

Promising Practices in Community-Level Sexual Violence Prevention Across North America



Developed by:

**The New York State
Sexual Violence Prevention Center**

A Project of  **CAI**

**The New York State
Sexual Violence Prevention Center
Prepared by CAI for NYS DOH
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Introduction

In recent years, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Rape Prevention and Education (RPE) program has emphasized the significance of adopting a community-level approach to sexual violence prevention.¹ This approach prioritizes primary prevention and population-based strategies aimed at strengthening the social, economic, and environmental factors impacting communities facing sexual violence. The community-level approach, grounded in the socioecological model, centers addressing sexual violence holistically, extending beyond the individual-level and into the broader community and societal context.² This is a direct response to the anti-violence movement's call that members of the field address violence at its roots using strategies that increase protective factors or decrease risk factors associated with sexual violence perpetration or victimization.

As public health evolves and strives to prioritize health equity at its core, it becomes critical to create spaces and practices for community voices of priority populations through qualitative data collection via listening sessions and interviews. This approach provides us an opportunity to hear from those most impacted by sexual violence, fostering inclusivity and prioritizing their perspectives.

This report is dedicated to serving the primary population of young people aged 8 to 24 and influential adults impacted by the RPE program by listening to the insights of content and context matter experts in reproductive justice, racial justice, and disability justice. The purpose of the work described here is to explore promising practices occurring at the community-level, encouraging critical thinking and creativity in the pursuit of the vision to end sexual violence. The intention is not to reach conclusive findings, but rather to inspire innovative approaches and enhance understanding of strategies that address sexual violence prevention.

The community-level risk factors for sexual violence include poverty; lack of employment opportunities; institutional support or harm caused by the police and judicial system; tolerance of sexual violence within communities; and weak community sanctions and accountability for those who cause harm. Alternatively, protective factors include community connectedness; neighborhood or community support; access to mental and health services; and safe and affordable housing.³

¹ National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC), *A Health Equity Approach to Preventing Sexual Violence* (2021).

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), *STOP SV: A Technical Package to Prevent Sexual Violence* (2016), defines individual-level prevention as strategies and interventions directed at individuals to build knowledge, skills, and resilience, while community-level prevention extends its focus beyond individuals to address the broader social, economic, and environmental determinants. It recognizes that preventing sexual violence requires a multifaceted approach that considers the entire community context.

³ CDC, *Connecting the Dots: An Overview of the Links Among Multiple Forms of Violence* (2017).

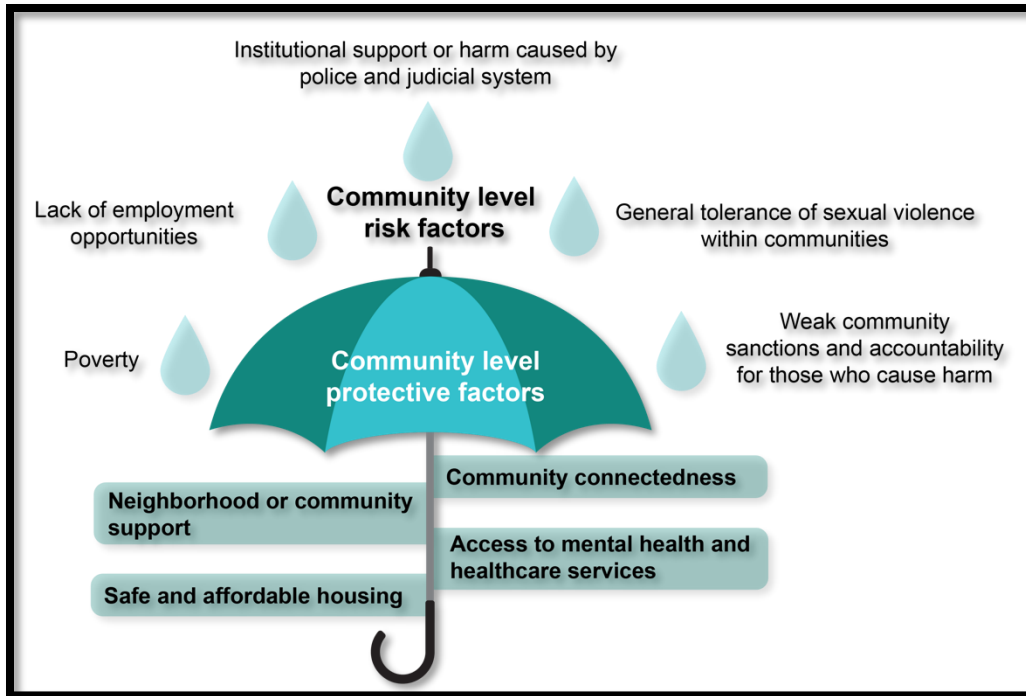


Figure 1: Adapted from the CDC, *Risk and Protective Factors* (2017).

As research and methodology emerge on this topic, we also recognize the challenges in identifying and evaluating programs and practices, particularly those at the community level. There is a need for a deeper understanding of promising practices and innovative programming grounded in intersectionality⁴ and using health equity approaches, as well as concrete examples of practices or approaches that can be adopted. The information in this report is based on interviews with 15 subject matter experts and was created in collaboration with three leaders in the fields of reproductive justice, racial justice, and disability justice. The outcomes of these interviews will contribute to the understanding of prevention work that better serves youth and communities across New York State and beyond.



⁴ Intersectionality is a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 to refer to the intersection of multiple identities, experiences, and systems of oppression. It is a framework for understanding how different forms of oppression, such as racism, sexism, classism, ableism, homophobia, and transphobia, are interconnected and cannot be examined in isolation from one another.

