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Center on Fathers, Families, and Public Policy

Fatherhood Programs and Domestic Violence

Marguerite Roulet

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The Center on Fathers, Families and Public Policy is a national nonprofit policy organization that addresses the concerns of low-income families who receive federal and state assistance. Founded in 1995 as a policy arm of the Ford Foundation-supported Strengthening Fragile Families Initiative, the Center works with practitioners, researchers, and policy advocates throughout the country to promote the well-being of low-income men, their children, and their families. The Center provides technical assistance to direct service organizations, analysis of legislative and policy initiatives that affect low-income families, and advocacy for the creation of holistic laws that are supportive of all members of low-income families, whether or not they live together or are legally married.

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Fatherhood Programs and Domestic Violence

By Marguerite Roulet

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Fatherhood Programs and Domestic Violence

Introduction

MUCH recent work has noted a connection between poverty and the occurrence of violence against women. This research has found that women from poor households are at greater risk of experiencing violence than women from wealthier households and that violence is often a contributing factor to their continuing poverty. While several of the studies have made these findings based on survey research, Jody Raphael's *Saving Bernice* explores the connections more thoroughly as she chronicles one woman's experiences with violence and poverty and her struggles as she tries to change her situation. Raphael has much to say on poverty reduction programs and policies directed at girls and women. However, she concludes these arguments with the statement that "it doesn't look like it will be possible to eliminate women's poverty without doing something about the pressing needs of the other half of the equation: low-income men" (2000:150).

Over the past decade, even as public supports for men have been eliminated (e.g., the General Assistance Program), community-based programs have tried to fill this void to address the issue of men's poverty. The development of these programs throughout the country was in part supported by government interest in augmenting the earning potential of a segment of this population, namely noncustodial fathers. In these instances, the government's efforts are primarily directed at increasing the fathers' ability to pay child support, either to their children or to reimburse the government for prior assistance provided to their children. While the primary focus often remains child support (as evidenced by the frequent collaboration of the office of child support enforcement with programs and the increasingly mandatory nature of some programs), many programs (particularly those that are voluntary and community-based) try to support the fathers' relationships with their children and other family members and with members of their children's families.

These programs—of which there are only a few hundred throughout the country (see, for example, the National Practitioners Network for Fathers and Families for member organizations)—try to take a holistic approach to serving their clients,

addressing everything from their education and employment needs to their lack of such basic resources as housing, food, and clothing, their isolation from social institutions (other than institutions of enforcement), and their concerns about their social and familial relationships. In taking this approach, these programs are different from most other programs that serve men, which tend to be more specifically directed at one issue, such as training programs directed at securing or augmenting employment options or batterer intervention programs directed at changing abusive behavior in familial or other intimate relationships.

Within this context, one of the difficult issues confronting programs that work with fathers is how they can or should address domestic violence, particularly if the programs are actively supporting their clients' involvement with their children and other family members. While most fathers who avail themselves of these programs' services are not batterers, program representatives' experience and the aforementioned research indicate that the issue is of critical significance if programs are to serve fathers and families in healthy and holistic ways.

Since its inception CFFPP has been concerned about these issues. We have worked to support low-income fathers and the programs that serve them and to advocate for policies that meet their needs rather than undermining them. At the same time, we have been concerned that policies and practices we support not harm children or women. To this end, we have worked with women's policy advocates to recommend mutually supportive policies (see *Common Ground* series on paternity establishment and child support policy); have interviewed both noncustodial fathers and custodial mothers about their experiences with government support systems, paternity establishment, and child support (see *Negotiating the Child Support System* reports and forthcoming reports on interviews with custodial mothers); and have specifically discussed domestic violence with custodial mothers and included information about domestic violence in some of our legal question and answer handbooks (see *WI Custody & Access* handbook).

