

White Paper on Improving Family Violence Prevention in Ohio

Executive Summary



The Ohio Family Violence Prevention Project

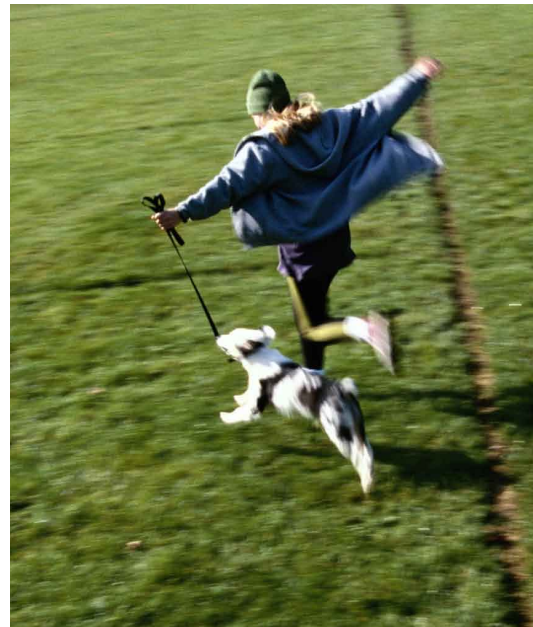
With the support of the Anthem Foundation of Ohio, the Ohio Family Violence Prevention Project began in January 2007. The project's goals are:

- to increase awareness of the scope and consequences of family violence in Ohio;
- to identify realistic and promising policies and programs for prevention; and
- to build support for implementing recommended policies and programs.

The main product of these efforts is the *White Paper on Improving Family Violence Prevention in Ohio*. To generate this work, the project directors convened a working group of leading academic researchers, agency personnel and practitioners (see acknowledgements). The group met quarterly in Columbus to insure that our descriptions of family violence, prevention and the related recommendations are both realistic *and* based on the most current, best available evidence.

On January 3, 2008, we completed a draft of the document which we then circulated to an external review panel of researchers, agency leaders and practitioners throughout Ohio and across the United States. After another series of revisions, the *White Paper* publicly debuted at a conference at The Ohio State University in Columbus on February 19, 2008.

Following the conference we plan to hold a series of regional meetings throughout Ohio (including Athens, Canton, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Lima,



Toledo and Youngstown and Zanesville) to solicit further feedback from local practitioners and decision-makers and build support for the vision. By June 2008, we plan to complete a detailed report that will describe our experience building support for the vision and include an expanded version of the *White Paper* with greater detail on existing family violence prevention efforts and a blueprint for moving forward.

Summary of the White Paper on Improving Family Violence Prevention in Ohio

Of the many threats to Ohio's citizens, few are as pervasive and harmful as family violence. This *Summary* reviews what family violence is and what Ohio should do to prevent it *before* it occurs. Discussions of family violence touch on many political, cultural and social issues, so we carefully base our claims on a thorough and critical appraisal of the available evidence. Because of limited space here, we refer readers to the extensive references and footnotes in the full *White Paper*.

What is family violence?

Family violence includes acts that are physically abusive, sexually abusive and/or emotionally abusive and occur between family members. In cases where one family member is dependent on another, family violence also includes neglect. We use the term 'family' broadly, to describe relationships delineated by blood, legal status, commitment, dependency, and living arrangement. What makes family violence different from other types of violence is that it occurs in the context of a trust relationship and generally represents a pattern of behaviors occurring over time. Because of these characteristics, the consequences of such violence are especially harmful and complex. Conversely, preventing family violence can also help avoid a wide range of other problems. Common types of family violence include:

- **Child maltreatment**
When a family member or caretaker neglects basic needs or inflicts physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse. Neglect is the most common type of child maltreatment, followed by physical and then sexual and emotional abuse.
- **Intimate partner violence**
When physical, sexual and/or emotional violence occurs in the context of a current or former relationship. A perpetrator often abuses power in order to control his partner.