Background

To collect information on existing programs and interventions addressing risk and protective factors for sexual violence at the community level in North America, CAI conducted 15 interviews with subject matter experts. This information aims to support the existing and future work of the Rape Prevention Education program in New York State that is funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention through the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH).

Our approach in selecting these experts was guided by a fundamental belief that those most impacted by sexual violence and oppression are closest to the solutions. This approach is rooted in the recognition that sexual violence disproportionately affects marginalized communities due to historical and ongoing systems of oppression. Unfortunately, this has resulted in limited existing data representing the experiences of marginalized communities.

To support an intersectional and health equity lens, our primary focus was on amplifying the voices of individuals and organizations committed to authentic community-level strategies that prioritize those most impacted by sexual violence. These interviews prioritized hearing from individuals and organizations focused on community-based initiatives addressing racial justice, reproductive justice, and disability justice. These initiatives were specifically led by and designed for the following focus populations:

- Black youth and/or influential adults
- Indigenous youth and/or influential adults
- Youth and/or influential adults who speak Spanish as a primary or secondary language
- LGBTQ+ youth and/or influential adults
- Youth with physical or developmental disabilities and/or influential adults



Methods

Data collection

CAI identified programs and organizations conducting community-level and community-engaged sexual violence prevention work to interview using a structured iterative process, in collaboration with three consultants with expertise in community engagement in the areas of racial justice, reproductive justice, and/or disability justice. The expert consultants brought a combined 62 years of expertise in their respective fields, had deep connections with other individuals and movements working in their focus areas, and provided guidance to ensure the interview process reached out to individuals and organizations well-positioned to speak to their experiences and expertise working with communities to identify focus areas for action using community-level strategies.

To identify members for the interview, CAI used a five-step process:

- First, CAI utilized its literature review prepared for NYSDOH in October of 2022, "Sexual Violence Prevention: Community-Level Implementation." This review contained an annotated bibliography of 105 community-level programs using keywords and terms, "neighborhood or community" and "sexual violence prevention;" "neighborhood or community" and "sexual assault prevention;" "community-level approaches to youth violence prevention;" "community mobilization" and "youth violence prevention." From the bibliography, less than five programs met the criteria of doing work within the focus areas of reproductive, racial, and/or disability justice with the identified priority populations.
- Then, CAI's staff hosted several brainstorming sessions to generate a list of leading organizations and individual leaders working in the fields of racial justice, reproductive justice, and disability justice. These sessions included CAI staff working in community health and community engagement, as well as NYSDOH Rape Prevention Education (RPE) staff and regional centers. Additionally, the expert consultants each submitted a list of programs for consideration based on their respective focus areas. CAI also sought out feedback from its international network of public health professionals in the areas of community health and community engagement. During these conversations, individuals were presented with the primary learning question: "What are evidence-based, promising practice, or innovative programs for youth ages 8-24 and/or influential adults in NYS and North America (focused on, but not limited to the United States) that either increase protective factors or decrease risk factors associated with sexual violence perpetration or victimization, especially those at the community-level?" The results yielded approximately 100 results.
- CAI staff and the expert consultants then reviewed the list of 205+ programs and approaches, eliminating all but 50 that did not meet the criteria of conducting work at the community level or within the focus areas with the defined priority populations.
- Next, the CAI team developed a rubric and decision-making tool to assess and categorize the 50 programs from the scan. The tool had 17 questions to assess the

extent that the individual or organization under consideration could provide relevant information on evidence-based, promising, or innovative programs to increase protective factors or decrease risk factors associated with sexual violence, especially at the community level. Focus areas for these questions included:

- primary focus or lens of the organization/individual (i.e., reproductive justice, racial justice, disability justice);
 - level of the Social Ecological Model that the organization/individual focuses on (i.e., individual level, relationship level, community level, societal level) and the community-level sexual violence risk and protective factors addressed in their work;
 - populations who lead and collaborate on programs with priority youth populations (i.e., Black, Indigenous, Spanish-speaking, LGBTQ+ youth, and youth with intellectual or developmental disabilities);
 - promising practices or activities that address community-level risk/protective factors;
 - the extent the work is community-led (scale from 1-10);
 - the extent the organization or individual could provide concrete and specific information to inform sexual violence prevention (scale from 1-10).
- Lastly, the expert consultants completed the decision-making tool considering each of these programs. Using the criteria set forth by the tool, the list was narrowed to 28 prospective interviewees who were most highly rated for the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) review and selection. Ultimately, a list of 20 programs was approved by NYSDOH. Eligibility criteria included programming on community risk and protective factors, the extent that programming prioritized community-led practices, and communities served by the program (e.g., Black youth, Indigenous youth, LGBTQ+ youth).

After receiving input and approval from NYSDOH, the CAI team reached out to organizations and individuals to schedule interviews. There was a high level of interest in participating in the interviews, and as scheduling began, CAI engaged in ongoing conversation internally and with NYSDOH to ensure that the final list of the 15 selected programs out of the list of 20 represented a diversity of focus areas and primary populations. As CAI began interviewing leaders from these 15 programs between December 2022 and January 2023.