In addition, we have held meetings with domestic violence advocates, batterer program representatives, and fatherhood program representatives about how to address this issue on a programmatic level. This report represents some of the discussion from two such meetings, which were held in May 2001 and July 2002 in Madison, Wisconsin. These meetings did not exclusively address domestic violence, but rather focused on a variety of issues that fatherhood programs contend with regularly in providing services, including child support and paternity policy, federal public assistance policy (TANF), issues resulting from incarceration, barriers to securing housing, employment and education, and the effects of poverty and racism on the lives of the men they serve. Within this context, domestic violence

was acknowledged to be an issue that needs to be recognized and addressed alongside other issues of concern to fatherhood and men's programs.

Representatives from over 20 programs throughout the country, as well as batterer program representatives and domestic violence victim advocates, participated in the meetings, and the conversations were direct and open. Participants in the meetings did not come to specific or uniform conclusions on how programs should address this issue. Instead, they raised concerns, discussed divergent frames of reference on the matter, and began a conversation about domestic violence in poor communities and their potential role in helping reduce violence.

Prevalence of Domestic Violence

ONE issue that participants in both meetings agreed on was the significance of domestic violence in the US, and the importance of according it serious attention. As one participant pointed out:

> Domestic violence is an issue that has a tremendous level of magnitude in our society. If we look at police reports alone, there are four million of them . . . reported annually in the United States of America. In Wisconsin, there's 30,000 reports filed annually. Now, police reports . . . just tell such a fraction of the picture, because domestic violence and sexual assault are dramatically under-reported crimes.

Jody Raphael corroborates this in her work, *Saving Bernice*:

> National surveys estimate that domestic violence is a factor in approximately six percent of all U.S. households. During the past five years researchers have consistently found that 20 to 30 percent of women receiving welfare benefits are current victims of domestic violence, and approximately two-thirds are former victims. (2000:25)

Meeting participants who are practitioners in fatherhood programs concurred that they, too, view domestic violence as a significant issue for some of the clients they serve. One participant noted that, although many fathers who come to their program have not necessarily been referred to the program because of domestic violence, it is nonetheless an important issue for many. As he stated:

> [T]he guys that we have in our program that come court-ordered—under probation and all that—there's a flow that comes through. But there's a whole number of men that never get addressed in our fatherhood programs. They're not reported for domestic violence. But we know anger is an issue . . . So we get a lot of men in our fatherhood and our teen fatherhood program that, dealing with this issue of violence in relationships is a central issue.

However, even as meeting participants acknowledged the prevalence of domestic violence throughout the U.S. and the need to address it on a broad basis

(including through fatherhood and men's programs), they also acknowledged that historically it has been difficult for domestic violence victim advocates and fatherhood advocates to work together on this issue. Throughout the discussions, participants explored some of the reasons for the lack of collaboration, and identified ways in which they think such collaborations can be successful, particularly in the context of working with low-income, "fragile" communities in which both men and women have historically been, and continue to be, disenfranchised from the structures of power within society.

General Barriers To Collaboration

ONE of the issues raised as a barrier to collaborative work between fatherhood and men's groups and domestic violence groups has been the historical unwillingness of many sectors of U.S. society to acknowledge domestic violence as a widespread and serious problem. Not only have individuals minimized the prevalence of domestic violence, but the legal and court systems have frequently been unable or unwilling to protect women, even in the face of incontrovertible evidence of violence against them and their clear need for safety and protection. As one participant put it, "sometimes women only want [and] need safety, and the systems don't do what they need to do." Particularly if a batterer is in a socially privileged position, it can be difficult for women to receive protection from the state. As one domestic violence victim advocate stated:

> [D]isproportionately, arrest and prosecution in the area of domestic violence affects low-income people, much more so than it does high-income people or even middle-income people, despite the fact that we know that domestic violence is happening in all socioeconomic classes.

In contrast to low-income people of color, wealthy white individuals who commit domestic violence are more frequently able to avoid arrest and prosecution, to reduce sanctions, and to use the legal system to their advantage—for example, in seeking and being granted physical custody of their children.