- **Elder abuse**
When a family member or caretaker neglects basic needs, financially exploits an elder, or inflicts physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse. Neglect is the most common type of elder abuse reported to adult protective services, followed by financial exploitation and then emotional, physical and sexual abuse.

Any introduction to family violence must acknowledge the gendered nature of the problem. Men are responsible for the overwhelmingly majority of violent crime and family violence is no exception: especially in the area of intimate partner violence, men are much more likely than women to harm their partners.

How common is family violence?

Estimating the scope of family violence is very difficult, because the behaviors usually occur in private and are almost always stigmatized, illegal, and difficult to detect. Based on a review of a variety of sources, we conservatively estimate that currently in Ohio:

- 383,000 children under 18 have been abused or neglected;
- 1,540,000 people have been physically or sexually assaulted by an intimate partner;
- 61,000 elders have been abused or neglected.

And in the last year alone:

- 64,000 children were abused or neglected;
- 166,000 people were physically or sexually assaulted by an intimate partner;
- 29,000 elders were abused or neglected.

The estimates are easier to understand when considered in the context of other problems. Figure 1 presents the annual incidence of these

and other selected threats to Ohio families. We do not aim to imply that one threat is more important than another, only that family violence is just as common as other problems that receive much more attention. Moreover, the consequences of family violence can be just as enduring and harmful to Ohio's families.

What are the consequences?

Considerable research now links family violence to a surprisingly wide range of outcomes that persist throughout life. Children who experience abuse or neglect are more likely to start drinking and smoking as teenagers, and to be arrested as a juvenile. As adults, they are more likely to miss work, develop heart disease and obesity, and attempt suicide. Intimate partner violence also has well-documented effects on mental health, injury, chronic pain, gastrointestinal disorders and pregnancy outcomes such as low birth weight. Moreover, children who witness intimate partner violence are at greater risk for psychological, social and academic problems. These consequences are not evitable, as children can improve markedly if their home environment changes to one that is safe and stimulating. Too often, however, such changes fail to occur. Finally, an elder who experiences abuse or neglect may be three times as likely to die.

These consequences place a tremendous economic burden on Ohio. Interpolating findings from national studies, we estimate that child maltreatment and intimate partner violence alone cost Ohio over \$3.3 billion dollars annually. (No rigorous estimates are available for elder abuse.) One third of these costs (\$1.1 billion) are direct expenditures for services to victims (e.g., mental health counseling; medical treatment, foster care, battered women's shelters). The remaining costs are indirect --the value of things that are lost as a result of violence, such as the cost of finding a new home, needing to repeat a semester of college, or lost worker productivity. When family violence is fatal, it also includes lost lifetime earnings.

Can prevention work?

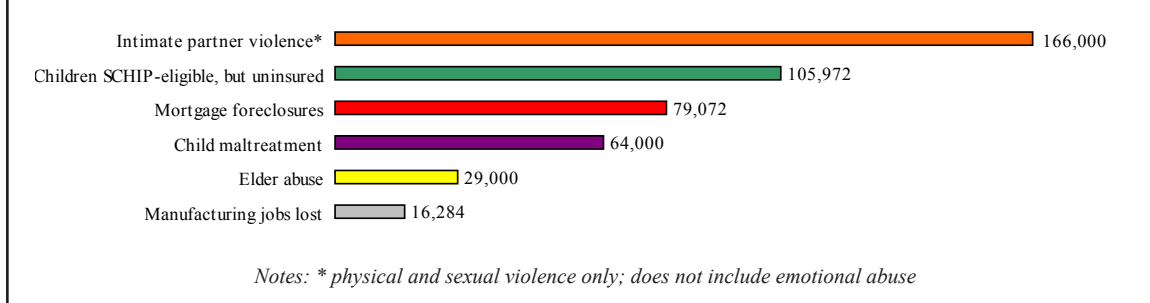
Most people recognize the logic of the saying: "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of

cure," yet prevention is only compelling when available approaches actually work. Fortunately, a large and growing body of research has identified several promising approaches to family violence prevention. The strength of the evidence varies according to the type of violence and the type of program, but much of the news is encouraging. Studies from three different cities, for example, found that nurses making regular, structured home visits to low-income first-time mothers may have prevented many cases of child maltreatment. Evidence for other types of programs is less consistent, but still promising. A summary of 27 studies of school-based child sexual abuse prevention concluded that such programs have a large effect on improving children's knowledge and skills. For intimate partner violence, carefully evaluated school-based programs in North Carolina and Ontario, Canada significantly reduced dating violence among teens for up to four years.

