2011-05

A Church Based Intervention and Aftercare for Traumatized Urban Youth

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http://hdl.handle.net/2144/8473

Boston University
BOSTON UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

Dissertation

A CHURCH BASED INTERVENTION AND AFTERCARE
FOR TRAUMATIZED URBAN YOUTH

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Ministry
2011
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are so many people to thank for assisting me with this thesis project. My ultimate thanks goes to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ who afforded me the compassion for people, the fortitude and wisdom to tackle a painful subject.

I send special thanks to my wife, Melissa for all of her support, for her encouragement and patience, for sleepless nights editing and proofreading this entire paper. I want to thank my mother Marsha Elow-Wright and sisters: Theresa, Pamela, and Gwenette for all of their encouragement, love and support.

I send gratitude to several people at Boston University School of Theology. I have to give thanks to Dean Imani Newsome who was instrumental in me considering the track of pastoral counseling under the Doctor of Ministry program. I am most grateful for two professors: Dr. Carole Bohn who retired and Dr. Dale Andrews who is now at Vanderbilt University, for willing to stay on with me as my advisors in order for me to complete my thesis project. I am extremely grateful for Dr. Linda Crain whose guidance and support allowed my thesis to come to fruition. She walked with me and held my hand every step of the way. All three provided me with scholarly instruction that guided me to the finish line. I give thanks to Onaje Woodbine of Boston University School of Theology Writing Lab who assisted me in forming a sound document. Also thanks to Editor Terry Carter for his editing expertise that was referred by Dean Newsome.
I must pay special honor to all the youth participants; Minister J. Matthew Borders, IV and the Standard Youth Ministry of Morning Star Baptist Church; Elder Sandra Barnes and Grant AME ComForCare Youth Ministry; and Lemuel Mills and Cled Sully of Action for Boston Community Development. This project could not have been completed without them. I must give thanks to Rev. Tim Allen and Roy Martin both who unlocked my writer’s block and ushered me into depths of my thesis project.

I cannot forget my church family of Morning Star Baptist Church. I would like to thank Bishop Borders and the Board of Deacons who encouraged and prayed as well as helped me financially completing my Doctor of Ministry degree. I would like to thank Rev. Gary Adams for his insight in dealing with people who have been traumatized by a homicide. To Rev. Mark Arnold who assisted in editing my paper and especially to David Miller who accompanied me to each site to handle the media aspect of the project so I could analyze the data. I would also like to thank Rev. Kara Dunn and Minister J. Matthew Borders, IV for their input on the challenges in ministering to urban youth.

Violence in the inner city of Boston greatly troubles the following gentlemen who have been at the forefront of many initiatives to stop the senseless killings. They are the first ones at the crime scenes as well as comforting families through the funeral process. I thank Rev. Jeffrey Brown of Ten Point Coalition and Rev. William Dickerson of Greater Love Tabernacle for sharing how they tackle the painful and never ending violence in the community. To Tina Chery and Milton Jones of the Louis D. Brown Peace Institute for being a valuable resource.
I dedicate this thesis project in the memory of my pops Willie C. Wright who inspired me to be the best I can possibly be.
A CHURCH BASED INTERVENTION AND AFTERCARE FOR TRAUMATIZED URBAN YOUTH

(Order No. )

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Doctor of Ministry
Boston University School of Theology, 2011

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ABSTRACT

Violence has taken the lives of many young people in Boston and has left many other youth traumatized. However, rarely have the youth been asked what they need to heal and move forward with life. The purpose of this project was to create a healing intervention model to give traumatized youth a forum in which they could express their pain and engage in a healing process. The qualitative methodology used focus groups, various methods of creative expression and individual interviews. A final evaluation proved the effectiveness of this intervention model and the need for pastoral aftercare. The findings showed that black churches must partner with professional services organizations due to their lack of resources to meet the needs of trauma victims.
CHAPTER ONE
THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

Introduction

American society has established a culture that promotes violence. This culture of violence particularly affects urban youth, who are inundated daily with images of violence and trauma that pervade the daily news, video games, homes, schools, communities, music and TV. In these urban communities the nature of violence has changed over generations from fist, stick, and knife to gun\(^1\). The handgun generation was birthed in the 1990’s. For the handgun generation of inner-city African American youth there is no post-traumatic stress syndrome because there is no “post.” The term “continuous traumatic stress syndrome” coined by Geoffrey Canada is perhaps a more accurate description for this generation who never escape the war-like conditions.\(^2\)

The urban social culture has tendency to silence the youth because it forces them to show no emotion, even though violent deaths leave them deeply hurting inside. Some do not cry at funerals because it is perceived as being soft. One has to be tough in order to survive in his or her environment. Living in such a violent culture is the number one challenge for youth today. Thus, young men and young women know that violence

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\(^1\) This footnote is to reference the title of Geoffrey Canada, *Fist Stick Knife Gun: A Personal History of Violence in America*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

\(^2\) Geoffrey Canada, *Fist Stick Knife Gun*, x-xi.