Interviewee Community-Level Focus Area:

Focus Area ⁵	# of Interviewees	Summary of Community-Level Activities
Disability Justice	3	Engage in diverse initiatives, including arts and performance, disability justice trainings, and curriculum development to promote disability justice and inclusion.
Reproductive Justice	1	Demonstrate strategies for incorporating healing justice into reproductive health, with a specific focus on Black women, femmes, and nonbinary people.
Racial Justice	2	Address systemic racial inequities through various community activities such as challenging the carceral system, promoting alternatives to prisons and jails, restorative and transformative justice approaches, and increasing community support.
LGBTQ+ Communities	3	Provide support for LGBTQ+ communities through advocating for systems change and facilitate connections to healing resources with a focus on inclusive programming, community-led work, and diverse perspectives.
Immigrant Communities	2	Intentionally engage with African and Spanish-speaking immigrant communities by addressing cultural barriers, collaborating with local organizations, and offering support, resources, and community connections.
Faith-Based Communities	1	Christian faith-based leader with expertise in racial justice and urban ministry, advocating for social change, community revitalization, changing built environments, and addressing environmental racism.
Community-Level Change	2	Expertise in community-centered practice, including participatory theater and frameworks supporting organization and movement change within institutions, communities, and systems.
Engaging Men and Masculine Communities	1	Focus on alternatives to incarceration for Black and brown boys/bois, working to end their criminalization through policy change, advocacy, and transformative justice initiatives.

Interviewee Geographic Focus Area:

- 7 worked locally or regionally, including New York City, Ithaca, and Buffalo, New York; Los Angeles and Long Beach, CA; and tribal territories across the Southwest in New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, and Texas.
- 8 worked nationally or internationally.

⁵ While the focus areas categorize the interviewees by their primary focus area, many interviewees described themselves as working at multiple intersections of justice-based work (e.g., reproductive and disability justice). Further, additional primary focus areas were defined, such as LGBTQ+, faith-based, and community-level work. These interviewees also identified as doing justice-focused work at the intersections of their primary area of work.

CAI and NYSDOH finalized a semi-structured interview guide asking questions on successful approaches and challenges to community-level work, strategies for community engagement, and examples of innovative work. Interviews lasted 90 minutes each and were conducted via online video conferencing software. The interviews were recorded and transcribed with the consent of the interviewees, and interviewees received monetary compensation for their participation.

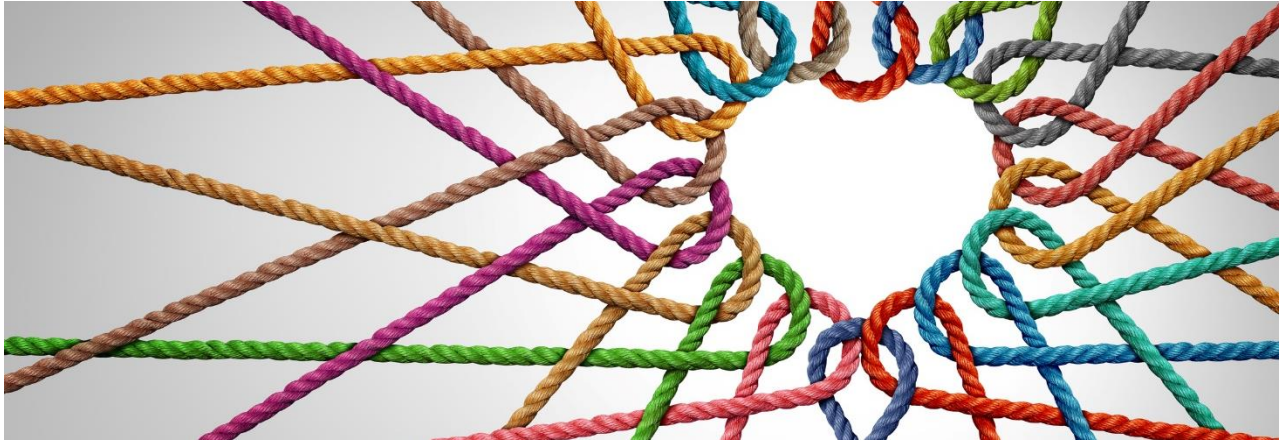
Data analysis

Two researchers conducted content analysis of the interview transcripts using a combination of inductive and deductive coding. The transcripts were uploaded to Dedoose 9.0.46, a qualitative data analysis software program, to complete coding. An initial set of a priori codes were developed based on the interview guide and prior research. Additional themes and relevant codes emerged from the transcripts and the codebook was continually refined throughout the coding process. A total of 54 codes (including sub-codes) were identified by the end of analysis.



Results

A total of 15 participants were interviewed. The largest proportion of participants work directly in New York State (40%), followed by those coming from the Southwestern United States (33%), and other participants working across North America (27%). Interviewees work with a wide variety of communities and in varying focus areas, including programs for Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) and LGBTQ+ communities, Indigenous communities, faith-based communities, Latinx and African immigrant communities, Spanish-speaking communities, communities with physical or developmental disabilities, and programs for boys/boys and men. Given that the definition of community-level can differ based on context, participants focused on work done in collaboration with communities including, but not limited to, neighborhoods, schools, faith communities, and local organizations. This collaborative work with communities allowed interviewees to ask questions to develop a further understanding of community-level approaches, beyond the individual-level.



A total of seven main themes emerged from the analysis:

- 1) Effective approaches to community-based work
- 2) Barriers to community-based work
- 3) Partnerships gaps and successful approaches to partnerships
- 4) Innovative work
- 5) Desired directions for future work
- 6) Strategies employed
- 7) Cultural considerations

Effective Approaches to Community-Based Work

Interviewees identified the importance of bringing together all stakeholders in an ongoing way to create consistency and trust with the community:

“I think sometimes when organizations want to go and create community and organizational connections and dynamics, there's oftentimes, ‘Let's kind of do a one and done,’ and not realizing that it may take showing up in little bits and pieces over one year, two years, three years, 10 years, in order to build that relationship.”

