Preventing Violence in Low-Income Communities: Facilitating Residents' Ability to Intervene in Neighborhood Problems

Mary L. Ohmer
Georgia State University

Barbara D. Warner
Georgia State University

Elizabeth Beck
Georgia State University

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MARY L. OHMER

School of Social Work
Georgia State University

BARBARA D. WARNER

Criminal Justice
Georgia State University

ELIZABETH BECK

School of Social Work
Georgia State University

The violence found in low-income communities, including areas of concentrated poverty, is often extensive and can involve illegal drugs, juvenile delinquency, and even homicide. A large body of research has emerged which points to the positive effects of informal social control and social capital in preventing violence in low-income communities, including neighbors taking leadership roles by intervening themselves. This article contains a description of an exploratory study of a pilot training program the authors developed to facilitate residents' ability to intervene in neighborhood problems in a low-income community in Atlanta, Georgia. The training incorporated concepts from restorative justice, peacemaking criminology, and macro social work, particularly consensus organizing. The results demonstrated that after their participation in the training, residents were more likely to intervene in a variety of neighborhood problems and were more likely to use direct, non-violent and peaceful intervention strategies. Participants also improved their attitudes

about intervening, feeling it was appropriate to intervene and their neighborhood was safer if residents intervened in problem behaviors. This article provides an important step in exploring the development of informal social control and social capital in low-income neighborhoods. Moreover, the strategies used in the training program can be used by social workers to design programs to prevent violence.

Key words: *violence prevention, informal social control, social capital, collective efficacy, restorative justice, consensus organizing*

The violence found in low-income communities, including areas of concentrated poverty, is often extensive and can involve illegal drugs, juvenile delinquency, and even homicide. While violence can have devastating effects on individuals and society as a whole, there is now a well respected body of research demonstrating that communities have the capacity to halt its development. Specifically, informal social control, conceptualized as neighbors taking action or intervening in neighborhood problems and inappropriate behaviors, has been shown to reduce crime, violence and delinquency in low-income neighborhoods (Elliott et al., 1996; Morenoff, Sampson, & Raudenbush, 2001; Sampson & Groves, 1989; Sampson, Morenoff, & Gannon-Rowley, 2002; Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997). Moreover, scholars argue that the combination of informal social control with social capital is important in addressing violence. However, much of the knowledge regarding the importance of informal social control and the factors associated with its development has not been transferred back to communities in ways that residents can use to address problems of violence. Further, it is not known whether there is capacity to develop informal social control in the types of neighborhoods where it is most needed.

This article provides an important step in exploring the development of social capital and informal social control in low-income neighborhoods. The article contains a description of an exploratory study of a pilot training program the authors developed in order to facilitate the development of informal social control as well as social capital in a low-income community. Findings are presented from the program illustrating residents' attitudes about intervening in neighborhood problems, including inappropriate behaviors, and perceptions of their

likelihood and confidence in intervening in a variety of hypothetical problem neighborhood behaviors before and after their involvement in the training program.

Background and Literature Review

Recent community-level studies of crime and violence, emanating from Shaw and McKay's (1942/1969) social disorganization theory, have consistently pointed to the positive effects of informal social control and social capital in addressing violence. Social capital has also been viewed as a prerequisite to informal social control. Coleman (1988) defines social capital as the "relations among persons that facilitate productive activity" (p. 100). Informal social control refers to "the development, observance and enforcement of local norms for appropriate public behavior" (Greenberg, Rohe, & Williams, 1982, p. 80). Behaviors included within informal social control include supervising public behaviors, intervening in inappropriate behaviors and administering rewards and informal sanctions (or threats of informal sanctions) for behaviors. Informally controlling inappropriate community behaviors has been linked to the reduction of crime and violence within neighborhoods (Elliott, et al., 1996; Morenoff, et al., 2001; Sampson, et al., 2002; Sampson et al., 1997; Sampson & Groves, 1989).

