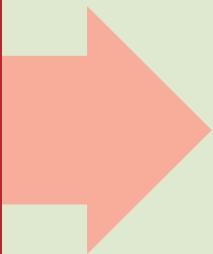


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THE ECONOMIC INJUSTICE of Behavioral Intervention Programs

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As we consider social and economic justice and peace in our communities, we must recognize that the time has come to put more action to the words associated with the change process. For clinicians, think of this as being past the assessment phase and reaching the point where the action of effective interventions begins.

We must consider that social justice reform has been a key phrase in many discussions both politically and in the field of social work. But we must ask ourselves what steps have we taken to implement change? There is an urgent need to talk less and create more action to bring about change. There are many contributing factors to continued generational dysfunction and trauma, which prevents significant changes in socioeconomic status (SES) in disenfranchised communities. This in turn perpetuates

generational poverty, abuse, and addiction (Romano, 2018).

GROWING PAINS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE AND ECONOMIC CHANGE

Lobbyist and grassroots organizations work tirelessly to advocate for changes such as economic empowerment from a macro level perspective. It is imperative that we continue organizing to move the needle on actions to support marginalized populations. Continued conversations on

causes are not as important as supporting people and organizations in securing dollars to make changes that will create generational empowerment as opposed to continued generational poverty and abuse. Organized marches and protests have their place, but could that energy be directed towards focused community action?

Conversations between lobbyists and direct practice social workers can result in greater understanding about the needs

of people in impoverished neighborhoods. The World Health Organization (2017) summarizes the existing evidence on strategies for primary prevention by identifying those that have been shown to be effective and those that seem promising or theoretically feasible. Mezzo level practitioners can support these efforts by becoming involved in the development of nonprofit organizations and enhancing support by securing grant dollars to fund after-school programs, financial literacy, and prevention programs to reduce intimate partner violence.

FROM ADVOCACY TO ACTION

An example of this level of collaboration can be applied to the scenario of a batterer intervention program (BIP). Violence against women is likely to constrain poverty reduction efforts by reducing women's participation in productive employment. Violence also undermines efforts to improve women's access to education, with violence and the fear of violence contributing to lower school enrollment for girls (International Center for Research on Women, 2016).

The World Health Organization recognizes:

In low resource settings, prevention strategies that have been shown to be promising include: those that empower women economically and socially through a combination of microfinance and skills training related to gender equality; that promote communication and relationship skills within couples and communities; that reduce access to, and harmful

use of alcohol; transform harmful gender and social norms through community mobilization. (2017)

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC OBSTACLES OF CHANGE

When reviewing programs focused on reducing abuse and violence in intimate partner relationships, one specific theme emerges. Among both perpetrators and victims of violence in intimate partner relationships, low SES is a common factor. Studies focused on domestic violence among women treated at emergency rooms indicate a higher prevalence of intimate partner violence, especially among partners who engage in excessive drinking and external episodes of violent behavior (Reichel, 2017). These factors contribute significantly to intimate partner violence, not in every situation, but in many instances. It is important to recognize that low SES is not an excuse for abusive behaviors, but it does represent a contributing factor. It is also important to note many families choose to remain intact after arrests, convictions, and incarcerations for domestic abuse (Valentine & Breckenridge, 2016).

Participants of BIPs, living in impoverished areas, have financial obligations not only to the court system but to their respective BIP. Other challenges faced by BIP participants include the following:

- Lack of transportation
- Inability to secure stable employment
- A need for substance abuse treatment
- Mental health treatment and psychotropic medication management

These factors contribute to higher rates of stress and, for some, continued substance abuse as a way to cope with the stresses of life—all of which are factors in continued intimate partner abuse. Sadly, the cycle of intergenerational abuse continues (Boots et al., 2016).

In the state of Kansas, domestic violence programs must be at least 24 weeks long, according to the attorney general's office (Kansas Attorney General, 2019). Some states require even longer programs with the expectation that participants pay participation fees consistently throughout the program or risk being discharged. In many instances, unsuccessful completion requires restarting the program and payment of participation fees. These requirements make successful completion a complicated process, often resulting in years of participation to be successful (Mills et al., 2013).

SOLUTIONS TO OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

When considering efforts to support BIPs from all three levels of social work practice, and to move from research to action, it is essential not only to have lobbyists supporting new legislation that protects women from violence, but to also to reduce mitigating factors for BIP participants to re-offend. From a mezzo level perspective, how might social justice dollars assist in funding sliding fee scales and scholarships? To support those participating in BIPs and actively engaged in the change process, how might BIP providers receive the best education and skill-building

techniques to continue to effectively support participants?

CONCLUSION

These represent just a few of the questions asked of those actively engaged in working toward supporting the change process of marginalized populations. The success of programs that have already responded to these questions can, and should, be duplicated. Research serves its purpose, but lasting change comes in the form of social workers accessing resources to secure and safe emotional and physical spaces for those seeking services. According to the World Health Organization, action-oriented interventions focused on advocacy and empowerment have the potential to decrease or even prevent intimate partner violence and the need for batterer intervention programs (World Health Organization, 2017).

When victims and perpetrators of intimate partner violence are repeatedly punished for the symptoms they experience, because of the systemic factors perpetuating cycles of poverty and disruption, intentional advocacy is necessary. Instead of feeding into the court system, program managers and direct practice clinicians should continue to advocate for directing resources toward individual treatment and familial supports, which leads to the building of safe and healthy communities (International Center for Research on Women, 2016).

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