Interviewees discussed establishing a culture of care among community members to allow those involved to feel safe before engaging in the work. There was also discussion about empowering community members to lead the work and including them in leadership positions, as described by this interviewee:

“...leadership by those most impacted is essential to doing the work. And it's a core principle for a lot of justice frameworks, reproductive justice, disability justice, like gender justice, and a lot of people don't know what that means, especially organizations, even if they're nonprofit, even if they're small... People think that it means ‘Oh, we're just going to hire these people to do a little bit of this work.’ No, they need to be in decision-making. They need to be in power roles.”

Interviewees also emphasized the importance of accessibility at the community-level, including both:

1. physical accessibility (e.g., wheelchair accessibility, ramps, elevators, restrooms), and;
2. accessibility to social determinants of health that reduce risk factors and increase protective factors at the community-level (e.g., equitable access to education, healthcare, economic opportunities, integrated social support, community engagement, etc.).⁶

These social determinants of health are essential in helping individuals and communities meet their basic needs and achieve their desired outcomes. For community members engaged in program work (e.g., planning, implementation, evaluation), participants discussed the importance of compensating them fairly, providing food, and transportation. Establishing trust among community members was also described as important, including employing community members to engage in the work, and survivor-led work, as described by this interviewee:

“Also, this belief that the most impacted people are the ones closest to the solution. And so we hire survivors. We're a group of survivors and we own that, and that's essential to how we do our work. And yes, people are from the communities that they serve, because that affords trust, understanding, belonging, kind of all of these things that are required to do real community work.”

⁶ NSVRC, *Risk and Protective Factors* (2022).

Using social media in an informed way was also discussed as a way to increase community connectedness, access to resources, and services. Actively listening to the community and using storytelling to listen to community needs was also highlighted. Furthermore, showing up by being actively engaged with the community and other community-based organizations was described by several participants as important to show community members that the organization is an active part of the community and not working in isolation from community. Similarly, the need to uplift other community-based organizations doing the same or similar work was discussed as an effective approach to doing community-based work. Interviewees discussed the need for the work they do to be trauma-informed and the need for creating safety for program staff and participants by allowing for safe expression, art, and storytelling, as described by this interviewee:

“Just being real, and, and create an environment where people can share their stories. And in creating this kind of environment, this community of love, of unconditional love, right? Unless you create that as a norm within your community, I don't think any activity you may do can have the kind of impact...”

Similarly, interviewees described what success meant for their programs and how success is not always measured quantitatively through numbers of participants, but through storytelling and other qualitative ways:

“Funders want to hear that ‘We had 100% turnout.’ And we do capture some of that information, about like quantitative data points of success, as far as turnout and engagement and how many people open the email and did the thing. But I think that our most meaningful impacts have been made qualitatively. We've captured stories. We've captured feedback from folks, asking them how they felt while they were in the space, asking them how they're going to take what they learned moving forward. We have ultimately defined success by, you know, the idea that absolutely, we're working toward Black liberation. But what does that mean? And part of our principles are that Black liberation is something that we are wanting to make more accessible for all right now...And so if that means that the \$300 in cash assistance that the single mom got to buy groceries for the week, like, is what is making that happen for her and her family? That's how we measure success. And usually, we're able to capture that more through stories rather than numbers.”

Participants noted needing to expand their approach to effectively address risk and protective factors in community-based work:

“But what we realized during that time was that how we had been doing things as an organization needed to change, that there are too many intersections to gender-based violence and responding to it, and that we had to be flexible. That's where

the food sovereignty⁷ program came in from, recognizing the multiple [forms of] violence against our community and being able to respond to them.”

Participants also emphasized the need to allow communities to identify their own needs related to risk and protective factors:

“...those are just a couple of examples of some of the work that's what's been happening out here, where funders have been sort of getting out of the way, and allowing community to dictate terms. And I think that's the direction of philanthropy needs to go, you know, with regards to supporting communities and sustaining is that communities should be the ones driving the terms for what gets supported, and what gets funded.”

Barriers to Community-Based Work

Interviewees noted several barriers to community-based work, including assumptions about what the community needs, and having insufficient resources to do transformative community-level work:

“We can go into a community and we can carry attitudes...that I am the expert, you are not, let me tell you what you need, whether you think you need it or not...And so we come in with an arrogance that says, I know what you need more than what you know that you need. And that becomes a barrier.”

Interviewees also described a lack of safety or accessibility for community members to be involved in the work. Further, interviewees also discussed how misinformation and assumptions present barriers to community-based work, including a lack of understanding of how sexual violence connects to larger issues being addressed in communities. Organizational territorialism was highlighted as another example of a barrier; that is, the challenge of organizations competing for limited funds, and poor communication between agencies:

“Because I think that I have seen it that a lot of times there's no connection with other service providers, other sexual violence prevention. Like it's like, I'm doing this thing, you're doing the same, but we, there's no communication between us both... So because I think that a lot of times, we just close ourselves to our area of expertise, or like, we build just coalitions or community with those that know what we're talking about.”

Participants noted the definition of community itself could be a barrier to community-based work, and how the idea of community as based on geography alone can be dangerous for certain groups. In some instances, community was defined by shared identities and experiences where

⁷ Food sovereignty programs are initiatives aimed at enabling communities to reclaim their right to healthy, ecologically sustainable, and culturally appropriate food production and consumption. (Source: US Food Sovereignty Alliance, n.d.)

engagement occurred online to foster a sense of safety. Specifically in this example, LGBTQ+ people of color were discussed:

***“But in California, the emergency management protocol here is to rely on your neighbors, literally the people on your block...if there’s a flood or a fire or an earthquake, and there was a lot of pushback around that definition of community being based on geography from trans people of color very specifically, because there’s so much transphobia in residential neighborhoods. And so I wanted to start by maybe changing the framing of your question around how we define community, because we do a lot of community based work, but the way that communities are structured... It’s beyond who is on your block....It’s not always a safe community response model to work only in residential communities.*”**

Lastly, interviewees noted that upholding oppressive systems impacted the risk and protective factors to community-based work. They emphasized the importance of shifting perspectives when engaging with community on priorities. By expanding solutions to problems and needs beyond preexisting Western world notions, which are often patriarchal⁸, ableist⁹, and based in white supremacy¹⁰, programs can center the true needs and perspectives of the communities they aim to serve:

“...I think this is our biggest container that we put the most in, which is ‘upholding Western worldviews weakens indigenous power building.’ And so, being able to know that we can build our own thing, right? Like that, maybe a survivor doesn’t need counseling, maybe she needs ceremony. So being able to, like think around the Western world views.”