Putnam (2000) expands on Coleman's (1988) definition of social capital by distinguishing between two types of social capital: bonding and bridging. Bonding social capital includes social ties and social cohesion among residents, and encompasses the notion of dense social networks among small groups of people that bring them closer together. It accumulates in the daily lives of families and individuals living in communities through the course of informal interactions and includes social networks, trust, norms, and values. It is these interactions and the resultant capital that support residents' willingness to directly intervene in inappropriate neighborhood behaviors. Alternatively, social ties between neighborhood residents and both individuals and organizations outside of the neighborhood are central to Putnam's notion of bridging social capital. Bridging social capital refers to more loosely connected

networks of large numbers of individuals typically linked through indirect ties (Putnam, 2000). It connects neighborhoods and people to others, across diverse social groups and/or localities. Bridging social capital includes connections to institutions that facilitate more traditional indirect intervention strategies, such as relying on the police and social services. Through social ties norms are acknowledged and reinforced, connections to external resources are developed, and an awareness of our responsibility to others is sharpened. As Putnam reminds us, social ties widen "our awareness of the many ways in which our fates are linked" (pp. 288-289).

Given the significance of social ties in supporting residents' ability and desire to perform these tasks, it is not surprising that social capital has been found to be foundational to social control. This relationship has been born out in research demonstrating a connection between social capital and a higher likelihood of informal social control among neighborhood residents (e.g., Elliott, et al., 1996; Greenberg, et al., 1982; Sampson, et al., 1997; Warner, 2003). Contemporary social disorganization theory argues that neighborhood structural factors, such as concentrated disadvantage and residential mobility, create a deficit of social capital that inhibits the manifestation of informal social control. Communities that are disadvantaged and have high levels of residential mobility provide a weaker context to transmit informal sanctions or social control derived from the community itself (Bellair, 1997; Bursik & Grasmick, 1993; Sampson, et al., 1997; Sampson & Groves, 1989; Warner, 2003; Warner, Wilcox, & Rountree, 1997).

Within social disorganization theory, informal social control has been conceptualized in primarily two ways: informal surveillance (i.e., guardianship) and direct intervention. Informal surveillance or indirect intervention refers to "the casual but active observation of neighborhood streets that is engaged in by individuals during the course of daily activities. It includes recognizing and paying careful attention to strangers in the neighborhood and keeping an eye on neighbors' homes and property" (Greenberg, et al., 1982, p. 9). Informal surveillance presumably increases the likelihood that formal authorities, such as the police or social services, will be contacted in the event of deviant behavior and that residents will

be able to identify wrongdoers once formal authorities are involved. However, calling the police or social services may not be a viable response to problems in some neighborhoods. For example, neighborhoods with a long history of negative relationships with the police may be unwilling to work with the police. In such neighborhoods, community policing programs have had difficulty in getting residents to participate, due in part to the community's history of political and economic disinvestment, estrangement from and/or tension with law enforcement, and residents' skepticism and or fear about working with the police (Grinc, 1994; Rosenbaum, 1987).

Direct intervention, on the other hand, involves residents themselves, "questioning both strangers and residents of the neighborhood about suspicious activities. It may also include chastening people for certain behavior and admonishing children" (Greenberg, et al., 1982, p. 10). Greenberg et al. suggest that direct informal social control "should be particularly effective in conveying an image of a cohesive and well regulated neighborhood" and should help to "establish social norms for the area" (p. 10).

This direct form of informal social control by residents has been viewed as an essential part of a democratic society. As Clear and Karp (1999) have pointed out, "citizens in a democracy must actively work toward the welfare of the whole society and not just look out for themselves. Thus, citizens are morally obligated to fulfill whatever tasks are necessary to sustain a good society. Failures in public safety are at least partially the result of citizens' shared assumption that the responsibility for public safety belongs entirely to the criminal justice system" (p. 32).

Paralleling the criminological awareness of the importance of social capital and informal social control for preventing crime and violence, community-based social work strategies emerged which sought to build social capital by enhancing citizen participation and building the capacity of residents to address problems in poor disadvantaged communities (Johnson, 1998; Schorr, 1997; Weil, 1996). These interventions are grounded in theories associated with social capital and include community capacity, asset building and community organizing. In particular, there has been a renewed interest

in community-based strategies to address youth violence (see Andres-Hyman, Forrester, Achara-Abrahams, Lauricella, & Rowe, 2007; Bowen, Gwiasda, & Brown, 2004). These strategies moved beyond changing individual behaviors to affecting the environmental context associated with youth violence, including such risk factors as poverty and social isolation, as well as problems related to the accessibility of weapons and drugs, low social capital, and high social disorganization. Rather than focusing on punitive responses to youth violence, youth themselves have been engaged in developing solutions, including soliciting their views and suggestions and focusing on their strengths and ability to engage in positive civic action in their neighborhoods (Checkoway, 2005; Hoffman, 2005; Hughes & Curnan, 2005).