\(^3\) Geoffrey Canada, *Fist Stick Knife Gun*, x-xi.
comes with the territory, in the home, in school and on the street. They are trained to be aggressive because the slightest display of any emotion may cost his or her life.

Therefore, today many young people are forced to kill whether they want to or not. If they do not kill the person(s) with whom they are fighting, will come back and “take them out” (in street terminology). When they are hit or otherwise violated, they must strike back. They must send the message loud and clear that they are not pushovers.³

Even if someone looks at them in the wrong way, it might be a death sentence; if someone steps on their sneakers or bumps into them, it might be a death sentence; and the list goes on. Many young people are playing God when someone sins against them. However, unlike God, they operate on the policy of no forgiveness and no mercy. Thus, terror becomes the mode of operation for a significant number of urban youth and trauma the manner of life.

This traumatic stress fostered by urban violence is a problem that exists in every part of our nation and has been substantially documented.⁴ In the face of unspeakable atrocities many of these youth are crippled, possibly for life, by their experiences of trauma. Yet despite the prevalence of violence among young people, and the many

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efforts to confront this problem, few “leaders” have consulted the youth directly to learn what their perspective is, or what they think is needed to assist them in healing.

The need to listen to young voices is crucial particularly in Boston, where I serve as a pastoral counselor and clergy at Morning Star Baptist Church. Violence in the city of Boston has increased tremendously over the last few years. “After years celebrating a dramatic dip in murders in what was hailed as the ‘Boston miracle,’ residents have been shaken by a resurgence of homicides and shootings concentrated in the city's poorer neighborhoods. In one week alone, police reported seven murders in seven days.”

In 1990 a total of 152 homicides were reported due to the heavy influx of drugs and guns in Boston. As the crack-cocaine epidemic grew so did the memberships of gangs. Due to the crack-cocaine epidemic gang warfare increased. These gangs began turning to firearms as a means of security and aggression, leading to growth of violent deaths in Boston.

In 1992, violence in the city of Boston reached an uncompromised intensity when it charged into a religious sanctuary. A young man was repeatedly beaten and stabbed by fourteen hooded men outside of the Morning Star Baptist Church in the Mattapan section of Boston. The men chased the young man inside the church during a funeral service for another young victim. In response to this incident, the Ten-Point Coalition was

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immediately formed to fight against gang-related violence. As a result Boston’s homicide rate dropped 61.2 percent, from 152 homicides in 1990 to 59 in 1996. By 1998, 35 murders took place. For a 29-month period ending in January 1998, Boston had no teenage homicides.

In recent years, Rev. Bruce Wall of Global Ministries Christian Church has suggested that violent circumstances have started to adversely impact our community again. He feels that we cannot afford to rest and recall previous miraculous efforts and outcomes for dealing with violence. Rev. Wall stated, “We have to start all over again. We need a new miracle. The other one is dead.”

The question then is, why has violence increased again? The Boston Miracle appeared to be unsustainable because it did not address the socio-economic factors of violence. It only addressed the symptoms; and even then, the diagnostic and treatment model were ill-conceived. There are many diverse variables that result in a person being violent and pursuing a life of crime: such variables include poverty, unemployment, absentee fathers, and lack of education, lack of positive role models, lack of resources and opportunity, and an unjust justice system. In fact, the Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) laws have kept thousands of previous offenders in Massachusetts


from accessing employment, housing, loans, insurance, and entrance to college.\textsuperscript{11} When people cannot take care of themselves or their family by legal means, they may turn to crime as their only option. For the sake of survival, a life may be taken, which creates intense trauma in the lives of affected youth.

Given the major social problems of violence and trauma within urban black youth and a lack of literature drawing from the wisdom of the youth themselves, this project will gather materials to construct a pastoral theological understanding of youth who have faced a traumatic event. At a later date the information gained from this project may comprise a resource guide to better equip pastoral caregivers to work with this population of youth. First, these youth must have an opportunity to share their stories.

\textbf{The Problem}

I must acknowledge a few personal reasons that prompted me to develop this project. I am very passionate about giving back to my community. This passion drives my mission to assist young people toward channeling their vibrant energy in a positive direction and providing them with the tools to succeed. I have been personally affected by violence in losing a nephew and a younger cousin by way of homicide. In addition, as a clergy, I have eulogized and buried young people who were murdered. As a clergy, I am crushed at seeing the many make shift memorials throughout the community that are

\textsuperscript{11} http://www.baystatebanner.com/local11-2009-11-26
visited for years. I believe that such urban shrines do not allow those impacted by a violent death to move on with their lives.