Gaps and Successful Approaches to Partnerships

Interviewees described gaps and successful approaches to partnerships, including gaps in their current partnerships and potential for future partnerships. This included multi-level partnerships with organizations and movements working at various levels of the socioecological model, from local community efforts to large-scale national or international efforts:

“I think it would be fantastic if there were more multi-level partnerships...where people that are doing national movement building work to end rape and sexual violence are in conversation with regional folks who are in conversation with more local folks. And that there’s cross-training and membership. That actually doesn’t really exist in many spaces at all. That would be amazing.”

⁸ Patriarchy refers to the institutionalization of men and/or masculinity as dominant over women and/or femininity. (Source: Center for the Study on Social Policy, 2019).

⁹ Ableism refers to oppression, prejudice, stereotyping, or discrimination against disabled people on the basis of actual or presumed disability. (Source: Lydia X.Z. Brown, 2021).

¹⁰ White supremacy refers to a political or socio-economic system where white people and institutions experience structural advantages and rights that other racial and ethnic groups do not, both at a collective and an individual level. (Source: Dismantling Racism Works. 2021).

They also discussed partnerships as facilitators to work, giving examples of successful partnerships to support community-based work:

“...we built a larger coalition with some other organizations... in that was an org called Students Deserve. And we had built a sort of alliance of like 70 organizations to reallocate school police dollars. So we reallocated \$25 million of school police money into a Black student achievement plan...And also locally, we [worked on] another campaign that was being led by another organization called Youth Justice Coalition to help pass something called Youth Justice Reimagined, which reallocated \$75 million of probation money to support youth development here in LA County...So they were able to pass this really, really big initiative that's helped to create thousands of jobs and, and reinvest money into young people and divest it from incarceration.”

Interviewees also discussed funders as being supportive of their work, as well as tensions with funders to do prevention work:

“Our foundation funders have been the most flexible and supportive, especially in understanding like the areas we want to go in as an organization. And so particularly, we have a couple of funders who don't ask for grant reports, that give us the cash up front, that are just like, 'We trust you all to be doing this work.' And then grant reporting looks like this, it looks like a conversation, and we talk about the things that we've been doing. If you give community the... if you provide opportunities for abundance, community will rise to that occasion. And so what I will say is that our foundation partners, as funders have been essential in that.”

“I think really pushing back on funders to say, did you want us to just treat the after effects of sexual assault, or do you want us to stop it from happening in the first place? Because if you actually wanted to stop it from happening in the first place, then you'd be funding housing and this and that, and you'd be giving us more resources to offer someone other than like victim's compensation, if you file the police report, and some funding for some counseling sessions and a temporary shelter for 30 days, right? Like, do you actually want to stop this from happening again? Or do you want to just put a Band-Aid on it?”

Interviewees also described working as partners with faith leaders and organizations and schools to conduct this work:

“...for the African community, faith is, you know, a very integral part of every part of their life. And so, it comes up more than just what's in the mosque. But if we're able to build a trusting relationship in mosque and people keep seeing us, and people keep hearing our name over and over again, they see the logo. We

understand it takes more than one time for someone to say, oh, okay, [our agency] is a trusted resource. I can go to them...”

Innovative Work

During the interviews, participants discussed how essential it is for community programs to ensure that their approach is tailored to the specific needs of the community it serves. They also highlighted that interventions must be creative, flexible, and community-centered throughout visioning, planning, implementation, evaluation, and sustainability. They emphasized that solutions to violence are most meaningful and effective when they come from those most affected by it. Community initiatives can create positive change and improve results, but no one solution is a perfect template.

Interviewees made an important note that innovations described work that reimagines prevention and renews practices outside of traditional frameworks, including Indigenous or ancestral practices.

“But one of the ways that we approach our training and education around sexual violence is naming that sexual violence has been used as a tool of oppression from the onset of colonization¹¹, right? That sexual violence has been used intentionally to disrupt our communities, and it continues to disrupt our communities. So starting off with that awareness in all of our advocacy has been important. And for folks to understand that we aren't just in this circumstance, we don't have like these high rates of sexual violence in our communities just because? Like this has been an intentional tool of colonization. And so if we want to indigenize, re-indigenize¹², reimagine our systems, that we have to be able and kind of willing to go back to some of our ancestral ways of knowing and those are rooted in restorative justice.”

Innovative sexual violence prevention work identified by interviewees included abolitionist frameworks that address sexual violence¹³ (e.g., efforts that remove law enforcement from the equation and reallocate police funds to addressing community-level risk and protective factors):

“And I think we can't teach children consent and bodily autonomy, and that they have a community of supportive adults who will intervene early and lovingly in a

¹¹ Colonization is the invasion, dispossession, and domination of one people to another. The long-term result of such dispossession is systemic inequities. (Source: United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2007).

¹² Indigenizing and reindigenizing practices refer to the process of adapting and reclaiming cultural practices historically associated with Indigenous peoples. (Source: Jeff Corntassel, Chaw-win-is, and T'lakwadzi, 2009).

