

# Looking Back and Moving Forward





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### *Closing Session of the Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community*

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William Riley, Administration for Children and Families, Project Officer of the Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community, opened the final session of the Institute by briefly thanking all presenters, respondents, and participants for their attendance and contributions to the Institute. He acknowledged the obvious passion that the attendees have for their work. Reflecting on his 34 years of service, he recalled only one other time when he had participated in a forum in which there were so many esteemed African American scholars.

He came to the event hoping for responses on the utility of holding such a forum and hoped to gain insight into possible influence on other agendas and research policy. He recognized that an initial session would not resolve every question, but he remained optimistic that the Institute was a start in the right direction.

He concluded that he would leave the Institute with a greater understanding of domestic violence. He acknowledged that the Family Violence and Prevention Services Program of the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) could not function effectively unless federal employees understood the full scope of violence issues. He noted that he would be leaving the first session of the Institute with a better sense of current research and practice limitations, as

well as a better understanding of the efforts that will be required to reduce and prevent domestic violence. He commended the mixture of researchers, practitioners, and observers of domestic violence present at the Institute and urged participants to be mindful of ways to continue the collaborative effort.

Riley encouraged the group to include the role of the community in its discussions, recognizing that energy and resources of various communities could be used in combating and deterring violence among African Americans. He closed by stating that the Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community had been worthwhile and then invited Shelia Hankins–Jarrett to give her comments.

### **Statements of Celebration**

*Shelia Hankins–Jarrett prepared a statement of reflection, understanding, lessons learned, and celebration. The statement served to ensure that participants acknowledged events relative to the Institute, as well as the success of the conference.*

Two years prior to the Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community, various researchers and practitioners met for a meeting in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. A number of the participants established relationships and maintained correspondence. Each had individually conceived of an event resembling the Institute. With enthusiasm and enlightenment the group cooperatively developed a plan to assemble a steering committee for the Institute on Domestic Violence. The culmination of their efforts was this forum in Minnesota.

Shelia Hankins–Jarrett celebrated knowing individuals who would provide help and support. She challenged Institute attendees to step forward continually as African Americans to dispel negative stereotypes, achieve great things, and move forth.

Ms. Jarrett then invited other participants to share their personal statements:

- Tony Whitehead celebrated the Institute as a combatant against the struggle he encounters on his battlefield, the university. He explained that dealing with the development of young people and getting a particular agenda together within a university environment is sometimes

very difficult. Therefore, he had been slow in developing certain relationships within the academic arena. He concluded that becoming a part of a network like the Institute, outside a scholastic setting, could be very conducive to getting agendas relating to African Americans together.

- Beth Richie identified with Dr. Whitehead’s struggles within a university setting. She called herself an “activist,” because she often stands in opposition to the hierarchical, patriarchal organization of academics. Part of the struggle, she deduced, stems from trying not to become marginalized while attempting to study marginalized groups. So she celebrated being appreciated for doing work that she loves to do and having been given the privilege to participate in the Institute.
- Joyce Thomas also celebrated being a part of the Institute. Having been in many arenas where institutions and organizations have been predominately mainstream, she considered attending the Institute a great experience. In her opinion, the issues of child abuse and domestic violence, have been separated, both programmatically and professionally. She appreciated, however, that discussions on domestic violence at the Institute included situations of spouse abuse, child abuse, and elder abuse.
- Oliver Williams celebrated the opportunity to connect with other professionals in the field and break the isolation commonly found in research and practice surrounding domestic violence. He noted the big focus on healing during the Institute—healing the community. Participants seemed to agree that the issue of healing is not often found in mainstream presentations or programs that address violence. He applauded the work of the National Resource Center, which collects information and research regarding African Americans and ensures that voices of African American researchers and practitioners are heard.
- Antonia Drew shared her experiences of isolation from the perspective of a service provider. She noted that mainstream agencies receive funding based on the number of African Americans they serve. The services of these agencies, however, are often inadequate for the African American clientele they serve, but formulation of African American agencies is discouraged because they increase the competition for funding. Drew, therefore, celebrated the formation of the Institute, as a vehicle to support African American agencies and community based organizations.