There are also some methodological reasons that drew me to this project. Intervention is a clearly a necessary component of violence prevention programs that are in the community. However, the community also needs to hear the voices of youth, as well as the input of adults, regarding the concerns of violence. I believe that my research has to be based on an emic approach, i.e., trying to understand the problem in terms of those who are experiencing the problem. It would be difficult for an “outsider” to voice what these Black youth are feeling and dealing with from day to day.

In my community, I noticed that many of the programs that address violence have a psychosocial focus. They address the prevention of violent crimes (homicide) but many are established without input from youth. The mayor, clergy and police department have come together to curb the violence, while other organizations like the Ten-point Coalition were formed to fight the plight of violence. The Louis D. Brown Peace Institute was established to assist families in the painful post-homicide process and to promote peace. I believe prevention is an important aspect of the violence question, but that still leaves some important questions such as: “When the violent crime happens, how do youth in urban contexts navigate through the personal trauma while these events are ongoing?” and “Who is willing to listen to them?”

Many in my position want those answers too. Therefore, the purpose of the project is to create an intervention model that gives traumatized youth a forum to expressing creative, expressive and perhaps non-traditional ways their pain in losing a
loved one to homicide. Where is God in these young persons’ abilities to live, strive, and make meaning of the violence? Where is He as they look to heal? As pastoral caregivers, these unanswered questions are absolutely psycho-spiritual in nature.

At an Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD) community discussion, two young ladies discussed how their cousin was killed and the help they received after the incident. One received grief counseling at her suburban high school while the other received nothing from the Boston Public Schools (BPS). The young lady from the BPS said, “I had no one to listen to me.” The other young lady informed us that her suburban high school responded to her needs much differently.

In my seminary studies, as in my own community, I noticed the same methodological problem occurring; the voices of youth are just not heard especially in the area of trauma. This absence of direct input from youth poses an acute practical concern. In all of my research, I have yet to discover a diagnostic and intervention model that starts directly with the youth’s experiences. In a Counseling Adolescents in Crisis course, I heard the voices of many youth who faced challenges during their influential and developmental stage of adolescence in such texts as *Our Boys Speak* by John Nikkah (2000) and *Adolescents at School* by Michael Sadowski (2003). Both of these are good studies, but neither dealt with the trauma these youth have experienced in a violent culture. The voices of the adult survivors, the pastors, community leaders, the

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12 Action for Boston Community Development’s community on April 10, 2008 to determine if there programs are effective and to determine if other programs need to be created. Trauma intervention was one of many programs suggested to be formed for the well being of the community.
grief/trauma counselor, theologians and the professionals (psychiatrist) are all heard but there was no primary recognition of voices of the youth.

Similarly, in a human development course, I became equipped as a pastoral counselor to apply psychosocial theories to my life and to the lives of individuals I serve. And yet, there was no content in the course that specifically addressed or offered theories for clergy like myself who conduct homicide funerals and who minister to so many people whose lives are so fragmented. Many of the people I serve feel that they do not have the capacity to put their lives back together again. While this was an exceptional course it did not adequately represent the experience of trauma in terms that urban Black youth themselves would find meaningful.

In another course, Theology of Trauma, the question that surfaced for me was, “How does a young Black kid’s religious interpretation of trauma differ from the perceived Black Christian tradition of suffering?” In this instance I found that religion can be often be inarticulate and insensitive in responding to a traumatic event such as homicide. In a course on Suffering taught by Professor Lucien Richard, he stated, “that no religious tradition offers a completely satisfactory answer to the question of suffering; but there is also a good deal of truth that if we cannot accept a suffering humanity, the reason may be our inability or unwillingness to accept a suffering God.”

In both my studies and personal experience working with those who have suffered a traumatic loss, I discovered that many realized that their faith is all they have. “The

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13 Lucien Richard former Fellow of the Boston University Professors; lecture March 1, 2004.
church has made it possible for me to face and accept death, and to hope that death does
not destroy life,”writes theologian William Shea. For many of those I serve this quote rings absolutely true.

Therefore, noting the absence of first-person input from traumatized youth in all of these areas of study, I have developed this project to solicit, interpret, and give voice to their unique perspectives. Based on my study, I believe that traditional methodological tools in the studies of trauma are inadequate to understand urban Black youth trauma experiences. Those professionals, who bring tools exclusively from social science disciplines, unwittingly convey inadequate perspectives that do not allow a fully evolved understanding of the trauma problem or solution to urban violence. One simply cannot be an outsider and fully understand the dynamics of urban violence. By my own experiential definition, an outsider is any person who lives outside of the urban community and whose life has not been affected by violence. Even more paradoxically, these frequently are just the ones who report on the nature of this violence as if they are “inside” experts on the subject.

The Setting

In the summer of 2008, I participated in a series of trauma training sessions to address the needs of youth and families when a traumatic event occurs in a Boston inner city community. At this trauma response training, a young man spoke out of anger about

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the lack of clergy presence or response to the violence on Boston’s inner city streets. As painful as it was for me to hear the truth of what he was saying, I felt he was correct. Has the black church fully addressed youth who have been traumatized? In many ways the church has been effective at conducting funerals for victims of violence, but has failed to provide adequate pastoral care to traumatized youth after the funeral. The consensus seems to be that the black church is out of touch with the lives and concerns of black urban youth.15

As I listened further to this young man, I began to hear ages-old theological concerns embedded in the stories he told and the questions he raised. In fact, he raised essential theodicy questions regarding “how God can be good and all-powerful.” and “Has God abandoned his generation?” There were points where he wondered out loud, “God, how could you let this happen to my friend? God, why? God, where is the peace you promised? God, will you reconcile the conflicts between young people or will you continue to let your children suffer?” He seemed to be viewing the world now as evil, unsafe, and chaotic. Even his feelings of anger, resentment, and a sense of betrayal seemed to be directed toward God and those who represent God, the clergy. For him, the Boston Miracle was nothing more than locking young people up, and he wanted no parts of that miracle or that type of god.

Within this encounter, I discovered how critically youth need to be heard and addressed by clergy, pastoral counselors, and laypersons in the aftermath of their

traumatic ordeals. The black church’s greatest challenge may be to recognize the unyielding religious or spiritual impact that traumatic events wreak on these youth and young adults.\textsuperscript{16} A pastoral counseling component will be a great asset in understanding trauma’s impact on youth. The Black church must help address the trauma youth are facing. Black clergy must learn directly from the youth what their psycho-spiritual needs, concerns, and desires are before they can effectively respond to their pain and assist them in the healing process.

Even though faith communities are increasingly becoming more involved with crime victims’ issues, even the most well-intentioned faith communities are not always equipped to provide assistance. Many clergy receive little or no formal training in how to help victims in trauma, and they have little information about available services.\textsuperscript{17} Dr. John McDargh, Associate Professor of Religion and Psychology at Boston College, states that victimology is given “slender attention” in the schools that make up the Boston Theological Institute.\textsuperscript{18}

Thus, this project is designed to create a robust and dynamic opportunity for youth who have faced a traumatic event to tell their stories, paying particular attention to how pastoral caregivers can better serve them in their healing process. It is intended to

\textsuperscript{16} A great discussion this significance is suggested throughout the text, Wilson, J. P. \textit{Trauma, Transformation, and Healing} (New York: Brunner/Mazel Inc. 1989).

\textsuperscript{17} \url{http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/publications/infores/faith_based_vict_asst/insufficient_training.html}

\textsuperscript{18} \url{http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/publications/infores/faith_based_vict_asst/insufficient_training.html}
help Black clergy to provide adequate pastoral aftercare to youth suffering from traumatic experiences.

The Black Church

The Black church plays a significant role in the life of its congregants and community. It is not only a religious institution expounding on theological principles but in the Black community the church has been an economical, educational, political, psychological and social resource center. Moreover, “churches can be a resource to those who are the victims or the perpetrators of violence.”19 However, some questions arise: How does the Black church address youth who have been traumatized by violence? Does the Black church make youth feel comfortable enough to share their pain?

I examined these questions in a class project for my Social Science Perspective on the Church & the World course. I observed youth in Sunday school and worship service. I also interviewed parents and Sunday school teachers at Morning Star Baptist Church (MSBC). In the worship service, some youth seemed to be in tune with what was going on while others seemed to be bored.

Every 2nd Sunday of the month is youth Sunday at Morning Star. The youth take part in the worship service by delivering the opening prayer, giving the welcome address, and by communicating the church announcements. Although having this small piece in the worship service is important, many parents still feel that their children do not

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experience the fullness of church life. While MSBC’s Sunday school still provides their children with a sense of community and teaches them to live a moral life, parents and Sunday school teachers conveyed that outside of Sunday school, in the life of the larger church, many young people feel rejected and as if they do not fit in. Oftentimes they suffer through the worship service because they cannot relate to the sermon. Thus, for many young people church becomes a waste of time, especially since it does not allow the youth to have a voice. The truth is that the voices of young people need to be incorporated into every aspect of the church.