¹³ Abolitionism calls for a societal approach to recognizing, understanding, and addressing the systemic causes of sexual violence, such as gender inequality, sexism, misogyny, racism, and homophobia. It is a call for real, lasting change that moves us away from a culture that allows, perpetuates, and excuses sexual violence (Harrington, 2010; Corntassel et al., 2009; Princeton University, 2020).

way that doesn't separate them from someone they love and care about and punish someone they love and care about, but just makes the boundaries clear and offers people healing. If we have police officers in schools, who are violating their bodily autonomy on a daily basis, right, going through metal detectors, searches, strip searches, etc. And so I think that is an important part of [a] community-based culture shift that definitely requires... [a] sort of withdrawal by the state from community spaces. But...as long as police pervade community spaces and deny people's bodily autonomy, it's gonna be really difficult to then shift a culture and be like... that's okay that this is not."

There was also discussion about policy work and monetized incentive programs led by community members to address risk and protective factors, and meeting communities' basic needs (e.g., food, housing, and employment) as a means of addressing risk and protective factors:

"In the city of Stockton, California, they were, they were sort of flirting with the idea of a universal basic income, they saw some tremendous success with a pilot that they did in the city of Richmond, California. They did a violence prevention program where, you know, they paid gang-involved folks about \$1,400 a month to do violence prevention work and saw their murder rate go down to zero. You know, so if you, if we quite literally just give people money, like give people resources, it is cheaper than the police. It is cheaper than incarcerating them, and it's cheaper, right, than criminalizing them, right? It's just cheaper. You know, so just giving people resources directly helps. You know, so the third thing I would do, which is, yeah, here's \$1,200 a month, go survive."

Desired Directions for Future Work

Interviewees emphasized that to address sexual violence, basic community needs and social determinants of health that increase protective factors should be met, like housing, healthcare access, and employment:

"What I've come to understand is the best approach to ending sexual violence and preventing sexual violence is creating the conditions under which it's not possible or certainly less possible. And I think that requires some basic things at the community level, like meeting people's basic human needs...having safe, secure, accessible and affordable housing, having access to immigration status, healthcare, and living wage income, are the primary ways that people when sexual violence did happen to them, said, you know, the things that would have prevented it from happening, or would enable them to leave it or escape the situation earlier, and certainly to better heal from it."

Interviewees also discussed the importance of promoting social justice frameworks and collaborations as a way to create systems change that prevent violence:

“I’m not saying that one rape prevention agency has to end global oppression. But I am saying that they need to be connected to the systems change struggles and have capacity to do that and support survivors in doing that to make sure the system’s change actually is about ending sexual violence. And then we want to make sure that, again, if you keep it small, and tailored to a particular experience of sexual violence, that you’re only responding to after the fact, then you’re just missing the vast majority of sexual assault survivors... Because that’s actually not ending any of it. It’s not offering healing for a vast majority of folks. Or it’s offering healing in a moment of crisis, but not long-term prevention or changing conditions.”

Several specific strategies were discussed by interviewees, including strategies to build relationships, strategies to encourage healing, including healing for staff/leaders of the organizations themselves, strategies to mobilize communities or to create partnerships, including using social media, and strategies to engage youth. Specific examples of these strategies will be described in the discussion section.

Cultural Considerations

Interviewees also discussed how employing rituals and cultural considerations are effective approaches to engaging community. These practices were highlighted as important for community engagement broadly, with a specific emphasis on prioritizing approaches that foster psychological safety and transparency for those who may experience direct or collective sexual violence. For example:

“So ritual and ceremony, which is definitely included in Playback, are super important as protective factors. If I feel like there’s a common language and way of being, if I feel like you value me, that I’m being named and seen in a space, I’m more likely to speak up and say what’s going on with me to ask for support, to follow up, to come to the next event, to tell others in the community about the event. So whenever I’m able to lead and coordinate in the space, I’m going to always incorporate ritual and ceremony and what we do and acknowledge who’s in the community.”

“As Black women...within like the Healing Justice, space, I think it’s really important that we talk about our fiercely faith-based mission as something that is expansive, something that isn’t limited to but absolutely inclusive of Abrahamic religions such as Christianity, Islam, and so forth. And we are wanting to create space for Indigenous practices to be reclaimed, for African religious traditions to be reclaimed, and prioritized in our healing. And so we have experienced and witnessed rituals from the Ifa tradition...We’ve had conversations around Hoodoo and Vodoun. And so yeah, it’s like a ‘both and...’, and not ‘either or...’”

Interviewees also discussed the importance of cross-generational engagement as a way to build connections among community members from different generations:

“We pride ourselves on being an intergenerational community. And so for example, in “Self-Love Saturday” spaces we’ve had elders, 70, I don’t know 80 years old present, all the way down to like newborns and small children, teenagers. And so really we talk about the space and most of our spaces as being intergenerational because we believe that we all have knowledge to share and contribute to a community space. And that when we are healing together, it does more good than it does to separate us. Most of our spaces are open to being generational spaces, we do have some targeted programming with young folks through different partnerships.”

“I work with women of all generations, BIPOC women, from millennials to those who are seasoned -- 80s, 90s -- and teach them how to engage with one another.”

Recommendations for Development of Sexual Violence Prevention Programs using Authentic Community Engagement and Collaboration

The following three recommendations emerged based on the facilitators, barriers, and effective frameworks or strategies identified during the interviews. These recommendations emphasize that solutions to violence are most meaningful and effective when they come from those most affected by it. Centering community voices using the recommendations below ensures that the community is empowered to identify and develop plans to meet the needs they identify, leveraging their unique strengths. In order to be effective and sustainable, program recommendations must be embraced at the highest level from organizational leadership to project funders.

