Violence and Mental Health

Experiencing, exposure to and fear of violence have known emotional and mental health consequences. These consequences are often lifelong, require extensive treatment, and can, in turn, affect physical health as well as bring stress and consequences to others.

Current research has identified the following mental health conditions as significantly more common among those exposed to violence either directly (e.g., as a victim or perpetrator) or indirectly (e.g., as a witness):

- Multiple mental health conditions (5-9)
- Depression and risk for suicide (1,4,7,10-12)
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (1,10,12)
- Aggressive and/or violent behavior disorders (7,10,12,13)

It is generally accepted that there are emotional implications for those who are directly victimized by violence. Those who witness violence, as well as those who fear violence in their community, suffer emotional and mental health consequences too.
So what does all this mean?

There are a number of implications from our growing understanding of the relationship between violence and mental health. Firstly, most of those who experience or witness violence require mental health interventions and supports that extend beyond the short term and recognize the longer term consequences of their experience. Secondly, when communities experience significant violence, and the fear generated by that violence, there is a need to both recognize the consequences that creates for all community members and identify strategies for addressing those consequences. Lastly, and maybe most importantly, recognizing the emotional and physical toll violence imposes on the entire community (especially children and youth) requires that preventing violence before it occurs be a basic component and priority for all communities. There is a strong and growing science base that confirms that violence is preventable. Further, there are a number of effective strategies that not only prevent violence but also foster good mental health. These include: fostering social connections in neighborhoods; promoting adequate employment opportunities; ensuring positive emotional and social development; providing quality family support services; and making sure young people have connections with non-judgmental, caring adults/mentoring.

TO LEARN MORE

- Visit the UNITY homepage www.preventioninstitute.org/unity.html
- Read the UNITY Policy Platform. Developed partnership with UNITY cities, the UNITY Policy Platform describes the kinds of strategies that need to be in place to prevent violence www.preventioninstitute.org/component/jlibrary/article/id-290/127.html

UNITY builds support for effective, sustainable efforts to prevent violence before it occurs so that urban youth can thrive in safe environments with supportive relationships and opportunities for success.

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References

3. Statistics from the National Center for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder