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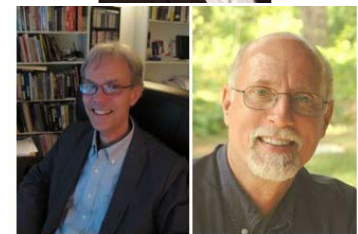
The Cure Violence Program: If there is a “cure” for violence, where does it lie?

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Many of us recall the confusion of early attempts to prevent, treat, resolve, and grow beyond the harm of sexual violence. Early observations that there was “no cure” for sexual violence often led to misunderstanding rather than deeper knowledge about assessing, treating, and preventing it. Over time, many of us worked tirelessly to remind the world that the act of sexual abuse is a behaviour that can be changed and not simply an incurable disorder; at the individual level, our clients are human beings who change over time and not simply immutable monsters. At street level, the “no-cure language” has changed in statutes. However, the search for the societal ills that result in violence continue – and yes, at that level of abstraction, many believe there is a cure. Many organizations have championed efforts at reducing sexual violence; this blog focuses on one that is seeking to prevent all violence.

Recently, Kieran travelled to the University of Illinois at Chicago and met with staff from the [Cure Violence](#) program. The idea behind Cure Violence is that the world has been looking at the idea of violence from a problematic perspective for many years, and that we can prevent – and not just respond to – violence. The Cure Violence program has operated for over fifteen years and across nine different countries. Traditional responses to violence are rooted in notions of criminal justice, with a punitive and reactive response; communities punish and rehabilitate violent offenders after the fact. Therefore, you need to become a perpetrator of violence, have a victim, and be involved with the criminal justice system in some capacity before you can learn how to prevent future violent acts. People who perpetrate sexual abuse commonly experience this, despite the emergence of support groups and organizations whose mission is to help those who are afraid that abuse may occur and are seeking help.

The Cure Violence program, however, looks at violence from a more holistic perspective, stating that society needs to view violence as a health issue and that we can use a public health approach to respond to



SAJRT Bloggers' Profile

Chief Blogger Kieran McCartan, Ph.D. and Associate Bloggers David S. Prescott, LICSW and Jon Brandt, MSW, LICSW are longtime members of ATSA. We are dedicated to furthering the causes of evidenced-based practice, understanding, and prevention in the field of sexual abuse.

The Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers is an international, multi-disciplinary organization dedicated to preventing sexual abuse. Through research, education, and shared learning ATSA promotes evidence based practice, public policy and community strategies that lead to the effective assessment, treatment and management of individuals who have sexually abused or are at risk to abuse.

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it. The core idea underlying the program is that violence operates like an epidemic: it spreads across neighbours (through social learning) infecting people socially, psychologically, and culturally, resulting in more violence. Thus, violence inevitably begets more violence, even though the risk factors and context in which they exist can change from one person to the next. Although the program originally focused on intercity gang violence, it can be used to discuss and think about various forms of violence, including sexual violence. Through the work of staff in Cure Violence the cycle and spread of violence can be interpreted and, therefore, stopped, by:

- Detecting and interrupting potentially violent conflicts

The program employs violence interrupters to work within vulnerable communities, to help identify and provide early intervention to sources of violence. These interrupters have to have credibility within the communities that they work in and be seen as a legitimate resources by the at risk populations, because they come from these communities and have histories of violence themselves as perpetrators or victims. The interrupters work to defuse the situation and refer the community members onto other organisations that can help support them in a more bespoke and appropriate, way.

- Identify and treat individuals at the highest risk

Outreach workers help support the vulnerable community by offering them ongoing and appropriate support. The aim of this part of the program is to work with the people who are at the highest risk of committing violence and offer them support in making better long term life choices that do not involve violence.

- Mobilise communities to change norms

The program works with all levels of community members in the communities that it works within to enable social change so that the community as a whole rejects violence; suggesting that there are other means of conflict resolution and new, adaptive ways of moving forward.

The Cure Violence program provides insight into preventing sexual violence; it provides a model and way of thinking/working in this arena. There are differences between sexual and other forms of violence, but this program offers us adaptability rather than roadblocks. Reflecting on the Cure Violence program and how it relates to sexual violence:

- Victims of violence and victims of sexual violence often suffer from similar psychology, emotional, social, health, economic and life course challenges as a consequence;
- Often times sexual violence is lumped together in communities with high levels of social, political, and health vulnerabilities (such as other forms of violence);
- There is often a relationship between being a victim of general violence and being a victim of sexual violence. This can often be endemic in communities, families, peer groups and geographical areas;
- Some perpetrators of sexual violence have been victims of sexual violence themselves previously, as well as other forms of violence and abuse;
- There is a growing recognition that sexual violence, like other forms of violence, occurs within community structures (i.e., sports clubs, communities, gangs, networks, etc.). Therefore, understanding how to respond to affected communities in an appropriate way

becomes all the more urgent;

- Sexual abuse, like other types of violence, can be prevented;
- We need to understand and honour the voices of both those who perpetrate and are victimised by sexual violence so that we can develop better resources to stop sexual violence before it happens (we see this in the prevention of sexual violence re-offending, but we need to move it further out into society); affected communities can be leaders in this area.
- We need better support and awareness for at-risk communities so that sexual violence can be prevented;
- We need to develop better resources, means and mechanisms for engaging communities in changing social norms around sexual violence. We have started to do this over the past 10 years but we need to get better at it and learning from an equivalent program would enable us to do that.

Cure Violence asks us to reconceptualise the reality of violence, and therefore how we can best respond to it. Some organizations are starting to do this with sexual violence, taking a preventive, public health approach and it seems that the Cure Violence program may help just on our path to achieving it.