

Halt the Hits



Marie-Eileen Onieal
PhD, CPNP, FAANP

In December 2010, unsettled by the seemingly epidemic proportions of school and workplace violence, I wrote an editorial on the subject.¹ Almost four years later, I find that recent behavior by well-known people compels me to write again, because I'm concerned that the problem of violence—this time, domestic—is pandemic and we as a society are so out of control that we have lost our moral compass.

In the latter part of this summer, it seemed that every television, newspaper, and radio announcement included at least one incident of a professional athlete and his abusive behavior toward a team member, a spouse, or a child. The behavior was so outrageous that just hearing about it made me nauseous. To add insult to the injuries inflicted on the victims, the coaches, bosses, and teammates of the alleged perpetrators ostensibly ignored the events.

In the National Football League (NFL) alone, dozens of players have been arrested for domestic violence (DV) in the past few years.² Moreover, these repeated incidents of

“The problem of domestic violence is pandemic, and we as a society have lost our moral compass.”

abuse occurred with little or no repercussions for the players' atrocious behavior. As the most recent incidents involving Ray Rice and Adrian Peterson were being disclosed, the unbalanced approach to applying sanctions for off-field conduct was revealed. Apparently, to the NFL, DV has been a lesser offense than substance abuse, so the

number of games' suspension is fewer for DV.

Regardless of how the NFL has sanctioned off-field (mis)conduct, what do the actions of these players portray to the younger generation? In addition, what is the approach of essentially tolerating these bad behaviors teaching young men (and women) about DV? We know that the problem of DV is not isolated to professional athletes. Nevertheless, we need to know more about the problem—and more importantly, how to stop it.

I believe that the first step is to recognize that children who witness domestic violence are more likely to be abusive than children who do not.³ Second, we need to change our perception of who the victims of DV are. Data on DV tend to focus on women; however, a national survey conducted by the CDC and the US Department of Justice revealed that in 2011, more men than women were victims of intimate partner physical violence, with more than 40% of severe physical violence directed at men.^{4,5} In addition to recognizing the demographics of DV, we must realize the associated financial costs. In the US alone, the cost of DV exceeds \$5 billion annually: \$4.1 billion for direct health care services and \$1.8 billion in lost productivity.³

DV is one of the most pressing issues in our society. A human problem, it includes intimate partner violence (IPV), sexual violence, child maltreatment, bullying, suicidal behavior, and elder abuse and neglect.⁶ On average, 20 people per minute in the US are victims of physical violence by an intimate partner.⁷

While reports of DV among our “rich and famous” make headlines, those incidents are just the tip of the iceberg. DV/IPV is an insidious and frequently deadly social problem that crosses economic and geographic boundaries. Globally, approximately 520,000 people die each year as a result of DV/IPV. That translates to 1,400 deaths per day, the “equivalent of three long-haul commercial aircraft crashing every single day, week in and week out, year after year.”⁸

In recent weeks, as I brooded (and pontificated) about the Rice and Peterson incidents and listened to the NFL address their policies and programs relating to DV and sexual assault, I wondered what was being done (or could be done), and what role we have in reducing this epidemic. Searching for an answer, I discovered a program dedicated to DV/IPV prevention (although it saddens me to think we actually need a dedicated program for this).

In 2002, authorized by the Family Violence Prevention Services Act, the CDC developed the Domestic Violence Prevention Enhancements and Leadership Through Alliances (DELTA) Program (see box).⁹ The focus is on primary prevention to reduce the incidence of DV/IPV by stopping it before it occurs. Prevention requires understanding the circumstances and factors that influence violence. Understanding risk and protective factors is important, because comprehending the complexity of those factors can assist in violence prevention in our communities.

However, understanding is not enough—we need to advocate for more training and educational programs in our schools and

► The DELTA Program

www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/delta/index.html

Since 2010, the CDC’s Domestic Violence Prevention Enhancements and Leadership Through Alliances (DELTA) Program has funded 14 state domestic violence coalitions, which in turn have supported 59 local nonprofit coordinated community responses (CCRs).

The purpose of the CCRs is to prevent intimate partner violence (IPV) at the community level through primary prevention-focused funding, public education, public policy development, training, technical assistance, and program development. Primary prevention strategies include

- Preventing first-time perpetration and first-time victimization
- Reducing risk factors associated with IPV
- Promoting protective factors that reduce the likelihood of IPV
- Implementing evidence-supported strategies that incorporate behavior and social change theories
- Evaluating prevention strategies and using results to form future plans.

The successes, challenges, and lessons learned by DELTA Program grantees in developing, implementing, and evaluating their state plans will provide a wealth of information to CDC and others on how to develop an IPV primary prevention infrastructure and address IPV to achieve programmatic goals.

sports programs that can help address the problem at its roots. We need programs and professionals to teach and promote interpersonal respect, healthy relationships, and positive role modeling. We need to develop a comprehensive, coordinated approach to reducing all DV/IPV.

Professional sports leagues and players are in the spotlight; they have the opportunity to lead by positive example and help catalyze change.¹⁰ Let’s call “time out” on DV and stop tolerating any form of violence, on or off the field. **CR**

REFERENCES

1. Onieal M-E. Conduct unbecoming. *Clinician Reviews*. 2010;20(12):C2, 8-10.
2. NFL player arrests: arrest database. USA Today. www.usatoday.com/sports/nfl/arrests. Accessed October 19, 2014.
3. Domestic Violence Statistics. <http://domesticviolencestatistics.org/domestic-violence-statistics/>. Accessed October 19, 2014.
4. Hoff BH. National study: more men than

women victims of intimate partner physical violence, psychological aggression. *MenWeb online Journal* (ISSN: 1095-5240). www.batteredmen.com/NISVS.htm. Accessed October 19, 2014.

5. Hines DA, Brown J, Dunning E. Characteristics of callers to the domestic abuse helpline for men. *J Fam Viol*. 2007;22:63–72.
6. Wilkins N, Tsao B, Hertz M, et al. *Connecting the Dots: an Overview of the Links Among Multiple Forms of Violence*. 2014. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, CDC, and Oakland, CA: Prevention Institute.
7. CDC. The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey. www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/nisvs/index.html. Accessed October 19, 2014.
8. Butchart A, Phinney A, Check P, Villaveces A. *Preventing Violence: a Guide to Implementing the Recommendations of the World Report on Violence and Health*. 2004. Geneva: World Health Organization.
9. CDC. Domestic Violence Prevention Enhancement and Leadership Through Alliances. www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/delta/index.html. Accessed October 19, 2014.
10. Brisbo L. Let’s call “time out” on domestic violence. *Futures Without Violence* blog. September 22, 2014. www.futureswithoutviolence.org/movements-are-made-of-momentslets-call-time-out-on-domestic-violence/. Accessed October 19, 2014.