to violence. In addition to providing participants with a framework for understanding the effects of being exposed to violence, families are encouraged to identify both the ways in which they are already coping effectively with stress and violence and the less adaptive coping strategies that could be targeted for change. While the experience of violence exposure is the most intense type of stressor discussed, the parents and youth also discuss more typical, but serious, sources of daily stress, as well as the accumulation of stresses and how to cope with these realities. Facilitators then introduce activities focused on normalizing responses to stress and violence exposures, such as understanding how the body responds physiologically, and reminders that it is the violence rather than an individual's response that is problematic.

Both the meetings held with the parents and children separately and the families meeting offer an opportunity for group members to develop appropriate self-care plans with the benefit of feedback from other group members. To this end, group members are asked to discuss how they relax and what they do for fun, both individually and with their families. For example, in the parents' group, parents participate in an activity entitled, "My Smooth Day," in which they imagine and share what would constitute an ideal day for them. They then brainstorm small ways in which elements of this ideal day could be incorporated into their everyday lives. In addition, both parents and children learn and practice relaxation exercises, such as deep breathing. Finally, each family also creates a family self-care plan, in addition to their individual self-care plan. In considering their plans, each family identifies sources of stress at home, discusses how each family member deals with this stress, and considers enjoyable ways for the family to spend time together to mitigate stress and reinforce the cohesiveness of the family unit. Parents have reported that they post their family's self-care plan on the refrigerator to remind themselves of its importance and that doing so has helped them to follow through with the outings or activities agreed upon by the whole family.

Week Four: Monitoring Our Children

This session was adapted from the CHAMP Family Program (McKay et al., 1999) and is designed to facilitate discussion of the importance of parental supervision and the monitoring of children's whereabouts and activities, with an emphasis on age appropriate levels of parental involvement. In the parents only session, parents are asked to identify their present strategies for monitoring their children's activities and keeping them safe within their community and school environments. In addition, they are asked to reflect on how their own childhood experiences and upbringings may be influencing their current parenting behaviors. Parents are further encouraged to evaluate the amount and type of supervision that they and other group members provide in relation to the perceived risks of violence or other forms of harm for their children. The primary goals for parents in this session are as follows: (a) to consider collectively how they might respond to their children's communications about their lives; (b) to identify specific ways to monitor their children's involvement in negative peer group activities and unsafe community situations; and (c) to adjust their protective behavior by balancing their children's emerging needs for contact with peers and independence with the necessity of adult supervision.

In the child-only segment of this session, children are guided through a series of exercises, entitled "Express Yourself Skills" (McKay et al., 1999), designed to help them communicate with their parents about difficult or sensitive issues, including peer pressure, drugs, and gangs. Facilitators introduce these exercises in the following way: "Expressing yourself means talking so that you get your ideas across and listen to people so that they can get their ideas across to you." Children then focus on the use of body language as well as their verbal skills as they practice different ways of expressing their thoughts and feelings with other members of the group. In both the parent-only and the child-only groups, participants

identify locations that are considered to be safe, as well as those recognized as unsafe, on neighborhood maps. Parents and their children then share their maps with each other as a starting point for a discussion of the child's safety in the neighborhood and the need for adult supervision/monitoring. Each family is then asked to identify "safe havens" on the map where children may go in the event of a community emergency.

Week Five: Dealing Constructively with Conflict

During this week parents and children discuss sources of conflict and strategies for handling disagreements, particularly those situations that involve, or might escalate to, violence. The primary goals for this session are centered on the following: (a) understanding individual responsibility for violent behavior, including provocation of and response to violence by others; (b) discussing the issue and meaning of choice in using violence to address conflict; and (c) identifying everyday situations and relationships that might involve a "high risk" for the use of violence. Both parent and child participants are also asked to evaluate the consequences of using violence, both for themselves and for possible victims.

This session provides participants with an opportunity to look at conflicts that might have arisen with one another, with their peers, and with others in their lives. During this exploration, participants are given the opportunity to identify their reactions to conflict. In the beginning of this session, facilitators discuss the four needs that both children and adults have according to Johnson and Johnson's (1991) *Teaching Students to be Peacemakers*, a curriculum designed to teach peaceful conflict resolution strategies. Specifically, these four needs include the following: (a) the need to belong; (b) the need for power; (c) the need for freedom; and (d) the need to have fun. The basic principle posited by Johnson and Johnson (1991) suggests that conflicts occur when people try to meet these four needs in ways that 'clash' with one another. Both the children and their parents consider this principle in discussing the different types of conflicts that they encounter in their everyday routines and interactions with each other. In the child-only segment of the group, the children are asked to role-play different scenarios involving conflict and to act out how they might react in that situation, as well as alternative reactions to the same situations. Parents engage primarily in a discussion of conflicts that arise within their families, and with their children in particular, and identify non-violent ways to prevent or resolve these conflicts. They also are asked to consider the types of conflicts they imagine that their children face that might involve or lead to violence.