- ⇒ **Recommendation #1: Empower Survivor-Centered Leadership**
- ⇒ **Recommendation #2: Offer Programming that Inspires Creativity, Healing, & Joy**
- ⇒ **Recommendation #3: Foster Community-Engaged Strategies that Employ Social Justice and Healing Strategies and Frameworks**

RECOMMENDATION #1: EMPOWER SURVIVOR-CENTERED LEADERSHIP

Community-driven solutions should be survivor-centered¹⁴ to ensure survivors of sexual violence have a real voice in the creation of programs and policies, ensuring it should not be their burden alone to do this work. Interviewees emphasized that those most impacted by violence, marginalization, and oppression have a unique and invaluable perspective on creating and implementing solutions. Participants specifically emphasized the importance of placing survivors and community members in roles with decision-making ability. Taking a survivor-centered approach ensures more effective, tailored, sustainable, and compassionate solutions.

¹⁴ Programs should be mindful of taking a survivor-centered approach compared to one that is survivor-informed. A survivor-informed approach is one in which the survivor's experience is considered in the development of a program but doesn't necessarily place them at the center of the design or implementation of the program. Being survivor-centered includes survivors during the design and implementation components of the program, and fosters choice, transparency, empowerment, and safety for survivors (NSVRC, 2017). Programs should respect the agency and autonomy of survivors and let them decide their role and level of involvement in the work.

Though survivors should be centered in this work, interviewees also discussed that trust and transparency are imperative for communities at large. This means a genuine commitment to the idea that communities are the source of the most effective solutions. Too often actions of programs contradict their words, with a greater focus placed on advancing their own agendas. To avoid this, programs must refrain from assuming they have the answers, and instead demonstrate faith in the ability of the community to envision and create the world they desire.

Strategies to Promote Survivor-Centered Leadership:

- Pay/hire survivors from the community to lead community-level work.
- Create paid community advisory boards made up of survivors and community members with diverse experiences, perspectives, and identities.
- Ensure survivors and community advisory boards have real decision-making abilities by including them in leadership roles and processes.
- Uplift the leadership of young people, LGBTQ+ communities, BIPOC survivors, and members of the disability justice community.
- Include community members who are not affiliated with the organization or project but play an informal role in promoting protective factors and reducing risk factors for violence in community.
- Survey participants to learn about issues they identify and develop programs or policies based on these findings.
- Create peer-learning spaces for survivors to share their stories, build relationships, and practice leadership skills.
- Offer training opportunities for survivors on topics like community engagement, facilitation skills, and other topics they select as foundational topics for their work.
- Educate stakeholders, internal leadership, and funders on the need for community-centered work.
- Ensure physical or digital meeting spaces are easily reached and fund expenses that may create barriers (e.g., reimbursement for travel; stipend for internet access; provide childcare).
- Establish clear goals to ensure all members are working with a sense of direction and purpose.
- Foster spaces of care, ceremony, healing, and joy to promote wellness for members and staff.
- Gather detailed feedback and work to collectively implement suggestions.

RECOMMENDATION #2: OFFER PROGRAMMING THAT INSPIRES CREATIVITY, HEALING, & JOY

Community-centered work can foster resilience and joy, which allows interventions to imagine what is needed to meet each community's unique needs and strengths.

Strategies that Promote Creativity, Healing, & Joy:

- Programs must consider community-specific activities that reflect the unique context of a community's cultural characteristics.
- Emphasize the need for creativity, expression, and the ability for communities to strategize activities and practices.
- Utilize community-based participatory research, or human-centered design, as a method to encourage members of the community in the process of addressing sexual violence prevention (e.g., community mapping, photovoice).
- Create spaces for participatory theater or participatory media, which allow participants to explore and discuss issues related to social change.
- Offer opportunities for connections to building between multiple generations of participants (e.g., cross-generational mentorship programs, workshops on intergenerational engagement).
- Facilitate and give space to feel comfortable to share or not to share.
- Leverage cultural practices to connect community members from different generations, such as rituals and ceremonies.
- Create spaces for BIPOC queer, transgender, and gender non-conforming people to heal by restoring ancestral or Indigenous practices.
- Ensure program leaders are trauma-informed and understand that everyone has trauma that may present in different ways.
- Create spaces to counter anti-Blackness by eliminating barriers to access to technology and space for Black life, Black art, Black ritual, Black ceremony, and Black leadership.
- Expand the list of referrals and resources beyond Western-based models of care and build a network of community-based healers.
- Divest from law enforcement back into communities and youth.
- Hold space and have a conversation about power and privilege and how to protect youths' rights.
- Create space for ceremony, celebrations of success, and joy.

RECOMMENDATION #3: FOSTER COMMUNITY-ENGAGED STRATEGIES THAT EMPLOY SOCIAL JUSTICE AND HEALING STRATEGIES AND FRAMEWORKS

Fostering relationships with multi-sector and diverse partners can deepen community sustainability and expand access to resources and services for youth and families. Effective solutions should broaden the network of collaborators, including non-traditional partners. Interviewees emphasized the importance of using a transformational approach to relationship building instead of a transactional one. A transformational approach to partnerships emphasizes creating long-term, meaningful relationships that are beneficial for the community and the organization. In contrast, a transactional approach is short-term and focuses on the immediate needs of a program or organization.

Additionally, advocating for policy and systems change to ensure these needs continue to be met is an important step in addressing the long-term effects of poverty and inequity. The

recommendation also calls for providing resources such as gas stipends, cash stipends, computers or tablets, job training, and paid opportunities. By providing these resources and engaging in collaborative approaches to work, the community understanding can ensure that the needs of its members are met.