The often-complicated nature of many individual situations further exacerbates the tendency to minimize or ignore abuse, since victims themselves may respond to their situations in seemingly contradictory ways. As one participant commented:

> [Domestic violence] is probably one of the most complicated issues. It is so multi-layered and multi-faceted, and . . . none of us can ever assume that what we are seeing or hearing from any of the participants truly reflects what is actually happening in that picture . . . An example of that is that in all my years of doing direct service with victims, I can tell you that practically every one of them saw that getting their abusive partner into some kind of program—whether it be coun-

> seling or something—to help that person understand the violence and the abuse, was like the primary goal stated of many victims. They didn't want their relationship to end, many of them. They loved this person . . . That was really a primary goal and many victims would state that to me. And then at different points in my work, I've worked with probation agents who would say, 'These victims are coming in here and they're screaming at me and saying he shouldn't be in this counseling program for abusive men. He's not an abusive man.' . . . So the probation agent gets a shot of something that probably is not what it seems, and probably what's happening is that coercion and control is happening and the abuser is saying to the victim 'I don't want to go to this counseling program; get me out of this counseling program,' and she goes to the probation agent and says 'he shouldn't be in this counseling program'. And the probation agent is thinking, 'What the heck's going on here? She's the victim and she's saying he shouldn't be in this program.' So you should always assume that things are not what they seem, and that's a really important element of the work we do . . . I spent almost nine years working at the local shelter program, where I got to, over those years of working with hundreds of battered women, there's some of them who you sort of see and work with year after year, and you get to know them quite well, and they are always saying things to me like 'None of the police take this seriously. The DA doesn't take this seriously. No one believes me. No one takes it seriously.' And then I went to work for the DA's office, and those same women would call me up and say ' . . . You know me. I wouldn't lie to you. This isn't happening. Y'all are blowing this out of proportion. This is no big deal.' And I sort of had to try and put two and two together and try and figure out that there's something more going on here than meets the eye.

'Police reports . . . just tell such a fraction of the picture, because domestic violence and sexual assault are dramatically under-reported crimes.'

In addition, numerous organizations and individuals in the U.S. continue to actively try to undermine and discredit victims' concerns and efforts and those of advocates who work on their behalf. As one advocate noted:

> The emergence of fathers' groups such as [those at the conference] is relatively new . . . compared to the fathers' rights groups, which mostly are middle- and upper-class white men who are concerned with money . . . and access [or visitation], and they have a tremendous amount of power. They are extremely vocal, and they attack domestic violence advocates at every turn.

Each of these issues has forced advocates to protect themselves and their constituents and have made collaboration between them and fatherhood and men's organizations complicated.

Given this context, it is often assumed that domestic violence victim advocates and fatherhood organizations necessarily have directly competing interests. Advocates, it is assumed, are anti-men and anti-fathers, while fatherhood organizations are viewed as wanting what one participant referred to as "fatherhood at

all costs, rather than healthy fatherhood." Participants noted that, while organizations exist that hold these positions, most organizations they work with view this issue in a more nuanced way.

As one participant noted:

> I think that what domestic violence groups typically do is to view fatherhood in the context of fathers' rights, because fathers' rights are the most vocal, and also give domestic violence the most difficult time . . . [T]he first thing that we wanted to do in [the article "Fatherhood and Domestic Violence"] was to explain the different intentions of the various fatherhood groups, and also to say that there are different groups that you can find common ground with and work on common efforts with.

In the same way that domestic violence organizations may view fatherhood organizations as representative of a single voice that seeks to undermine their efforts, participants suggested that fatherhood organizations can find it difficult to view advocates against domestic violence as supportive of fathers. As one stated:

> [O]ne of the things that I think is a common misperception about people like me who are sort of career domestic violence victim advocates, working to end domestic violence, is often that people perceive us as being anti-father. And that's sort of a hard thing . . . [W]e are not anti-father. We're anti-domestic violence. We want to end violence in the lives of families.