Social work practices to enhance the ability of residents to intervene in neighborhood problems often rely on theories of self efficacy, which is closely related to collective efficacy. Bandura's (1982) theory of self efficacy suggests that residents who have strong beliefs in their capabilities approach potential stressors with the assurance that they can exercise some control over them. Sampson and Raudenbush (1999) argue neighborhood collective efficacy, or the shared willingness of local residents to intervene for the common good, depends on conditions of mutual trust and cohesion among residents. Thus developing strong social capital and ties among residents along with efficacy in controlling inappropriate youth behaviors is an important component in facilitating residents' ability to intervene. As residents are seen successfully intervening with youth, they will model these behaviors to other neighborhood residents.

In order to successfully model these behaviors within the community, however, residents must have the knowledge, skills and capacity to safely and effectively provide informal social control. Residents must develop a specific sense of efficacy in controlling inappropriate behaviors in their neighborhoods, including youth violence and delinquency. While criminological and social work research literatures have provided both increased awareness and empirical support for the effectiveness of developing social capital and informal social control among residents for the prevention of violence, this knowledge has

generally not been translated back to the community. The pilot program described in this article transferred the knowledge regarding the efficacy of informal social control, social capital and collective efficacy in addressing crime and violence back to the community, while at the same time facilitating residents' ability to intervene in neighborhood problems and inappropriate behaviors.

Theoretical Orientation of the Pilot Program

The pilot program borrowed from the literatures in restorative justice, peacemaking criminology, and macro social work, particularly consensus organizing, to support the development of informal social control and social capital among neighborhood residents for the prevention of violence. Three components were included: (1) teaching residents consensus organizing strategies for building relationships with other residents and external stakeholders, thus facilitating social capital and ties in the community; (2) helping residents identify and establish community norms that support pro-social behavior and mutual trust; and (3) teaching residents new skills to enhance their self efficacy and ability to directly intervene in inappropriate neighborhood behaviors in a respectful and supportive manner, using the principles of restorative justice. Each of these elements is discussed below.

A foundation of positive social interactions facilitates the ability of residents to use direct intervention strategies to address inappropriate neighborhood behaviors. Traditional community organizing strategies for building social capital (Beck & Eichler, 2000; Eichler, 2007; Ohmer & DeMasi, 2009) are important tools that can support the development of social ties among neighbors. One of the primary community organizing methods for strengthening bonding social capital includes facilitating effective one-on-one relationship building skills among residents. Using the strategies of consensus organizing, the pilot program included exercises that facilitated residents' ability to find new ways to meet and have discussions with other residents, particularly residents with whom no previous relationship had been established. Role plays and field exercises were used to build residents' skills and self efficacy in these

areas. For example, one exercise focused on how to approach other residents (e.g., at the grocery store, while taking a walk, etc.) and have a conversation about neighborhood strengths, weaknesses, norms, and/or issues that concern them. These experiences and class discussions helped residents develop direct and vicarious experiences of success, as well as more extensive social networks.

The program also emphasized consensus organizing strategies for building bridges between low-income communities and external organizations (Eichler, 2007; Ohmer & DeMasi, 2009). In part, the purpose of the development of these bridges was to break down low expectations and negative stereotypes that external players may have had of low-income neighborhoods, while at the same time breaking down the negative images that low-income residents may have had of people in power (Haskin & Lloyd, 1994). In addition, the program helped to develop social ties and capital among community residents and between the residents and external partners to help increase residents' confidence and ability to intervene in both direct and indirect ways in problem neighborhood behaviors. As part of the training program relationships among residents and external leaders were built by including external players in the program, inviting them to meet with and educate residents about their programs, as well as listen to what residents cared about. In addition, participants were given assignments that involved interviews with external resource players they felt were important to their community, but with whom they did not have relationships.

While social ties provide an avenue to positively reinforce norms as well as develop a common understanding of what the community norms are, there must also be a substantial level of agreement regarding the norms and values that are to be reinforced for informal social control to have a positive effect on neighborhoods and their crime levels. The norms and values supported by the neighborhood must encourage pro-social behavior, and be prevalent to the degree that residents can build mutual trust and be willing to intervene for the common good. Yet the development of norms that support both pro-social behavior and mutual trust may face obstacles in low-income communities. Questions regarding the type of

norms found in low-income environments have been raised in the literature. For example, norms that are widely held may not be always visible, and visible norms may not reflect widely held values. Wilson (1996) suggests that although disadvantaged groups may hold middle class values, they may not be able to live them out in all instances, given the eroding nature of the pervasive problems associated with poverty (see also Warner, 2003). Similarly, Anderson (1999) has pointed out that children may take on the norms of "street behavior" even if they do not agree with them "in order to get by." Thus, what is valued in a community may be difficult to observe directly.