When the youth do voice their opinion then they are often considered disrespectful and disobedient to the church’s standard. Although the Black Church can provide youth with a sense of community, history, and identity, it becomes more of a safe haven when it also allows their own unique voices to share their highest aspirations and their deepest pain. No longer can the younger generation be put in the background; they must be respected and their ideas and needs must be incorporated into the life of the church and community. One young lady whose friend was killed wrote a letter to one of her associate pastors stating that the youth of her church do not have the support they need in this time and age. Young people are the proverbial voices crying in the wilderness, eagerly waiting for someone to listen to them.

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20 Jalessa Turner, a young adult who attends Grant A.M.E. Church and a sophomore at Salem State University has given me permission to quote her.
Definitions

In a study like this where there are clearly distinct dynamics of understanding and expression in play. It was important to establish a common vocabulary for the youth and for the project design. What follows is a set of shared definitions that will lend clarity and greater understanding to the reader of this project. The following definitions will apply:

Collage - an artistic composition of materials and objects pasted over a surface; a literary piece, composed of either borrowed and original material or an assemblage of diverse elements: *a collage of conflicting memories.*

Conflict - “the result of differences that produce tension.”

Focus Group – a method of collecting qualitative data from a small group selected from a wider population and sampled, as by open discussion, for its members' opinions about or emotional response to a particular subject or area.

Forgiveness - “an element in the process of reconciliation, a process in which the search for justice is an integral and yet subordinate element”

Pastoral AfterCare - the process rendered by pastors, pastoral counselors, chaplains, and others with ministries grounded in theological reflection and consideration

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23 [http://www.answers.com/topic/focus-group](http://www.answers.com/topic/focus-group)

who provide continuous care for an individual, a family or a community that has faced very painful event.

**Peace** - “the freedom from disquieting or oppressive thoughts or emotions.”

**Practical theology** - as its name implies, is the study of theology in a way that is intended to make it useful or applicable. Another way of saying it is that it is the study of theology so that it can be used and is relevant to everyday concerns.

**Psychosocial** - referring to the mind's ability to, consciously or unconsciously, adjust and relate the body to its social environment.

**Psychospiritual** - a term pertaining to mental health and spirituality.

**Reconciliation** - “a restoration or even a transformation toward an intended wholeness that comes with transcendent or human grace, expresses the result of a restored relation in behavior. It not only draws upon forgiveness, but also elicits the qualities of truth and justice in the recovery of harmony or peace.”

**Resiliency** - “the power or ability of a person to return to his or her original form after being bent or stretched or twisted or pushed or pulled by life’s setbacks.”

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28 [http://www.medicalglossary.net/Psychospiritual.htm](http://www.medicalglossary.net/Psychospiritual.htm)


**Spirituality** – a connection to the Divine within oneself. It pulls one to the center of his or her being, which connects him or her to the One who has created him or her.

**Suffering** – “always means pain, disruption, separation, and incompleteness. It can render us powerless and mute; push us to the borders of hopelessness and despair,” states James Poling.

**Trauma** - constituted as “emotional shock: an extremely distressing experience that causes severe emotional shock and may have long-lasting psychological effects and bodily injury: a physical injury or wound to the body.” Primary trauma is experienced by those individuals directly involved or those who have witnessed a traumatic event. Secondary trauma is someone a step removed from the traumatic event, e.g. someone who did not witness it.

**Violence** - “as a word is derived from the Latin noun meaning force, strength, power exercised more often in a physical manner but also in a spiritual manner…thus violence signifies to perform with force, to act aggressively so as to injure, ravish, outrage or transgress the dignity and integrity a person in his or her physical or spiritual welfare”

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Limitations

The present study has certain limitations that need to be taken into account when considering its content, context and contributions. The primary limitations of this study revolve around issues regarding the sample population. And it must go without saying that it’s impossible for this or any other such study to speak for all teenagers.

Therefore, understanding that it will be impossible to interview teens from every ethnic group, this thesis project focuses on teens of African American descent who make up the largest population affected by urban violence in Boston. Thus, this project scope will be limited in diversity of population. In terms of gender, the project may also not reflect a numerical equality, since those participants recommended is dependent on the recommending resources. Beyond this, the Black community is a uniquely diverse population where cultural backgrounds and traditions can greatly influence answers on virtually any question. Also, despite the study’s best efforts at establishing a common vocabulary, teens whose native language is not English may not fully understand the terms used in the survey. Here, when necessary, I will attempt to address the potential hardship through the use of interpreters.