However, while participants pointed out that much of the apparent conflict derives from the inability to distinguish the different agendas and intentions of different groups, at the same time they acknowledged that the advocacy positions can seem contradictory, particularly in the context of a specific situation. So, for example, one participant stated:

> [M]ost victims I've worked with over the years said very clearly as the relationship was ending, 'I want out of this relationship, but I want him to have contact with my kids.' And what I heard from them very clearly is they wanted those contacts to happen in a way that was safe for them and in a way that was safe for their children, and that becomes, really, the primary goal. And it's at a point that it becomes not safe for them, or not safe for their kids, that that's when they start raising the red flags and saying, 'I don't want him in my kids' lives; I don't want him around my children.' And I think that that can be really a hard thing for people working with dads, to have the dads coming and saying, 'She doesn't want me to have access to my kids. She's not letting me have visitation.' . . . [A]ssisting victims in achieving safety in their lives is really . . . the number one issue for us, and that may sometimes be in conflict with the fatherhood folks.

Many participants acknowledged this difficulty, which they described as one of trying to reconcile the at times competing effort to "keep people's lives connected in that way that people so much want to have happen, but [to] build in safety at the same time."

Additional Barriers When Working In a Context of Oppression

In addition to the above-mentioned barriers to collaboration, participants identified specific issues that pose further challenges in working in low-income communities of color in which community and familial relations cannot be understood without consideration of societal oppression and racism. Given that the domestic violence movement has been deeply informed by the experiences of white, middle-class women, many of the practitioners working with low-income fathers of color have found that some of the interpretations of domestic violence should be reframed in accordance with the experiences of the particular communities with which one is working.

One of the clearest manifestations of this issue is the discrepancy in how the criminal enforcement and legal systems operate in regard to different communities and the impact this has on individuals who are differently positioned. So, for example, participants recognized the frequent failure of the legal system to protect women, and the ability of abusive men to use the courts to further their abuse. As one participant noted:

> Just from my own experience[:] . . . [W]ithin the [local city's] limits, there are two sort of wealthy areas . . . they're right in the city, but they're distinct little townships . . . ; they have their own police department. And in the six years I was the director of the domestic violence unit in the DA's office here, I think we saw one police report from [one of the townships] and exactly zero from [the other]. Yet we saw literally thousands from the rest of the city . . . and those two communities are very wealthy. And it's not that . . . I would ever imagine that domestic violence isn't happening there. But they're communities in which police officers . . . aren't making arrests for domestic violence, even if they go to households in those communities. We just don't see police reports.

Another participant concurred:

> . . . I see it in terms of how, if you're well-to-do, have some cash, and white, that what happens is that you get tickets, the police won't arrest you, or you get an attorney.

By contrast, participants argued, in low-income communities of color, the structure of oppression reconfigures the playing out of the legal provisions, which were initially established, as one participant noted, to address the disenfranchisement of European-American women and not that of African-American and other women, who "were disenfranchised in different ways." Thus, as he put it:

> [W]hen you look at the court system around domestic violence, too often what you see is black and brown people in the courtroom, because those are the people

> that get arrested and sent to jail often times. Not to say that the systems are strong enough, in terms of accountability, but that's the reality when you go from location to location. And I always say I don't have a problem with who's there. I have a problem with who's not there.

One participant described the implications of such different treatment and the impact it has not only on the individuals directly involved, but also on those who are related to and associated with them:

> I remember growing up when my uncle used to hit my aunt, and nobody would do nothing—right?—because nobody wanted to get sent to jail, and nobody [knew] what was the appropriate thing to do. And I remember my younger cousin—he's about a year younger than I am—he would run to my uncle with the broomstick—right?—and try to hit my uncle, and my uncle would turn around and hit him. But nobody ever wanted to do anything because they didn't want him to go to jail, because they didn't want to figure out how they were going to pay the rent. Why did Dad go to jail? Was he going to come back? Most importantly, what's going to happen when Dad comes back from jail? What's he going to do to Mom?