Participants in the pilot program were given the opportunity to explore community norms. The trainers discussed research regarding norms and values and their role in building strong communities. Residents were also given opportunities to internalize the significance of norms in their neighborhood. The trainers asked participants to respond to a series of questions about norms. These questions included defining norms in the context of their own lives, as well as describing circumstances in which they had violated norms, and times when a harmful or uncomfortable consequence resulted from norm violation. From this "story telling," the trainers worked with the participants to understand the relevance of norms. Participants were also asked to talk with a wide spectrum of residents about what they believed the norms were within the neighborhood. These interactions allowed residents to begin to understand neighborhood norms as others saw them, and began a process in which non-normative behavior was defined through communication and interaction among group members.

In addition to building relationships and identifying and establishing community norms, it is also critical to make residents more aware of the importance of their role in providing a safe neighborhood. Clear and Karp (1999) argue that "Each community member deserves to be treated with dignity and respect" (p. 32). Thus it is important that intervening should never be done in a threatening or condemning fashion. Relying on work by Bazemore (2001), Braithwaite (1989), Braswell (1990), Pepinsky and Quinney (1991), and Sullivan and Tift (2005), participants were taught how to intervene in respectful, non-coercive ways when faced with inappropriate

neighborhood behaviors, thereby fostering values that en-
couraged helping others and recognizing moral obligations to
others, rather than isolating and stigmatizing others.

During the training participants explored ways in which
they could address transgressions in a respectful manner. In
addition, the trainers presented methods for maintaining per-
sonal safety while intervening, including discussing with par-
ticipants neighborhood problems in which participants would
feel safe intervening alone and those in which they might need
assistance from a neighbor or family member. Respectful inter-
actions were modeled and participants learned skills such as
reflective listening, re-framing, and non-violent communica-
tion to promote such interactions. Residents were given time
to practice these skills through role playing and homework
assignments carried out with friends and family whom they
trusted. Participants were able to practice interactions in a re-
spectful manner by critiquing each others' homework assign-
ments and role plays.

In summary, it was expected that the pilot program would
lay a foundation to increase residents' capacity to intervene in
problem neighborhood behaviors by facilitating social capital,
as well as clarifying residents' definition of community norms
and values. Specifically, the current study examined whether
or not the program: (1) improved residents' attitudes about the
appropriateness of intervening in inappropriate and problem
neighborhood behaviors, as well as increase their likelihood
of intervening in these behaviors; (2) increased the likelihood
of their using restorative and indirect methods of intervening
rather than punitive ones; and (3) increased their confidence in
intervening.

Method

Procedures

The pilot program took place at a community facility in
a low-income neighborhood in Atlanta, Georgia. The neigh-
borhood is located in a relatively high crime area, particularly
in the offenses that the training program would most likely
have an impact on—burglary, larceny and auto theft—all of
which rose over the year prior to the start of the program. The

neighborhood is also a high poverty area, with 48.3% of families living below the federal poverty line (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Most urban literature considers poverty levels above 40% to be concentrated/extreme poverty or "ghetto poverty." Further neighborhood characteristics confirm the extreme poverty of the area. For example, only 40% of the residents are employed and 44% do not have a high school diploma. Thirty-six percent of the households are female-headed households. The neighborhood is predominantly (97%) non-Hispanic African American. Fifty-nine percent of the neighborhood residents are female and the median age is 23 years old. Only 24% of the residents are married.