Clearly, not every teen participating in this project will believe in God or belong to a faith community. However, each young person responding is certainly influenced by a larger culture that includes views of God and church. In this regard I believe the church still has a measure of currency, even for nonbelievers. Lastly, the narrative approach can be limited in capturing the full scope of youth traumatic experiences because some teens
do not know how to fully express their grief and trauma, or simply may not be ready to do so.

The project must also take into consideration that qualitative research via focus groups and interviewing has inherent limitations as well. Based on Morgan, Krueger, and Gibbs the following are potential limitations of focus groups: 1. Bias and manipulation (moderator leading participants based on own prejudices; participant saying what they think you want to hear); 2. False consensus (some participants may be more focal while others remain silent); 3. Difficulty in distinguishing between an individual view and a group view; 4. Difficulty in making generalizations (not a real sample due to the small size of focus group); and 5. Difficulty of analysis and interpretation of results (due to the open-ended nature of focus group). Beck and Geer list a number of shortcomings of interviews that relate to this general point: researchers are likely to misunderstand participants’ language since they do not have opportunities to study it in common usage; participants are unwilling or unable to articulate many important things and only by observing these people in their daily lives can researchers learn these things; researchers have to make assumptions about the things that could have been observed, and some of the assumptions will be incorrect.

With all of these considerations in mind I am not deterred, however. This investigation serves as an important foundation for exploring a number of questions and

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emerging concerns. A future body of research is already under consideration, fueled by these initial efforts. The immediate benefits of this work have the potential for responding to urgent and emerging needs of this population. It will assuredly be worth the effort and care taken in creating a first-person forum for this group of very deserving individuals.

The Design of Study

Following a series of traumatic events involving youth in Boston’s inner city communities, the hushed requests for clergy aftercare revealed the need for pastoral caregivers to be more effectively informed about and trained to address trauma. To reiterate, this project is designed to create diverse and effective opportunities for those young victims of this violence-related trauma to tell their stories, paying particular attention to how pastoral caregivers can better serve them in their healing process. In this regard, a logical first step is to learn directly from the youth what are their concerns, challenges, experiences, and needs.

In order to investigate this problem, a qualitative research method has been chosen. This method permits me to look at this problem in one of its natural settings, (i.e. inner city Boston). It allows me to gather data in an open-ended manner, with the sample that presents itself at the designated time, without manipulation on my part. However, the data gathered for this particular project will be limited to the population of a specific group of youth; in a particular location in inner city Boston, who have been engulfed in escalating levels of violence. It is a dynamic, real life circumstance which does not
necessarily comply with the control demands of highly calculated experimental research design or methodology.

The sample is unique. It is a subset of youth and young adults living in the designated area, who volunteer to participate in this project. It will be impossible to interview all youth from this area. Efforts will be made to assist youth whose first language is not English and who may not fully understand the terms used in the question and consent form. I will attempt to address their questions through the use of interpreters if necessary. Because the sample is unique, generalizations about “all” youth, or even youth in similar circumstances, cannot be made. The results of this study will point us in a certain direction, but caution must be used in applying the results to other areas and populations.

The specific qualitative tools I will utilize to assess the pastoral theological concerns of youth will be interviews and focus groups. The spiritual aspect of their concerns will be assessed based on the interview questions. The questions will focus on the traumatic event as it relates to the youths’ views of God. The plan is to understand if trauma has drastically altered young peoples’ views of God? The tools employed will also allow me to better understand the current reality and religiosity of these youth. This understanding includes the impact and results of how God plays a part in their healing process, and their approaches to dealing with trauma and violence. Again, not every young person participating in this project will believe in God or belong to a faith community. However, the church is called to serve non-believers as well. Trauma affects people of all religious beliefs or disassociations.
Significance of the Study

This study is significant in that it makes available voices that are traditionally not heard in reference to grief and trauma. I could find no conducted study that measures youths’ perspective on suffering due to homicide, especially from a spiritual standpoint. A review of the literature as it relates to the trauma and its impact on young survivors of urban violence reveals that very little attention has been paid to this area. For years pediatricians and other physicians have been concerned with the physiological impact of trauma and urban violence on their patients. The physiological symptoms most often noted are contraction, fight or flight response, rigidity, tightness, armoring, numbness, withdrawal, disassociation, shock, and sometimes even fainting, all of which can work negatively with the endocrine and visceral systems. Trauma has also been found to be embedded deeply in the tissues and nervous system and thus the underlying emotional/mental components are then recognized, brought into consciousness, titrated, or remediated.36