- A representative of the National Resource Center, Nita Carter, agreed with Drew's comments. She reiterated the difficulty and importance of decreasing the isolation of African American practitioners and researchers doing work relating to domestic violence. She agreed that current knowledge and expertise must be disseminated to a broad group of people, and noted receiving daily calls requesting information from individuals who must justify implementing a program for African American women and men. Carter suggested that while research is needed, so is curricula. While admitting that there are unanswered questions regarding domestic violence, she celebrated the potential of the Institute as a tool in providing direction and guidance to program development.
- On behalf of the Minnesota African American Women on the Move and the City of Minneapolis, Barbara Rogers welcomed participants of the Institute and offered to support their efforts.

### **Themes of the Institute**

*Robert Hampton opened the floor for participants to reflect on the substance of the preceding day's discussions. He began the dialogue by identifying several cross-cutting themes that emerged from the conference:*

- *The Need for Knowledge*

Conference attendees were exposed to knowledge, ideas, research, data, and new perspectives but, given the vast nature of the issue of domestic violence, the need for more knowledge was apparent.

- *The Intersection of Race, Class, and Gender*

Prevalent throughout discussions, ranging from gender entrapment, to cultural competency, to male violence, was the intersection of race, class, and gender, and how it affects the actions and responses of individuals, groups, and institutions.

- *The Notion of Context*

Participants talked about a historical context, as well as an environmental or ecological context. Participants also addressed context in terms of process and communication and symbolic messages and symbols.

- *The Bridge between Research and Practice*

Practitioners disclosed how research findings translate in practice. They also discussed issues of denial and resistance, recidivism, and other concerns, and how theories may not adequately address these realities. There seemed to be a consensus among participants that the forum setting had been a successful vehicle in transferring knowledge between researchers and practitioners.

Additional themes included:

- *The Macro and Micro Aspects of Domestic Violence*

The recognition of macro and micro aspects of the problem of domestic violence was offered as an additional theme. It was suggested that these issues could be examined specifically, but they also had implications in a larger pool.

- *Examining Turning Points*

The need to pay more attention to turning points in the lives of victims and abusers, as well as the importance of examining families that “work,” was discussed. It was noted that there were differences between women who experience a single or minimal episode of violence and extract themselves from those relationships and situations, and those who are battered over an extended period of time. Research needs to examine the “good boys” in the highly violent neighborhoods. The strengths of families in these neighborhoods, who protect their children and rear them in ways so they do not succumb to drug addiction, drug trafficking, gang participation, also needs to be addressed. Researchers should also pay attention to the processes of violence.

### **Issues of Concern**

*Following the recognition of themes of the Institute, participants engaged in various discussions on the issue of domestic violence that were a concern to African Americans. Those topics included translation and effective distribution of research findings, evaluation research, the role and implications of gender, and the importance of credentials in bringing forth recognition and validity of work by African Americans.*

### ***Translating and Distributing Research Findings***

Both researchers and practitioners expressed the concern about taking information from research and/or from practice and translating and disseminating it in ways which help community-based organizations to do front line work. The question of packaging this information and experience, in such a way as to train individuals, churches, and community groups to implement front-line primary or secondary interventions was posed.

Richie admitted that, as a researcher, she is sometimes isolated from the community, especially the service provider community, even though she continues to provide services. The balance of being a researcher and a service provider can be difficult to maintain. The reality is often that researchers conduct studies and practitioners provide services. Producing more research practitioners was seen as a priority. The hiring of researchers, as full time or part time staff at community-based or service agencies, was also seen as important in helping the researcher/practitioner interface.

Another option provided to help the interface was encouraging graduate students to thesis and doctoral research at community based agencies. Again, the question of incentives to translate research into practice was raised.

*The discussion then moved to dialogue about ways to triangulate different types of research methods, as well as the triangulation of approaches and practice. The training component was also heavily emphasized.*

Universities often encourage students to participate in research studies, yet the results from these studies are often relevant only to that particular university or demographic group of students. The need for more participation among scholars, professionals, and community based organizations in the African American community was deemed essential to implement policies, strategies, and tactics to reduce or end violence.