The characteristics of the training participants are fairly consistent with the neighborhood in terms of income, race and gender, although participants were more likely to have a higher level of education, to be older and to be married. The majority of participants had very low to low incomes, with 29% (N=4) having incomes at $10,000 a year or less, 36% (N=5) between $10,001 and $20,000 a year, 21% (N=3) with incomes between $20,001 and $30,000 a year, and 14% (N=2) with incomes between $30,001 and $40,000 a year. Ninety-three percent of participants responding to the question regarding race/ethnicity were non-Hispanic African American (N=13), and 6% (N=1) were African American/Native American. Sixty-nine percent of the participants were female (N=11) and 31% (N=5) were male. While the age of participants ranged from 20 to 78, the average age was 50 years old. Participants' marital status included married/domestic partnership (44%; N=7), widowed (25%; N=4), separated/divorced (19%; N=3), and single/never married (13%; N=2). The majority of participants did not have children living at home (81%; N=13), while 13% (N=2) had 1 child at home, and 6% (N=1) had 3 children living at home. Half of participants completed a high school degree or GED (N=8), 38% (N=6) completed some college or a 2-year degree, 6% (N=1) completed a bachelors degree, and 6% (N=1) completed a graduate/professional degree. Twenty-five percent (N=4) were employed full-time, 19% (N=3) were retired, 19% (N=3) were on disability and not working, 13% (N=2) were employed part-time, 13% (N=2) were unemployed, and 13% (N=2) were full-time students. Finally the average length of

residency in the neighborhood was 6.5 years; however, several residents were new to the neighborhood (minimum 2-4 years; N=4) and others were older retired residents who had lived in the neighborhood most of their adult lives (maximum 40-52 years; N=2).

The training program included six 2.5 hour weekly sessions, consisting of a combination of lectures, discussions, role plays and homework assignments (training modules are available from the authors). Participants were recruited for the program using a variety of methods. The goal was to recruit 15-20 individuals who were active in their community and/or had an interest in gaining skills to build a safer and more cohesive neighborhood. The authors partnered with a local family service agency working in the neighborhood, and worked with several existing neighborhood organizations and institutions to recruit participants, including faith-based organizations, community development corporations, the neighborhood planning unit, social service agencies, and the local public housing community. The authors attended meetings of these organizations to inform residents about the program. In addition, interested residents were asked to let others know about the program. Several informational meetings were held for potential participants to provide more detailed information about the project and determine a convenient time for the training sessions. Sixteen out of 18 residents recruited from the community completed the training program and both the pre- and post-training surveys. Two participants dropped out of the training program because they were not able to make the commitment to attend the majority of the sessions. Those who did attend stated they were interested in gaining new skills that would help them build relationships with other residents and address violence in their neighborhood.

Institutional Review Board permission was obtained to develop and conduct the pilot program. Participants were given an informed consent form which explained the benefits and risks of participation as well as the responsibilities, and a confidentiality pledge card to sign, addressing the confidentiality of participants' comments and interactions in class. The authors also explained that participants would be asked to complete a survey at the first and last session of the program,

and that notes would be taken on their comments, experience with the role play activities, and their homework assignments. Participants were also informed that their responses would be confidential, and that they could chose to "pass" for any reason on any activity of the training. Participants were paid a small fee (a maximum of $100) for their participation in the program that varied according to the number of sessions attended and surveys completed.

Measures

Participants were administered a pre- and post-training survey during the first and last days of the training. Surveys were read aloud to groups of approximately 3 participants, with participants filling in their own responses on the surveys. The surveys took about thirty minutes to complete and included approximately 100 questions. Surveys included questions on social ties, participation in neighborhood organizations, questions regarding inappropriate behaviors within their neighborhoods, questions about their attitudes toward intervening, and their likelihood and confidence in intervening in a variety of situations, and demographic questions. The following measures were created for the current study and were used to determine whether or not the training had a significant impact on participants' attitudes about intervening, likelihood of intervening, confidence in intervening, and the form of intervention they were likely to use.

Attitudes about intervening. Attitudes about Intervening were measured with five questions regarding participants' attitudes about the appropriateness of intervening in inappropriate neighborhood behaviors. The five items were: (1) It is appropriate to intervene in suspicious behaviors that occur in your neighborhood; (2) It is appropriate to question strangers in your neighborhood; (3) It is right for someone to say something to someone behaving inappropriately in your neighborhood; (4) When neighbors intervene, neighborhoods are safer; and (5) Good neighbors mind their own business (reverse coded). Responses to these items ranged from (1) "strongly disagree" to (4) "strongly agree." Each participant's responses were averaged across the five items. Cronbach's alpha for these five items was .81.