While these examples demonstrate that prevention can work, it is fair to ask, "At what cost?" Social programs can be expensive, so the expected benefits should outweigh the costs. The enormous, well-documented costs associated with family violence indicate that considerable investment in prevention may be worthwhile. Unfortunately, few economic studies have conducted cost-benefit analyses of family violence prevention. One important exception is the Nurse-Family Partnership, a home visitation program where nurses make regular, structured visits to low-income first-time mothers. Several analyses concluded that the program yields \$2.88 to \$5.68 in cost savings for every dollar invested. Preliminary findings from other approaches are also promising but formal economic analyses are still incomplete.

If we are optimistic about the potential for prevention to be effective and efficient, we also emphasize the need to have realistic expectations. Too often, enthusiasm for "evidence-based" approaches to social policy is followed by frustration and defensiveness when hoped-for results fail to materialize. For this reason, it is important to recognize the challenges of translating research findings into effective practice. Logistical, financial and political complications, for instance, often mean that the

Figure 1. Selected threats to Ohio families: Estimated annual incidence



version of a program used in practice differs from the one demonstrated to be effective in research. Examples include shortening school-based curricula from 10 to 7 sessions; inability to monitor whether practitioners are implementing a program fully; and inadequate evaluation designs that limit an agency's ability to demonstrate program effectiveness in practice. Another major challenge involves differences between who pays the costs of prevention versus who reaps the benefits. Even as the economic and social benefits of effective programs accrue, they often are spread across multiple agencies. As such, it is difficult for any single organization to justify funding a program on the grounds that it will recover those costs in reduced expenditures within their own budgets.

In summary, we know family violence prevention *can* work, but remain cautious in our assessment of whether it *will* work. Whereas Ohio has great cause to expand family violence prevention, such work must be accompanied by careful attention to the factors that influence its successful translation to practice and replication in the field.

Aren't we already doing enough?

Today in Ohio, most efforts to address family violence involve investigating suspected cases and – in the case of child maltreatment – providing services to victims. Very little funding supports services to victims of intimate partner violence or elder abuse, and even less is devoted to preventing any type of family violence before it occurs.

The focus on investigation is insufficient because each year the majority of cases simply never

come to the attention of authorities. Even among those cases that are identified, many victims do not receive services. Of the estimated 64,000 Ohio children who were maltreated in 2005, local child protective services were able to investigate, confirm, and provide services to only 20,003 victims (31%). For the 29,000 Ohio elders abused and neglected in 2007, only 2,175 (8%) actually received victims services. (The absence of a central reporting mechanism precludes our calculating such figures for intimate partner violence.) To be sure, investigating cases of family violence is a legally mandated and valuable function, and many Ohio agencies do an admirable job with the resources they have. Nonetheless, it is an insufficient approach to addressing the problem.

Current family violence prevention efforts in Ohio are scattered across numerous agencies and organizations and are supported by diverse, scarce and inconsistent funding sources. Our analysis of 2006 data from the Ohio Grantmakers Forum, for example, found 22 foundations providing 60 grants totaling \$1.4 million to address family violence, only part of which actually went to prevention. At the state level, different federal programs support efforts in the Departments of Aging, Health, Job and Family Services, and Public Safety (among others). As significant, however, are other programs that address risk factors for family violence, and thus help address the problem indirectly. Substance use treatment and parent education, for example, are popular throughout the state, yet rarely do these efforts explicitly consider or measure their effect on family violence. This represents a significant missed opportunity to expand and coordinate prevention efforts.