To note the importance of community collaboration in assuring the relevance of SURVIVE content, the curriculum for this session has undergone several changes. For example, most participants in this community endorsed the notion that "if someone hits you, you hit them back." In fact, both children and parents explained that hitting back or retaliating was necessary in some situations, specifically when a child is bullied. Given these views, it became immediately apparent that emphasizing risk assessment and safety was a more realistic approach to decreasing violence than simply encouraging families not to fight back. Consequently, both the parents and children are asked to discuss 'fighting back' as one option among many that should be considered when confronting conflict or violence.

During this discussion, facilitators also encourage a discussion of situations in which it is not helpful, and may actually be dangerous, for one to fight back. For example, the risk of fighting back when one is outnumbered or outsized, and when someone has a weapon is discussed. Similarly, a variety of the possible ramifications for using violence to respond to conflicts in certain situations are discussed, such as possible legal ramifications (e.g., child welfare involvement, prosecution, jail time), personal injury to themselves or others, and even death.

During the multiple family group session, families complete an exercise in which they identify a conflict in the home and agree to explore non-violent options for its resolution prior to the next session. Families are asked to report on the exercise at the next meeting. In addition, they are reminded that the group will be focusing on specific types of exposure to violence beginning in the next session.

Session Six: Media Violence

The session on media violence thus far, has been an extremely lively session. The goals for the meeting include: (a) the identification of the many types of violence among various types of media (e.g., print media, TV, film, Internet, music); and (b) the consideration of both the individual and societal effects of such a pervasive exposure to violence. Parents work together to create strategies for limiting their children's exposure to violence via the media. They also practice discussing violence in the media with their children, including how to handle negotiations with their children related to their access to the media.

In order to facilitate a discussion of media violence, facilitators and families bring in magazines and favorite compact disks for this session. In the child-only group, participants listen to their favorite music and analyze the lyrics with respect to images of women, men, children, people from different ethnic backgrounds, and relationships. Group members then write the lyrics for a song without using profanity or violent images or re-write a song that contains violence-related themes. The following is an excerpt from a rap song, entitled "I'm a Survivor," written and performed by two nine-year-old girls:

I'm a Survivor

I'm gonna to keep on, keep on doing what I want to do

Keep on doing what is right for me

What is right for me is to be violent-free

I'm gonna stay away from fighting

I'm gonna do my best to help myself stay away from violence.

In the parent-only group, participants first identify the ways in which they and their children are exposed to violence via the media, as well as any family rules related to limiting this exposure. Parents are encouraged to discuss the possible effects of being exposed to the violence in the media, such as increasing one's tolerance of violence, normalizing violence, reinforcing roles for women and men that may foster disrespect and violent behavior towards females, and portrayals of ethnic minority groups in a negative light. Parents are given a *Guide for Parents about Movie Ratings, TV Ratings, Music Ratings, and the Internet* (V-Chip Education Project, www.talkingwithkids.org; www.filmratings.com) as an additional resource for understanding what is appropriate for children to see, hear, or read at various ages. Upon reunion, children are asked to perform the non-violent songs that they created, after which families discuss ways to decrease the level of exposure to media violence at home.

Week Seven: School and Community Violence

This session focuses on violence in schools and the community. The primary goals for this session include: (a) the identification of the types and locations of violence in school and in the neighborhood; (b) the identification of inter-connections between school and neighborhood violence; and (c) the identification of the repercussions of community violence for youth and families. Specifically, participants discuss the various types of violence that they see within their community, such as shootings, drug deals, gang violence, fights in schools, and police violence. In the parent-only group, members share their

experiences of community safety and violence when they were children, which they then compare to the realities of the environment facing their children. A specific discussion about gang formation and gang violence is facilitated in both the parent- and child-only groups with an emphasis on preventing younger children from becoming involved with a gang. Facilitators ensure that parents have sufficient time to process intense feelings during this discussion.

In the child-only group, participants play a game called “Who Am I.” During this activity, group members take turns wearing a bandana with labels portraying various stereotypes of people, such as “bully,” “nerd,” and “gang member” on a sticker. The other children are told to interact with the “labeled” person as if he or she is the person described on the sticker. Debriefing after this exercise is focused on how each child felt while wearing the bandana, and how the others felt reacting to the labels portrayed on the sticker.