In addition to the different experiences with the criminal enforcement and legal systems, participants also suggested that the various forms of intervention, redress, and treatment in response to domestic violence are frequently inappropriate when applied to individuals in low-income communities who are contending with many other forms of oppression and marginalization.

One concern participants raised is that batterers' treatment programs frequently are narrowly focused and do not address other issues that affect people's lives. As one batterer program director suggested, "[W]ith the batterers' treatment programs, what needs to happen is there needs to be a component that teaches men how to be good fathers." In addition, he stressed:

> The other thing . . . is to integrate culture into it. . . . What [culturally competent programs] do is they, basically, understand . . . the whole context. Amos Wilson says, before you can end up talking about the violence that somebody does, you have to understand the victimization that they experience. But if you understand . . . the oppression that they experience, then they have to also take responsibility for the oppression that they do . . . The programs that we work with and that we write about and such, it's real important to deal with the issue of culture.

In addition to having too narrow a focus, participants suggested, many batterers' treatment programs, in conjunction with the court system, have developed interventions that have additional unintended resonance in oppressed communities. So, for example, even as he repeatedly underscored the need for separation in specific contexts, one participant argued that, used as the sole remedy, it has very different implications in some communities:

> Our philosophy is that, yes, the abuser uses violence to gain power and control in a relationship, through coercion, intimidation, and oppression. But basically black and brown men are within a system that uses violence to gain power and control in a relationship through coercion, intimidation, and oppression. [We must] deal with the social, historical legacy of oppression, of racism and how certain populations are targeted and labeled and only go to treatment, and are not necessarily healing . . . [O]ne of the things within the welfare reform/TANF law says 'you must go to a batterers' program.' But those programs have no sensitivity to your issues, and you are made to go to those programs. You'll not see your kids. You go to jail. That's power, that's control, that's coercion, it's intimidation. So if we're really attempting to deal with these issues, then there's some, first of all, a sensitivity that we must have to the whole aspect of relationships.

By contrast, he suggested:

> [T]he way that the society deals with it, is by doing time-out, isolating, 'let's treat these people' . . . And when you separate—and I understand separating for safety, because this is one of the things that is really important, and let me just say there are men that have generations of wounds, that the spirit is so damaged . . . and those men need programs and rehabilitation and even constant supervision, and some men never in this generation have the ability to be reunited with their families, because the wounds are multigenerational. But over 70% of the men will go back to the relationship and will be back in the relationship, . . . and the majority of them will have a relationship with their fathers. Knowing that, then what do we do with men? I believe you . . . don't separate the disease. So in every program that we have . . . it all deals with the sacredness of relationships.

'We must deal with the social, historical legacy of oppression, of racism and how certain populations are targeted and labeled and only go to treatment, and are not necessarily healing.'

Several other participants concurred with aspects of this statement, including the sense that current batterer treatment models are not sufficiently broad, that they isolate the behavior from other aspects of individuals' lives, and that they do not adequately account for, or address, the fact that many victims and batterers will continue to maintain a relationship over time. As one participant stated:

> [S]ometimes families want to work together and work it out. I mean, when you're working with communities of color, one of the things is that women want safety and protection. But sometimes what they want to do is they want to work it out . . . [L]et me say this, because I don't feel comfortable laying that out there without saying the other thing, but it's very difficult to tell when [an abusive relationship will become lethal]. So that's why this sense of protection is so important in the field, because you can't predict. You want to be able to protect everybody who's at risk. So when you're looking at the cases where it in fact occurs, you gotta find some way to be effective in protecting. But, that being said, there's a lot of people in the world where violence has been a situation and women have experienced those things, and the husband, or ex-husband, or

> boyfriend, the father of the child and the mother have worked it out, and have worked it out for years and years. There needs to be research to bring those cases up so we're informed about how did they manage to work that out.