How can we improve family violence prevention in Ohio?

Family violence causes tremendous harm in Ohio, and our current efforts to address it are critical but insufficient. Nonetheless, encouraging research findings and the range of programs already addressing risk factors for family violence, suggest that improving family violence prevention is both promising and realistic. Efforts to improve prevention in Ohio should be guided by three broad principles:



Engage and coordinate multiple agencies

The isolation and decentralization that characterize many state-level responses to social problems are particularly true for family violence, where many programs focus on other, important outcomes and thus only address the issue incidentally. Working together will create new opportunities for innovative programming as well as new funding possibilities related to family violence prevention. Different state agencies, for example, might work together to select specific counties for implementing and carefully evaluating a range of the most promising approaches to family violence prevention.

Focus on communities and perpetrators, not just individuals and victims

Most prevention efforts address individual-level risk factors that influence victimization, such as increasing knowledge (e.g., how an elder can make herself less vulnerable to financial exploitation), changing beliefs (e.g., “abuse can happen to me”) and building skills (e.g., how to resolve conflicts without violence). Because family violence affects all segments of society, focusing on individuals alone is impractical given the enormous resources it would require to teach everyone. In contrast, community-level interventions aim to create social environments that reflect both an awareness of and lower tolerance for family violence. This broader focus also recognizes the need to direct efforts towards potential perpetrators, not just victims. Because perpetrators, not victims, are responsible for abusive behavior, prevention efforts must engage them as well.

Consider both research findings and practitioner feedback.

While the research evidence for family violence prevention is encouraging overall, it is often incomplete or inconclusive. Thus, improving work in this area will require a willingness to carefully and consistently engage with research. While many agencies already are adept at identifying promising programs, there is less understanding of the organizational factors that facilitate successful and sustainable replication of programs. While the translation of research to practice is an essential component of effective prevention, it is equally important that practice should inform research – that is, practitioners should help guide what types of research is funded. Soliciting feedback from front-line experts not only leads to valuable insights but is critical for any coordinated approach to prevention.

However convincing the rationale, improving family violence prevention in Ohio won’t just happen. To build momentum and focus attention, we have identified four specific recommendations. These are not the only things Ohio should be doing, nor do they completely reflect the principles already discussed. Instead, they represent some concrete approaches that research finds compelling and practitioners find realistic.

1. Increase the quality of Ohio’s home visitation programs.
2. Create school environments that promote healthy relationships.

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3. Support county-level demonstration projects of inter-agency elder abuse “I-Teams” to coordinate prevention, investigation, treatment services
 4. Expand training/awareness of elder abuse among banking professionals

The complete *White Paper* describes each of these in greater detail, although they represent only a few possible “next steps” towards our vision of coordinated, community-level prevention. Such work is our best hope for curtailing the harm of family violence; Ohio’s families deserve no less.

About This Paper

The White Paper on Improving Family Violence Prevention in Ohio is a project of the Ohio Family Violence Prevention Project Working Group, which is supported by the Health Policy Institute of Ohio with funding from the Anthem Foundation of Ohio.

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A Summary of the White Paper on Improving Family Violence Prevention in Ohio.

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About This Publication and the Health Policy Institute of Ohio

The *White Paper on Improving Family Violence Prevention in Ohio* is a project of the Ohio Family Violence Prevention Project, which is supported by the Health Policy Institute of Ohio with funding from the Anthem Foundation of Ohio.

The Health Policy Institute of Ohio is an independent, nonpartisan organization that forecasts health trends, analyzes key health issues, and communicates current research to Ohio policymakers, legislators, and other decision makers. The Institute also convenes discussions on important health issues for Ohio by bringing together representatives from various sectors with a keen interest in health matters, including policymakers, providers, employers, advocates, health plans, consumers, state agencies, and researchers.

Additional copies of *White Paper on Improving Family Violence Prevention in Ohio* are available by calling the Health Policy Institute of Ohio at 614-224-4950 or by visiting <http://www.healthpolicyohio.org>.



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