In the multiple family group, families read a short picture book entitled, *Your Move* (Bunting, 1998), which is about two brothers’ experiences with gangs. Once the families have read the book, a guided discussion about the story line and its characters ensues. Families are also encouraged to borrow the book for the week to re-read at home and discuss further.

Weeks Eight and Nine: Domestic Violence

These two sessions are spent discussing issues related to Domestic Violence. In the first session, the dynamics of domestic violence and its particular effects on victims are discussed. For child participants, the primary goal of the first session is to assist them in assigning appropriate responsibility for the domestic violence on the actual perpetrator of the behavior. In addition, a critical goal of the eighth session involves safety planning. Specifically, both the parents and their children strategize about how to maximize children’s safety in the face of an acute incident of domestic violence. Facilitators offer basic information regarding safety planning during this discussion. For example, guidelines such as staying out of a fight between family members, going to another room, staying out of kitchen areas where ‘weapons’ can be located, and getting another adult to help may be provided. Parents create safety plans for themselves and their children, which they share in the MFG session.

The focus of session nine is creating safer relationships for children in the context of domestic violence. Specifically, this session addresses the impact of witnessing the victimization of a parent by their partner on children. Parents are asked to discuss the following: (a) how children are affected by witnessing domestic violence; (b) how parenting behaviors including discipline might be affected by domestic violence; and (c) how to create a feeling of safety in their own children through nurturing and strong parenting practices. Because many parents are extremely concerned about the possibility of violence occurring in their older children’s dating relationships, they are given an opportunity during this session to identify and discuss possible signs and consequences of teen dating violence. In addition, it is emphasized that parents help prevent teen dating violence by modeling healthy relationships for their children from an early age.

In the child-only session, participants are asked to describe what characterizes good relationships, including friendships, sibling relationships, dating relationships and parent-child relationships. In the MFG segment of this session, families create a “Healthy Relationship Wheel” (adapted from the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, Duluth, MN). This wheel is then used to facilitate a discussion of the elements of a healthy and safe relationship.

Week 10: Sexual Abuse

This session was not included in the original SURVIVE curriculum. The topic of sexual abuse was incorporated after the first pilot of SURVIVE at the request of parents who had personal experiences with sexual abuse and/or had concerns about their children in relation to possible sexual abuse or sexual risk. In this session, parents and children learn the definition, signs and symptoms, and dynamics of sexual abuse. Discussions of healthy sexuality and personal safety are emphasized at a developmentally appropriate level.

Parents are given the following definition of sexual abuse for reference: “Sexual Abuse is defined as any coerced or unwanted sexual touching or activity involving a child. It is important to remember that children cannot consent even if they agreed to participate.” Parents are given handouts to discuss why children may not disclose incidents of sexual abuse (DeVoe & Faller, 1999). Similarly, they are taught how to teach their children personal safety skills. Likewise, appropriate and supportive responses to a child’s disclosure of possible sexual abuse are identified in the parent’s group.

In the child-only group, participants are also given a working definition of sexual abuse as follows: “Any unwanted sexual touching or activity.” Facilitators modify the definition and discussion of sexual abuse according to the age and developmental levels of children in the group. The description of sexual abuse is explained more generally in terms of inappropriate touching by others and the context of different kinds of touching (e.g., doctor visits, bathing younger children, hugging, etc.). Participants are reminded that anyone experiencing any type of sexual abuse or anyone being touched in a manner that makes them uncomfortable should tell a trusted adult. Furthermore, they are told to continue to talk about the abuse until an adult intervenes to stop the behavior. Children then participate in an activity entitled “Body Maps” to emphasize each child’s ownership of his or her own body. In the activity, children work in pairs to trace the outline of another child’s body on a full-size roll of paper. Each child colors and “clothes” his or her own body map. Children then identify body parts that are ‘OK’ to touch and those that are not, with the aid of facilitators and their parents. In addition, who is allowed to touch which parts and under what circumstances (e.g., parent, doctor, nurse, friend, etc.) are also discussed. Finally, the children discuss how to deal with confusing, unwanted, or inappropriate touches. In the MFG, families review definitions of sexual abuse together and children share their body maps with their parents. Families individually identify the trusted adults that could be told about inappropriate touching or sexual abuse. Finally, the families are encouraged to continue discussing healthy sexuality at home.

