

National *Academic Centers of Excellence* on Youth Violence Prevention

Columbia Center for Youth Violence Prevention

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. The Centers 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.

The Columbia Center for Youth Violence Prevention (CCYVP) was established in 2000. CCYVP offers a multi-level and multidisciplinary focus on youth violence prevention. The work and projects of CCYVP are centered on the Washington Heights and Inwood communities of New York City. Through collaboration between academic researchers and community partners, CCYVP is developing, implementing, and evaluating evidence-based interventions that are responsive to the evolving needs and concerns of a diverse urban community. In addition to translating knowledge into practice in Washington Heights and Inwood, CCYVP seeks to share knowledge about basic principles of violence prevention, prevention practices, and mobilization strategies that can be adapted by other communities.

Through a strong collaboration between the New York City Department of Health and Columbia University researchers, CCYVP produces trend reports on violence in Washington Heights and Inwood over time.

Through active surveillance techniques in area hospitals, CCYVP is gaining contextual insight and more precise characterization of violent incidents.

Research

To establish baseline data on the occurrence and nature of dating violence in schools in Washington Heights and Inwood, CCYVP collected quantitative and qualitative data from local high school students and carried out an intense qualitative study to explore these reports of violence. This research has garnered much media attention by highlighting the issue of dating violence among teens in New York City. In response to high rates of dating violence, researchers have begun to develop a comprehensive, evidence-based intervention in local schools for students, teachers, and staff. This research has gained visibility through policy and organizational partnerships. These collaborations are instrumental as CCYVP teen dating violence initiatives move forward.

CCYVP is also involved in other research projects, including

- Identifying and analyzing the re-entry processes and outcomes for former juvenile offenders following incarceration in adult or juvenile correctional facilities or local detention centers. This study's findings will prove instrumental in understanding and positively interrupting the cycle of violence often endemic to neighborhoods such as

Washington Heights and Inwood. The program could also be useful in increasing positive opportunities and social service delivery for residents and enhancing social organization and community cohesion;

- Developing and implementing a curriculum for middle-school students about the role of proactive bystanders in preventing school violence. Efforts are also ongoing to learn more about how parents educate their children about the role of bystanders; and
- Documenting changes on the city blocks where a youth service organization, the Fresh Youth Initiatives, has built its new headquarters. By documenting neighborhood observations with photos and descriptive data, researchers hope to understand how changes in the built environment can affect youth violence.

Surveillance

CCYVP monitors and analyzes numerous data sources to create a dynamic snapshot of many youth violence indicators. Through the coordination of hospital records and data collected from the New York State Department of Health, the New York City Department of Mental Health, and the Office of Vital Statistics, CCYVP creates descriptive reports for monitoring purposes and effectively shares findings with community members and local stakeholders. For example, CCYVP actively surveys emergency department data on a quarterly basis, piecing together information about the nature and contexts of fatal and non-fatal assaults. Analysis of the circumstances surrounding violent incidents helps to identify the contexts surrounding violent behavior, in turn informing prevention activities and helping to guide future research projects to be conducted by CCYVP.

Community Mobilization

CCYVP is committed to training and mobilizing neighborhood members to be active members of the research process. Partnerships with local community-based organizations, such as the UNIDOS Coalition, serve to connect, maintain, and enhance the many relationships needed to produce, evaluate, and sustain effective community-led solutions to youth violence. This process has helped to develop a neighborhood-based safety net that youth in the community can turn to and rely on for support, services, and vocational opportunities. CCYVP plays a pivotal role in organizing and coordinating prevention activities that foster safer environments and teach youths the skills necessary to prevent violence.

Training

CCYVP researchers are supporting local organizations with the design, analysis, and evaluation of their own initiatives. The technical assistance offered by CCYVP is an invaluable asset for community partners, assisting in the creation of community-generated preventative solutions that have improved chances of sustainability.

CCYVP also offers graduate students and junior faculty a unique learning environment to research some of the most pressing topics in the field of youth violence prevention. Through the use of seminar series open to community partners, through formal coursework in the classroom, and through engaging ACE internships, students experience first-hand the many projects being implemented in the Washington Heights and Inwood neighborhoods.

For more information, please contact:

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212-305-8213 • <http://cpmcnet.columbia.edu/dept/sph/ccyvp/index.html> • mlp2151@columbia.edu

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

1-800-CDC-INFO • www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention • cdcinfo@cdc.gov