Psychologists and other mental health professionals have expended considerable amounts of their time dealing with the emotional well-being and issues of trauma and Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) among young adolescent Americans. Severe traumatic experiences for many leaves long lasting scars in terms of fear, resentment, 

hatred, bigotry, aggressiveness, anger, defensive/aggressive syndromes, dissociation, submissiveness, withdrawal, emotional numbness, distance, rigidity, hyperactivity, etc., depending upon the individual's unique circumstances and constitution. These imprinted scars severely close one down from their creative potential in the moment they create a barrier to future positive experiences or coping skills. Without successful psychotherapeutic intervention, including de-programming, defusing, re-wiring, re-patterning, re-alignment, or re-integration, many people experience emotional breakdowns, and have to be hospitalized.\(^{37}\)

Psychologists, pastoral counselors, clergy, and some laypersons performing pastoral ministry have started to recognize and appreciate the role that religion or spirituality plays in healing and wholeness. Research has shown that spirituality and religion may actually enhance mental health in many cases. Spirituality has been associated with several positive psychological outcomes including subjective well-being, self-esteem, physical health and marital satisfaction.\(^{38}\)

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Rev. William Dickerson of the Black Ministerial Alliance said, “It’s a spiritual matter when our kids are killing one another. If we don’t get at the root of the matter, the spirituality of the matter, then things will be as they are today.”  

Lack of spirituality has been associated with several negative behavioral and psychological outcomes including depression, substance abuse, suicide and anxiety. The vast majority of the research effort to date has been limited to investigation unique to the concerns of adult trauma. A significant amount of this effort has included the issues of adults returning from combat who are suffering from acute trauma. This project seeks to contribute to research in this area by specifically resourcing and addressing concerns of youth in urban trauma.

My work with youth survivors of homicide as a pastoral counselor and minister leads me to believe that they too could benefit from deep theological reflection on the impact of trauma on one’s total well-being. Therefore, the church can play a significant role in the life of a traumatized youth. Moreover, the church can be a resource to those who are ‘survivors’ of violence. The church has to approach traumatic teens with

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39 Thomas Caywood, “Pastor: We Need a New Miracle,” The Boston Herald; December 19, 2005.

delicacy and sensitivity because of their wounded souls. It must provide youth with a climate of safety, trust, confidentiality, and security. 41

Therefore, this DMin project is significant in that it makes an initial step into giving urban youth a voice as they address their trauma issues. It will also serve to develop a diverse body of knowledge and information specifically designed to address the acute pastoral aftercare needs for youth experiencing homicide trauma. For future consideration, my project will utilize the data gathered from this research to develop a resource guide for clergy. It is my great hope that this resource guide will be used to foster meaningful discussion and new explorations of a practical theological methodology for connecting pastors with youth in trauma.

CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The literature review included an investigation of trauma and the use of narrative therapeutic processing in the pastoral care of individuals (the telling of life stories). Artistic expression, as a means of connecting to the emotional and spiritual impact of trauma was one key area exposed in this review. A review and assessment of the literature relating to pastoral care in response to youth survivors of urban violence was also conducted. There are three review areas fundamental to the design and development of this project:

1. Context and background of the impact of violence on urban youth
   A. The nature and scope of the incidence of violence and urban youth
   B. The impact of violence on urban youth emotional development
   C. The challenges facing clergy ministering to urban youth
   D. The strategies for clergy to connect with urban youth

2. Theory of African American scholars and the pastoral counseling needs of urban youth
   A. Dale P. Andrews
   B. Homer U. Ashby
   C. Anthony Pinn
3. Pastoral counseling intervention strategies with urban youth
   
   A. Pastoral care, narrative approach, and trauma
   
   B. Use of expressive arts as an intervention strategy

**Design and Development of Project**

**Impact of Violence on Urban Youth**

I began this project as a direct result of my encounter with a young man in my community who challenged me regarding my responsiveness to the emotional needs of youth in our community who almost daily encountered violence. It was a heartfelt, emotional appeal that swiftly got my attention. Several questions immediately came to my mind, prompting my review of literature, which might help me answer several key questions within an overall thesis, e.g., (1) How pervasive is this problem nationally and locally? (2) In what ways are youth impacted emotionally? (3) How responsive has the “Church” (and the Black Church in particular) been in responding to the needs of our youth? (4) Have any clergy scholars already investigated this group and their concerns from a practical theological viewpoint? Lastly, (5) what intervention strategies seem to work best with youth and young adults from this population?

