Exposure to violence among marginalized urban youth

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Three learnings for today

1. Discuss the pervasiveness and perception of violence among marginalized urban youth.
2. Describe causes of violence perceived by urban youth.
3. Highlight strategies used by urban youth to cope with violence.
Methods

• Community partners led ethics training and covered mission of project
• Youth photographed good, bad, health and unhealthy, safe and unsafe aspects of their current home
• Research team interviewed youth about their photographs chosen
• Interviews were transcribed and analyzed
Findings

- Pervasiveness of violence, which they came to see as normal
- Youth’s explanations of the causes of violence
- Youth’s psychological and practice strategies to cope with persistent violence
Pervasiveness of violence
“All the time...It’s like I just hope that they don’t start shooting and my kids in the window and just happen that day a bullet go through the window. They don’t be little guns, they be shooting big guns. And it’s like the projects is way off and...away from everything and by the time the cops or anybody get there, they’ll be like what happened.”
“When I was coming up in North Philly there is a lot of violence going around, especially on the corner of my block. It would be like gunshots almost every day.”
"It's just like everything is connected so it's always been like – it's like living in this trap that I've been born into. And no matter how I try...it always ...has affected me."
Causes of violence

- Place-based
- Mistaken identity
- Misfortune
- Economic Pressures
- Drugs
- Biological Explanations
**Perceived causes of violence**

**Place-Based**

“When I hear projects I think okay, it’s going to be really bad, violence like most projects are.”

“I was beating up on somebody’s mom, dad just to get money just to feed myself. I would rob and steal people’s homes just to make ends meet for myself.”

**Economic Pressures**

**Mistaken Identity**

“It was mistaken identity and they shot him.”

“But a lot of times with the females, they usually more are the ones that’s actually the addicts. And so my mom, she was into drugs and...she got raped and then she had got HIV.”

**Drugs**

**Misfortune**

“Wrong place, wrong time.”

“I think violence is a negative part of your personality that overpowers you.”

**Biological Explanations**
“You think of a park usually in West Philadelphia you see a park, especially a basketball court you see them sitting on the benches selling drugs or possibly fighting over a game or God knows what else.”
“It's a lot of poverty out here, and so with poverty you've got a lot of crime, you've got a lot of black-on-black crimes, you got a lot of all that. A lot of kids is just dying young, getting killed.”
Coping strategies to deal with violence

• Psychological strategies
• Practical strategies
Psychological Strategies

“My thing is...to keep from crying you have to laugh about it or find some type of way to laugh about it.”

“I tell them to pray. God gonna cover us.”

“I guess hope. You just got to depend on hope. It’s gonna – our situation gonna be better and staying focused.”

“the only thing I can hope for is progress.”
Practical Strategies

“It didn’t bother me staying in and I felt safer and that was just it.”

“Just stay out the windows. Don’t get in the windows.”

“avoid the drama.”
Conclusion

- Majority of interviews focused on violence despite focus
- Housing insecurity does not happen in a silo
- Violence prevention is central to assisting youth experiencing housing insecurity or homelessness
- Grant funded world is not a sustainable model for vulnerable youth