Again, participants underscored the need for intervention programs to integrate the treatment of the violent behavior with an understanding of other relationships in batterers' lives:

> [One batterer intervention curriculum deals] specifically with fatherhood, reflecting over the impact of a man's growing up years and the influences of fathers in their lives, positively and negatively. But in addition, what it talks about is how to undo what they've done in terms of exposing kids to violence, looking at the impact of that behavior. But it also talks about developing a positive relationship with the—if the mother chooses and the court allows and all these other disclaimers, but if those things are met and there's an agreement that there's going to be this connection, association—what things they need to construct in terms of being an effective father . . . to their partner's children and/or to their biological children.

In considering the very definition of domestic violence, participants noted that some of the paradigms to understand dynamics of domestic violence may not fully encompass issues that need to be considered in communities contending with additional forms of oppression. Some of the participants discussed the sense of fear rather than power that permeates the lives of some men. As one participant stated:

> . . . I really believe that a lot of folk who are into that are motivated, not out of the definitions that you all have used, but out of fear. When a guy gets backed up into the corner and emotionally the woman is tearing his butt up, and he doesn't know how to respond, that ain't about trying to control nobody. It's about him being in absolute fear and not having a clue about what to do except what he has either seen in his home before, or he resorts to the violence out of fear, not out of an attempt to control anybody, because he's trying to control himself and having a hard time at that.

One participant responded by noting:

> There's a lot of fear all over, and the fear is very real. The fear of losing a relationship is at the core, and if you've come from multiple losses already, it's a trigger to so many things . . . Fear is a very critical issue that has to be dealt with.

As another participant noted, dealing with such issues is one means for batterers' treatment programs to become more effective:

> What happens in culturally competent batterers' treatment programs is similar to what happens in fatherhood programs, because what they deal with is the shift, in terms of what content you're focused on gets expanded in terms of dealing with the unemployment, dealing with substance abuse issues, dealing with other resource issues men have, but also dealing with the fact that there's comparable

violence in terms of male to male violence that occurs, and when you look at death rates, you have to add in acquaintance violence. You have to have some discussion about that because you can't be unifocused. You gotta be broader in terms of the way that you look at it. Now, let's deal with the issue of fear. For men who batter . . . often times the way that any emotion gets expressed is through anger. So what happens is that men have to learn how to expand. I mean, you hear them talk about it. You ask them what they feel, and they'll tell you what they think. You ask them what they feel, and primarily the emotion that they're able to tell you is anger. So what's important is . . . when you're talking about fear, people have to develop a level of skills to be able to identify the various emotions that they have, and one if they identify that as fear. I saw a man change. He gave up his physical abuse. But he also gave up his emotional abuse when he identified that the emotion he was feeling was not anger. It was sadness. But so what you do with the people that you're working with is you start to give them different skills to be able to express things, and not just tell you what they think, but also to tell you what emotion that they're feeling, and then to be able to get to a point where a person can articulate that his fear helps him to grow.

Considerations About Collaborations

It was in recognition of the need to address all of these issues that participants underscored the appropriateness and value of having fatherhood programs address domestic violence within the context of all of the other issues they address. As one participant pointed out:

> [W]hen you do talk about working with men that are in fragile communities and such, sometimes one of the things that you might hear is that groups have difficulty approaching the subject of domestic violence, because if they bring up the subject of domestic violence, what happens is the men are discouraged to be involved . . . [P]eople I can think of have had success bringing the subject of domestic violence up, because one of the things that I think is important is, if you have a trusting environment, then, as you've done, men expect you to be confronting and challenging with them, if they feel as though you're a resource . . . So if you could talk to them about substance abuse, then you can talk to them [about] unemployment. If you can talk to them about fatherhood, and being an able father and what responsibilities they have to their children, if you can talk to them and try to get them connected to employment, how come you can't talk to them about domestic violence? . . . Also I think sort of an implicit philosophy among some folks is if you look at domestic violence as a primary issue and you connect it sometimes to women's issues, then what happens is . . . you're [seen as] doing something to sort of backhand men, and I think we have to separate the issues, because one of the things that I have felt is the ethos of the fatherhood movement and activities is to create healthy environments and connections between children and their fathers. So the thing is that if you want to have a healthy environment . . . and if violence is a dysfunctional behavior, it's something that has to be approached.