Likelihood to intervene. Likelihood to Intervene was measured on five separate scenarios, including: (1) A couple was having a raging fight in public in which it appeared as if the man could turn violent; (2) Elementary-aged boys were seen away from school grounds on a school day; (3) Teenage boys were seen away from school grounds on a school day; (4) Neighbors were having a loud party; and (5) A group of boys were bullying another boy. For each of these situations, respondents were asked, "how likely would you be to intervene?" ranging from (1) "very unlikely" to (4) "very likely." The likelihood of intervening was averaged across these five scenarios. The reliability of this scale was moderate; Chronbach's alpha = .52.

Confidence in Intervening. Participants were asked about their confidence level (on a scale from 1 to 4, with 1 meaning "very unconfident," to 4 meaning "very confident") in intervening in two hypothetical scenarios previously identified in the survey: a couple having a raging fight in public, and a neighbor having loud parties. Correlations between these two items were not very high (r = .31); therefore, they were analyzed separately.

Most likely to do when intervening. Participants who responded that they were "likely," or "very likely" to intervene in the above two hypothetical situations (the couple having a raging fight in public, and the neighbor having loud parties) were then asked an open-ended question about what they were most likely to do when they intervened.

Results

Results from the t-tests

Tests of hypotheses that the training would increase all measures were conducted using one-tailed significance tests. Further, because of the small sample size, a more relaxed significance level of .10 was used. The results from the t-tests demonstrate that the mean scores regarding participants' attitudes about intervening and their likelihood to intervene both increased significantly from pre- to post-test, despite the very small sample size (N=15). The mean score for participants' attitudes towards intervening at the pre-test was 2.84, and it increased to 3.33 at the post-test, demonstrating a significant

improvement in participants' attitudes towards intervening after the training (t = 2.38, df = 14; p = .017). Similarly, the pre-test mean score for participants' likelihood of intervening across the 5 hypothetical situations was 3.08, and the post-test mean was 3.35, demonstrating that participants were significantly more likely to intervene in these situations after the training (t = 1.88; df = 14; p = .052).

While the mean scores for participants' confidence in intervening in both of the hypothetical situations increased from pre-test to post-test, the increase did not reach significance levels. However, the mean scores did go in the intended direction. The mean confidence level for intervening in the couple fighting was 2.94 at pre-test, which increased to 3.13 (t = 0.28; df = 14; p = .290). Similarly the mean confidence level for intervening with the neighbor's loud party was 3.40 at pre-test, which increased to 3.60 (t = 0.50; df = 14; p = .167). While the increase in the quantitative scores was not significantly different, it is interesting to note that the forms of intervention that respondents' stated they would use showed more variation (as discussed below), suggesting confidence with more forms of intervening.

What Participants were Most Likely to do when Intervening

Participants who stated that they were "very likely" or "likely" to intervene in the couple having a raging fight in public and a neighbor having loud parties into the night, were asked what they were most likely to do when they intervened. The majority of participants stated they would use only indirect intervention strategies to intervene in the couple having a raging fight before the training program (N=10), such as calling the police or 911 (e.g., "I would not intervene personally, I would call the authorities"). Only 3 participants said they would use direct forms of intervention before the training program (e.g. "I would try to reason with them"). However, after the training, participants stated they would be more likely to use direct forms of intervention to address the couple fighting (N=9), either alone (N=4) or in combination with indirect strategies (N=5). Moreover, after the training only four participants stated they would use only informal surveillance or indirect forms of intervention ("I would observe and call for

help or 911"). Participants stated they would intervene directly by trying to talk to the couple (e.g., "Ask if everything was OK and stick around until it calmed down"), asking them if they needed help (e.g., "I would approach them and ask them if they need help, and then go and call or look for police or security guard"), or trying to calm them down (e.g., "Try to calm the couple and maintain some coolness. Call 911."). A few participants indicated they would try to diffuse the situation by their tone of voice (e.g., "With a gentle voice I would ask, "Is there a problem here, can I help? If not, 911 is the only way"). These methods illustrate several of the skills participants learned regarding peaceful and non-threatening intervention strategies.

