

National *Academic Centers of Excellence* on Youth Violence Prevention

Harvard Youth Violence Prevention Center

History

The Academic Centers of Excellence (ACEs) were established soon after the tragedy at Columbine High School. Each ACE works with the communities it serves to encourage participation and partnership, mobilizing residents and researchers to craft effective solutions for violence prevention tailored to their specific community. ACEs research youth violence prevention approaches, collect and analyze surveillance data, and foster relationships with local community partners to help develop, implement, and evaluate promising prevention efforts.

Since 2000, the Harvard Youth Violence Prevention Center (HYVPC) has worked diligently to assess rates of youth violence throughout metropolitan Boston. Thanks to a multidisciplinary staff and collaboration with numerous community-based organizations and public service institutions, the Center is able to monitor youth violence trends. HYVPC can then share this information with residents, neighborhood groups, peer researchers, and City officials and identify areas of interest for future violence prevention research. Through community collaboration and training, HYVPC's efforts cultivate the local community's capacity to respond to youth violence and other public health issues.

Surveillance

The core surveillance effort for HYVPC is the Boston Data Project. This technically rich surveillance tool, along with Boston-area neighborhood and Emergency Department data, measures the attitudes and experiences of youths and adults. Data from this surveillance system are used to determine individual and community risk and resiliency factors, to track the changing needs of Boston's youth and communities, to develop evidence-based prevention programs and track their effectiveness, and to evaluate the impact of city and community policies on youth violence and well-being. The Boston Data Project provides researchers, city leaders, and others with data-based policy planning tools for developing and evaluating youth violence interventions and increasing neighborhoods' capacity to respond to and enhance healthy youth development. HYVPC hopes to make long-term impacts for many local youth residents through its partnership with the Boston Public Health Commission, through data sharing, and through community collaboration.

Research

Findings from the Boston Data Project are primed to be used by HYVPC for further research and analysis. The Center uses sophisticated Geographic Information System (GIS) software to map city characteristics and integrate data on youth violence trends and public initiatives in order to measure the impacts of policy on factors leading to youth violence. Researchers at HYVPC anticipate similar analyses that will assist in the implementation and evaluation of future prevention research projects.

HYVPC is also involved in a research project that involves linking survey and census data. Results from a recent survey of young adult males aged 18–24 were combined with geographically mapped neighborhood data to examine the association between different types of violence, including peer violence, intimate partner violence, sexual violence, and suicide. These results may prove useful to the understanding of the multiple factors that can contribute to an individual's risk for perpetrating different types of violence.

Training

HYVPC offers many educational and career development opportunities for students, junior faculty, health professionals, and community residents. Students at the Harvard School of Public Health can enroll in courses that integrate findings from Center research. Doctoral student internships and post-doctoral fellowships then provide the next generation of violence researchers

the foundation for future prevention research success. A bimonthly seminar series also keeps Center researchers current with the work of other colleagues in the field. HYVPC researchers also have developed videotaped presentations and have published manuals to teach clinical health professionals to recognize and prevent the deleterious effects of youth violence and child abuse. These resources, available through the American Academy of Pediatrics, are suitable for sharing with parents.

Community Mobilization

HYVPC's extended partnership with numerous grassroots community organizations, local hospitals, community associations, and local government help to facilitate the Center's goal of increasing social capital in individual communities. The Center provides community members with training in an asset-based approach to community development and works with Center partners to create neighborhood and city-wide community action plans to reduce violence. HYVPC surveillance data are available to community organizations, and the Center provides training and technical assistance for groups wishing to use this information. Furthermore, HYVPC awards mini-grants to local organizations working to prevent youth violence or promote healthy and safe youth development. This mobilized network is then empowered to respond to other public health concerns impacting their neighborhoods.

For more information, please contact:

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