Participants recognized the particular ability of fatherhood programs to undertake this work, given their often unique position and ability to understand the individual situations and social contexts of the men with whom they work; address the multitude of issues that are affecting their clients' lives; serve as a personal and community resource they can continue to rely on over time; work in ways that are culturally appropriate and sensitive to the particular community context; and ultimately provide an environment in which their clients can find peer support. As one participant commented:

> One of the things . . . I've learned in terms of looking at fragile families and the intersection of domestic violence and fragile communities, is the fact that the best way to do the work is when you have broad programs that deal with a number of issues, and as people have needs and come through that system, what they're able to do is do an assessment, figure out what they need, and direct them to different places, like what you all do. And the thing that I think is that domestic violence has to be added to that, because people's lives would be saved.

Another participant stated:

> When you isolate people, with your thinking you'll destroy your spirit. So that's why we need to make sure we have this inter-connectedness, where people are able to share . . . I can see people and say 'Man, you pissed off.' 'No, I'm not.' 'Yes, I can tell you are. We don't need to do a psychological assessment to tell us something's wrong with you.' But we have young men that say, 'No one ever asked me how I'm doing today. I don't have a dad. I don't have a uncle. I don't have nobody that asks me. The only time they ask me is when I get in trouble, when the thing has happened.' So with this young man, if there had been someone in his life to say and to know . . . 'I need to stay with you. I can't leave you alone.' I mean, and to say, 'You're thinking about doing something wrong, aren't you? I know what you're thinking because I've done that' and to go there, walk them through, 'You can't do that. Let me tell you why you can't do that: because if you're thinking about you're going to be away from your kids, now you're really going to be away . . . ' I mean, all of that, and to have somebody that can walk through that—that's critical, that aspect of having a place to go. And I always talk about the porch, that there used to be a time when there was a porch, where you always knew if you went to the porch, somebody was there. We need to recreate the porches, so that there's always someplace to go, that you don't need a funding source or a scope of work or treatment plan. Just show up on the porch.

However, participants were also quick to note that this effort to confront issues of domestic violence in fatherhood programs cannot be undertaken without careful consideration. As one participant noted:

> [T]his issue of domestic violence is a critical thing, and there are some men that have generations of wounds. We need to make sure that we are aware of all the idiosyncrasies and don't take it lightly, because sometimes in wanting to be a friend or a partner . . . we can downplay things. Sometimes . . . some of the peo-

> ple are so wounded that really sometimes they need real drastic measures, and so we should also take that other side into deep consideration.

Several participants suggested that, given the seriousness of the issue and the potential danger for individuals involved, the severe penalties imposed by the criminal justice system, and the implications for programs if they intervene inappropriately or ineffectively, it is dangerous for fatherhood programs to attempt to address this issue. One representative from a fatherhood program indicated that, in part due to these considerations, his program refused to accept men if they are known to have committed violence:

> [W]e knew we did not have in place the services needed to meet that need, and it just didn't make sense to try and attempt to build that into a brand-new program that we were already starting to get up and running, because we just didn't know how to do it. The second thing was, as a philosophical position, we thought, if we're building . . . a program where we're trying to establish guys' relationships with their children in the most positive light, there's no way to do that if there is a history of physical or mental abuse. So we just didn't think that it was the best way to get a program up and running if that was a major hurdle that we had to overcome.