The majority of participants stated they would use only indirect strategies to intervene in the neighbor having loud parties before the training (N=10), such as calling the police or 911 (e.g., "If it got to be too late, I would call the police"). Only 3 participants said they would use direct forms of intervention (e.g., "Go to the neighbor and notify that their parties are disturbing and ask them to calm down"). However, after the training program, the majority of participants stated they would be more likely to use direct forms of intervention to address a neighbor having loud parties (N=11), either alone (N=8) or in combination with indirect intervention strategies (N=3). Only 3 participants stated they would use only indirect forms of intervention with the neighbor having loud parties after the training. Participants indicated they would intervene directly by approaching their neighbor in some way to address the situation, including asking them to turn the music down ("Go and knock on the door and ask them to turn it down"). A few participants also discussed the manner in which they would approach the neighbor, including creating a pleasant atmosphere ("Smile, eye-contact, ask them about another person and create a different mood"), being polite (e.g., "I will ask please, your loud music sounds good but it is too loud"), or making a connection with the person ("Tell them I like the music also, but could they just turn it down a notch"). In their responses, participants illustrated strategies for directly intervening that they learned in the training, including using a peaceful demeanor and non-threatening language. Moreover, after the training participants said they would intervene

directly first, then call the police only if their direct intervention strategies didn't work (e.g., "Go over and ask them to politely lower their music. If this didn't work, I'd call the police.").

Limitations of the Current Study

This study was exploratory in nature and limited to analysis of residents' perceptions and attitudes using self-report data. No data were collected after the training to examine whether or not participants actually changed their behaviors regarding intervening in neighborhood problems. In addition, the very small sample size limits the study's validity and generalizability. While a pre- and post-test design was one the study's strengths, causal relationships cannot be inferred because of the nature of the design.

Discussion

Concentrated poverty has emerged as major social problem in the United States. Its effects range from intergenerational poverty to concentrated social problems that include illegal drugs, juvenile delinquency, and violence, including homicide. A large body of research has emerged which points to the positive effects of informal social control and social capital on violence and related problems in a variety of neighborhoods, including those with concentrated poverty (see Elliott, et al., 1996; Sampson, et al., 2002). This research delineates two types of informal social control: informal surveillance or indirect intervention, which is based on relying on formal entities to intervene, such as the police or social service agencies, and indirect intervention, which involves neighbors directly taking leadership roles by intervening themselves. Direct forms of informal social control by residents have been viewed as an essential part of a democratic society. Results from the current study demonstrated that after their participation in the training program, residents were more likely to intervene in neighborhood problems, including situations involving elementary and teenage boys missing school or hassling another boy, and in situations involving a couple fighting or neighbors having loud parties. Participants were also more likely to use direct, non-violent intervention after the training, including

approaching the individuals involved in the transgressions in
a respectful manner. They also improved their attitudes about
intervening, feeling it was appropriate to intervene and their
neighborhood was safer if they did intervene.

Residents participating in the training also expressed their
views regarding their experiences during a debriefing session
on the last day of the training. Overall, participants stated that
they believed they had gained important skills in interven-
ing in neighborhood problems in a nonviolent manner, par-
ticularly regarding the tone of voice they might use and their
orientation to the approach. Similar to their response on the
survey, residents said they viewed intervening as calling the
police or chastising behavior prior to the training, but after-
wards they realized that these approaches also carried costs.
More specifically, participants realized that the police may not
follow through or may not arrive in a timely way, and chastis-
ing neighbors could escalate matters and not effect a change in
behavior. After the training, participants stated that they now
realized they could approach their neighbors using problem
solving strategies, and several gave examples where they were
using these skills in their daily lives. For example, one partici-
pant explained that while she was passing out flyers, she saw
"two girls getting ready to fight and was able to diffuse the
situation by distracting them with her flyer." Another partici-
pant stated that "A women approached me in an angry way,
and I used a spirit of sweetness to tell her the rules and regula-
tions." The participant also added that "being in this session
has taught me a lot...I can handle a situation; if it is heated
situation I know how not to put the coals on the fire."

Facilitating residents' ability to directly intervene in a non-
threatening and respectful manner is an important social work
strategy for preventing violence in low-income and concen-
trated poverty neighborhoods. Furthermore, facilitating rela-
tionships, social capital and social ties among residents and
teaching them how to identify and clarify community norms
lays the foundation for direct intervention to be successful. The
training program illustrates how research on criminology and
peacemaking can be integrated with traditional macro social
work and community practice strategies to address neighbor-
hood violence. The results from the program illustrate that it

is possible to develop residents' capacity to intervene in inappropriate behaviors in low-income neighborhoods. Additional and more rigorous research is required to examine the development of informal social control and social capital among residents in low-income communities. This article provides an important first step in exploring these issues. Moreover, the training program illustrates specific strategies that social workers can use to design violence prevention programs.

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