Week 11: Measures/Surveys (Post-Test Assessment)

During the 11th session, both the parents and their children complete the “post-test” assessment. As previously noted, the post-test was incorporated into the curriculum to prepare for the formal evaluation of the SURVIVE curriculum in the next phase of the program’s development. As in the pre-test session, the primary goals for the meetings held during this session are as follows: (a) to inform parents and children of the purpose of the questionnaires; (b) to encourage families to be as honest as possible in their responses; and (c) to provide participants assistance with the questionnaires as needed. Upon completion of the measures, families meet together to plan for the final session and celebration.

Week 12: Endings and Celebration

During the last session, families celebrate the end of the program with a party. Goals for the meeting include the following: (a) a review of the material covered during SURVIVE; (b) a formal opportunity for families to say good-bye to each other and to facilitators; and (c) the presentation of completion certificates. Participants share their feelings about the group

ending and with the facilitators and one another, as well as what they have learned from participating in the group. Families are also provided with a referral list for family and child-related services for assistance after the program has ended.

Process of Facilitation

A team of three or four facilitators is used for MFG sessions (i.e., the child-only, parent-only, and multiple-family group). The primary role of facilitators is to create a safe environment in which families feel comfortable exploring issues related to violence. Facilitators are provided with a specific set of discussion questions to use when presenting material during each session, but discussions are designed to remain highly interactive and directed by the participants. Participant responses and insights for each session are compiled on newsprint during each group and summarized by a facilitator or participant to create a set of take-home principles that can be implemented by the families.

Within the family sessions, facilitators provide opportunities for communication between parents and their children and introduce exercises. For example, following a group discussion on neighborhood safety issues, the group is asked to break into individual family units and identify the neighborhood boundaries that are safe. The group facilitators move among the individual family units to encourage discussion and offer positive feedback. Finally, facilitators are assigned the task of describing the homework tasks, which are discussed at the beginning of the following week's session.

When Something Goes Wrong: Facilitation Procedures for Crisis Intervention

A two-day training program has been developed and is required for all facilitators and childcare staff. Training topics included the following: (a) the impact of multiple kinds of violence upon children and parents; (b) sensitivity in working with participants from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds; (c) critical incident and safety management; and (d) facilitator self-care, including attention to possible vicarious traumatization among facilitators (Pearlman & Mac Ian, 1995). To date, the SURVIVE program has been implemented with approximately 80 families that have experienced crises at either the community level or at the family/individual level. The procedures we have developed to handle crises of all kinds are based on the following goals: (a) limiting further violence exposure in children, including limiting exposure to their parents' reactions; (b) helping parents to manage their own reactions separately from their children; and (c) assisting parents in crafting appropriate and supportive responses to their children's needs in response to a crisis.

A community-level crisis is one that has occurred typically at the neighborhood level and includes violence such as a murder, drive-by shooting, rape or police violence. For example, in the first SURVIVE group implemented, group members reported that six murders were committed in their neighborhood during the course of the program. When a community crisis is disclosed, all families meet together briefly so that facilitators can announce a change in format, but then immediately separate into parent- and child-only groups. This separation allows parents to deal with their reactions outside of their children's presence and to work with facilitators and other group members on a strategy for handling their children's responses appropriately and supportively. Similarly, breaking into separate groups immediately allows the children to express their reactions to the event without concerns about upsetting or angering their parents.

The second type of crisis occurs at the individual or family level and includes imminent risk to a child by a caregiver, suicidality, domestic violence, or accident/illness. Although many of the parents regularly discuss personal experiences of victimization openly in the parent-

only group, when an individual or family is in crisis, a facilitator works separately with the family unit to develop a plan to manage the situation appropriately, while the regular group meeting continues. Alternatively, the facilitator may work with the family following the session to develop a strategy for coping and to identify resources during the period of crisis. In both community and individual crises, facilitators follow-up with participants between sessions, insuring that the family is safe and offering referrals when appropriate.

CONCLUSION

The literature is sparse regarding interventions that address “compound community trauma,” experienced by many children and families living in a community that experiences high levels of violence. In the present article, we have described the development of the SURVIVE Community Project, a family-based intervention program designed to reduce the harmful effects of family and community violence exposure among urban youth and their parents residing in Bronx, New York. The SURVIVE Community Project represents an initial effort to address the complex issues related to multiple and overlapping forms of violence exposure and responds to the limitation within the existing literature available on this topic. It also demonstrates the value of community collaboration in addressing community-wide problems, such as violence, that affect the development and functioning of its families and youth.

Urban children and families living with violence have yet to receive adequate attention from researchers or practitioners. Future research is necessary to test the effectiveness of programs such as SURVIVE in reducing the impact of violence exposure among urban youth. However, the SURVIVE Community Project offers promise that community-based programs targeting violence are feasible.

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