Several other participants concurred with the need to, on the one hand, do no harm to individuals and families and, on the other, protect programs that are providing much-needed services to low-income fathers. Some participants worried that if they did not support fathers—even those known to be abusive or violent—these men would have no other system of support available to them:

> [Yo]u do have to start somewhere to build a foundation and stick with what you believe in . . . But at the same time, people keep turning their backs on fathers and things of that nature, who are they gonna be able to turn to? [They're] gonna say, nobody's out here is gonna help me. So why should I change? Why should I take part in my child's life, which, first of all, the system is on me for child support and stuff like that? I owe $10,000, and I only got ten cents in my pocket, and I can't get anybody to actually open their doors up for me to say, 'hey, come on, we're gonna take you in. We're gonna start this process.'

'If you want to have a healthy environment . . . and if violence is a dysfunctional behavior, it's something that has to be approached.'

Several participants underscored that it is precisely for these reasons that the programs must consider ways in which they can contend with this issue. For example, some participants agreed with the idea that programs might not be in a position to confront domestic violence within the context of their own work, but that they can develop relationships with other agencies and individuals who can address this. Again, however, participants stressed the need to develop links with

agencies or individuals that can recognize the situations of the clients they are working with. As one participant put it:

> Most people don't like being sent all over the place and they get offended by that or they just don't want to deal with it. The bureaucracy takes us through a number of changes, so when we run into an agency that says they handle this, they can help you with this, for the most part, most people expect it to be . . . a one-stop shop . . . But when you tell someone up-front you've got a list of agencies that you know do the work, and you're in relationship with them, then that referral is very good, and you've won the confidence of that individual. But they are more likely to make that trip when you tell them up-front, 'listen . . . we don't deal with this issue. But I do know an organization and I know that they'll help you out' and refer them, then they're more likely to follow up.

In addition, practitioners again stressed the importance of addressing the issue comprehensively and holistically:

> You're going to [have to] address [it] by addressing the whole family . . . I've seen agencies where all they do is help the mother out, get the kids out of trouble, and leave the man alone, and the man's back out there looking for another victim and beginning the cycle and continuing the cycle and worse.

Mainly, however, participants argued that the issue needs to be addressed because it is a critical issue in the lives of the clients they serve—both in terms of the implications of the current criminal justice model of addressing it and in terms of the safety and health of individuals and families:

> Domestic violence has always been in my heart. [M]y mom died, got beat up by her boyfriend. I saw it done. That's why I'm in it . . . [I]f you leave it alone, they're going to come back to you when it's a big mountain, and it might be too late, because the domestic violence nowadays is considered like a felony, and that they look at it as a felony. It's on your record, you're treated worse, and it's very—it affects the soul . . . It affects that woman very dearly and affects the kids that grew up. The kids do grow up to be violent, or they grow up to be haters, or they grow up to be whatever. But it affects the whole family, and if we don't touch on it every time, if it doesn't become part of your program, it needs to. If it's not there, it needs to, and maybe just a little touch, and maybe not every touch. But you do need to address it, because it's happening all over—happening with your neighbors. You'll call the police on your neighbors when the music is loud. Are you gonna call the police if you hear the girl screaming? You know? But we need to really get involved in it in more ways than one . . . I grew up thinking that what happened to my mother was her fault. It was her fault. She shouldn't have did whatever to him, and she wouldn't be dead now, and I thought that all the way until I was about 25, 26, 27 years old. I'm 37.

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Resources

• Building Comprehensive Solutions to Domestic Violence: a Collaborative Project of the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, University of Iowa School of Social Work, and Greater Hartford Legal Assistance—a series of policy and practice papers

• Connecticut's Evolve Program: a 26 and 52 week culturally competent, broad based, skill building, psycho-educational curriculum for male domestic violence offenders with female victims, by Denise Donnelly, Fernando Mederos, David Nyquist, Oliver Williams, and Sarah Wilson. State of Connecticut Judicial Branch, June 2000

• Men of Color Fatherhood Education and Violence Prevention Project, a joint project of the Domestic Violence Program and the Father-Friendly Initiative of the Boston Public Health Commission

• National Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community

• National Latino Family and Fatherhood Institute

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