The problems faced by many practitioners in trying to conduct research on limited amounts of revenue, and not having the time to collaborate or get the technical assistance from universities, were acknowledged. The need for African American organizations to be empowered and to collaborate to bring forth better outcomes for the clients they serve was stressed.

### ***Evaluation Research***

The question of evaluation research generated much discussion. Many requests for proposals (RFPs) stipulate that, to reduce the risk of bias, programs be evaluated by an external program evaluator. Evaluators are not always readily available however, and can sometimes further alienate community based organizations.

Many participants agreed that some mechanism must be in place to evaluate the effectiveness of batterers programs that have been organized, run, and modeled after White male interaction.

Effective evaluation should occur throughout the duration of the program. It is very difficult to evaluate a program when the evaluator comes in at the end. Evaluation and research aspects, in terms of the control studies, have implications for practice, decision-making, and policy that cannot be separated. The suggestion was made that researchers, practitioners, and evaluators be accountable to themselves, their work, and the people they represent. Recognizing that information on African Americans is often decontextualized and distorted, practitioners and researchers must be careful of information they put out in the media and in publications, to ensure they do not to revictimize themselves in their words.

### *The Role of Gender*

The concept of gender as a component in the assessment of violence was discussed. Gender violence was discussed in terms of battered women, gang violence, child abuse, and the different ways African American children witness violence. Participants explored the implications of adhering to rigid gender roles and nuclear family arrangements. Participants also discussed the component of “compulsive heterosexuality” as it relates to gender violence. The *compulsory* element suggests that an individual does visible acts to prove sexual orientation.

Also discussed were the difficulties in treating gays and lesbians in group therapy, the difficulty of clinicians in relating to the lifestyle of homosexuals, and the use of gender slurs among heterosexual clients.

It was clear that the issues concerning gender and gender entrapment were prevalent in the treatment of domestic violence perpetrators and victims. Research involving gender was seen as a fertile area because of the lack of criterion standards or approaches towards addressing

it.

### *The Need for Credentials*

The question of creating functional organizations led by African American men and women was posed. Leadership from these organizations is already expected, but African Americans must have the necessary skills to help them accomplish their mission and goals through empowerment.

Strengthening linkages within and outside the community includes the need for African Americans to receive tenure and promotion and have references who can vouch for their work. It was noted that some excellent practitioners are not board certified and are being pushed out of clinical, and managed care because they lack credentials.

## **The Next Step**

*Participants of the Institute on Domestic Violence addressed the question: “Where does the Institute go from here?”*

The following suggestions were made on future roles for the Institute on Domestic Violence:

- A resource to distribute funding and solicit RFPs.
- A consortium utilizing multi-disciplinary, multi-method approaches to end domestic violence.
- A training academy that would provide continuing education and services.
- A periodic event convening researchers, practitioners, and interested individuals on regional and national levels.
- An organization to maintain resources, contacts, and knowledge and to coordinate events concerning domestic violence in the African American community.
- A clearinghouse to disseminate culturally relevant information, literature, and curricula that meet a basic criteria.
- An organization that evaluates programs.
- An agency that develops products to reduce the isolation felt by many practitioners.
- A broader networking group.

The following individuals were nominated to design a framework and plan for the Institute: Joyce Thomas, Robert Pierce, and Tony Whitehead.

Joyce Thomas agreed to draft, with the assistance of conference attendees, several options of how the Institute might continue. Tony Whitehead volunteered to help by providing insight on structuring the organization. Robert Pierce and Beth Richie volunteered to evaluate the structure and organization of the plan and provide suggestions. Shelia Hankins-Jarrett agreed to provide research, documentation, and existing models to provide assistance in developing the plan.

Wilbert Murrell also offered his services.

The Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community closed with a plea to participants to continue networking and maintaining contact on a formal and informal basis. Such networking will help the group accomplish the common goals of creating change and ending violence in the African American community.