Strategies that Foster Partnership:

- Listen to understand the community's history, needs, and interests.
- Demonstrate an appreciation for existing efforts and an openness to adopting community-centered strategies.
- Go where the work is already happening. Attend community events and participate in local activities (e.g., health fairs, block parties, town festivals, food drives, and farmer's markets).
- Create expansive connections and community with diverse stakeholders and organizations, including non-traditional partners:
 - Common examples of partnerships: Community-based organizations; Schools and colleges; Healthcare organizations; Social service; Public health agencies.
 - Examples of less common or non-traditional partnerships: Faith-based institutions; Local businesses (e.g., grocery stores); Housing and food assistance programs; Libraries and bookstores; Parent-teacher associations; Community gardens; Afterschool providers and summer camps; Youth sports leagues; Arts and culture programs; Local cafes and event; Independent media centers and community co-op; Parks and recreation.¹⁵
- Introduce community members to people in the community doing the work (and vice versa).
- Create membership programs to engage community networks as dedicated ambassadors for anti-violence efforts.
- Involve high-level leaders in the process to increase buy-in, communicate the investment in the work, and play a supportive role in providing connections and resources.
- Demonstrate that forming relationships takes time and effort and demonstrate by showing up intentionally and consistently in community.
- Ensure accessibility needs are met (e.g., access to food and transportation), especially for those with physical or intellectual and developmental disabilities.
- Understand how the issue of sexual violence prevention may be connected to broader community efforts.
- Provide cross-training that expands beyond the isolation of single programs or organizations to include multi-level partnerships (i.e., organizations and movements that span from local, to state, to national efforts and beyond).
- Host events with collaborators that allow community members and community stakeholders to form relationships.

¹⁵ *Sexual Violence Prevention Healthy Neighborhood Strategy: Summary Report of Listening Sessions with Youth-Serving Professionals Across New York State*, CAI (2022).

Interviewees discussed social justice as an essential framework to preventing community-level sexual violence and for programs to utilize to actively identify and address the ways structural racism, white supremacy, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism toward young people, ableism, classism, implicit bias, and microaggressions harm communities. Therefore, a leading recommendation is for programs to advocate for policy and systems change to ensure social determinants of health meet communities' basic needs.

Strategies to Utilize Anti-Oppressive and Social Justice Frameworks:

- Promote and utilize anti-oppressive social justice frameworks in your work.
- Deepen understanding of healing justice and transformative justice:
 - “Healing Justice is a framework that identifies how we can holistically respond to and intervene on generational trauma and violence and to bring collective practices that can impact and transform the consequences of oppression on our bodies, hearts, and minds (Cara Page).”
 - “Transformative Justice is a political framework and approach for responding to violence, harm, and abuse. At its most basic, it seeks to respond to violence without creating more violence and/or engaging in harm reduction to lessen the violence... Transformative justice responses and interventions actively cultivate the things we know prevent violence such as healing, accountability, resilience, and safety for all involved (Mia Mingus).”
- Center the voices of those most impacted by systems of oppression.
- Focus on strengths already present in the community and ensure that they are celebrated and supported.
- Acknowledge the histories and legacies of colonialism and oppression experienced by communities.
- Acknowledge harm the impact of histories of oppression have had on communities, and how that has transformed into the oppression communities face in the present.
- Recommend that funders adopt more equity-centered practices, such as shifting to storytelling-based alternatives to reporting and evaluation.
- Examine and challenge existing power structures, cultures, and behaviors that perpetuate inequity.
- Advocate for policy change to address systemic causes of injustice.

Limitations

Varying definitions and terminology describing this work emerged as a limitation during the interview process. This has been acknowledged as a challenge for the field of public health in the United States, particularly in work that centers community voices and leadership. Many present and past leaders in anti-violence spaces are not positioned within formal public health agencies or settings; these leaders have extensive experience in advocacy, social justice, and abolitionism. The differences in language and understanding of terms present a challenge when developing messaging to apply the findings from the interviews, as well as describe concrete practices that the field of sexual violence prevention can incorporate. In some instances, thought leaders in anti-

violence indicated that broad frameworks of concrete practices for application are antithetical to the approach for authentic community-level work to prevent sexual violence.

Additionally, while this study sought to hear from as many voices as possible working in the areas of interest (reproductive, racial, and/or disability justice serving the populations described in the Purpose), we recognize that in a sample of 15, other perspectives may have been excluded, thus making findings not completely generalizable to the broader reproductive, racial, and disability justice fields. Further, these interviews did not include people who may have caused harm. During interviews, interviewees recommended that future work expands to include those who have caused harm (not only those who have been harmed) as hearing from these voices is an integral part of preventing sexual violence.

Conclusion

The results yielded from this qualitative study serve as the foundation for key considerations and recommendations for evidence-based, promising practice, or innovative programming approaches to sexual violence prevention that meaningfully engage the community. Sexual violence affects every community and people across identities and experiences. To be effective, work to prevent sexual violence cannot be accomplished by one individual or organization and must invite all stakeholders and community members to participate in developing solutions that meet the specific needs and context of a community. Therefore, it's imperative that sexual violence prevention works in collaboration across a broad array of community from informal and formal networks of people (e.g., friends, families) and institutions (e.g., schools, faith-based institutions, community-based organizations), and that strategies used to partner with community consider varied cultural, health equity, and survivorship factors to authentically work with community as collaborators and designers. This approach broadens the scope of how we address sexual violence perpetration or victimization, recognizing that it is not just an individual problem that can be addressed or solved in isolation by existing and current programming or staff. Further, it ensures the community identifies needs based on their experiences and leverages existing strengths to prevent sexual violence. A collaborative, holistic, and intersectional approach is necessary to create effective solutions that address all forms of violence and oppression.