*Incidence of Violence and Urban Youth*

For the purpose of this project, violence refers to traumatic experiences by youth who lost a loved one or a friend to homicide. The collective statistics and the individual stories of suicide, homicide, eating disorders, drugs, alcohol, promiscuity, school failures,
and other destructive symptoms are frightening. Furthermore, this youthful discontent is manifested regardless of ethnic heritage, sex, or socioeconomic status. The evidence suggests that the challenges for minority youth tend to be the most pervasive. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reports that non-Hispanic black male teenagers are disproportionately affected by homicide. Homicide is the leading cause of death for non-Hispanic black male teenagers. The risk of dying from homicide among non-Hispanic black male teenagers (39.2 per 100,000 population) is more than twice that of Hispanic males (17.1 per 100,000 population) and about 15 times that of non-Hispanic white males (2.6 per 100,000 population).¹

According to the US Census national population estimates for 2007, Blacks make up 12.8% of the US population. However, of the 14,831 murder victims in 2007

¹ http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db37.pdf
nationally, and for whom race was known, 50.1% were Black and 47.6% were White (1). Most victims of homicide were men (3.4). Thirty-one percent were between the ages of 13 and 24 (3). Firearms were used in 68% of all homicides (5).² Youth violence is widespread in the United States (U.S.). It is the second leading cause of death for young people between the ages of 10 and 24.

- 5,764 young people age 10 to 24 were murdered—an average of 16 each day—in 2007.
- Over 656,000 physical assault injuries in young people age 10 to 24 were treated in U.S. emergency rooms in 2008.
- In a 2009 nationwide survey, about 32% of high school students reported being in a physical fight in the 12 months before the survey.
- Nearly 6% of high school students in 2009 reported taking a gun, knife, or club to school in the 30 days before the survey.
- An estimated 20% of high school students reported being bullied on school property in 2009.³

Boston Public Health Commission Research and Evaluation records based on Massachusetts Department of Public Health Office data indicate that Blacks are disproportionately affected by violent crimes, especially homicides. Appendix E, containing Tables 1 and 2, cites Massachusetts rates of homicide victimization and offending by age, race and sex. A clearer picture of ongoing trends is given in Figure 4, ²http://www.bphc.org/about/research/hob/Forms%20%20Documents/HOB%20with%20Charts/13_Violence%20no%20Sui%20Text%20w%20tables_HOB09_11May09.pdf
which displays the estimated number of white and black males, ages 14 to 24 in Massachusetts, committing murder from 1976 through 2007.

Also mimicking the national pattern, the role of firearms in the recent increase in youth killings, shown in Figure 5, is particularly significant and disturbing. The percentage of murderers ages 25 and over who used a firearm has remained fairly stable in Massachusetts, hovering around the 40 percent mark. By contrast, the percentage of gun killings among 14- to 24-year-old perpetrators has experienced a four-fold increase over the past three decades, now reaching an 80 percent high point.\footnote{http://www.mass.gov/Cago/docs/Community/uvs_report_final.pdf}

In 2005, there were 75 homicides in the city of Boston -- the highest figure in ten years. In 2006, there were 74 homicides. Both years saw hundreds of non-fatal shootings. In 2007, Boston is poised to surpass those numbers. What is perhaps more alarming is that the young people caught up in this youth violence epidemic are younger than ever. Of these homicides almost 30 percent have been teenagers and 50 percent of the victims of gun violence have been between the ages of fourteen and twenty-one.\footnote{http://parkstreetcityworks.org/boston.html, (resources: Boston Homicides in 2007, Boston Public Health Annual Report, 2007, and Boston Report of the Special Committee on Youth Violent Crime Prevention)}

This violence affects all of Boston; the bulk of it has been sustained by the neighborhoods of Roxbury, Dorchester, and Mattapan. The statistics are troubling; the greater concern is the effect this violence is having upon the youth living in these neighborhoods. Many youth have responded to this constant threat

\footnote{http://www.mass.gov/Cago/docs/Community/uvs_report_final.pdf}

by avoiding significant portions of their neighborhoods, still others have determined that the best solution is to carry guns themselves, thus perpetuating the cycle of violence. The police districts that record the majority of the homicides are the neighborhoods previously mentioned (B2=Roxbury; B3=Mattapan, and C11=Dorchester). Graphical data of Boston’s homicides in 2010 follows.

http://parkstreetcityworks.org/boston.html
BOSTON HOMICIDES
A breakdown of the 72 homicides in Boston in 2010.

By month

By hour

By police districts

Victim by race/ethnicity

Victim by age

Victim by gender

By case status

SOURCE: Boston Police Department
At the end of 2010, only 27 of the 72 killings reported, about 38 percent of the case had been solved. Cases are considered solved when a suspect is arrested or identified in an arrest warrant. Such data seems to support a heightened sensitivity that many youth exhibit to the dangers of their Boston neighborhoods. The risks of dying for black youth are between ages 12-19 years old. Each year from 1999 to 2006, the annual death rate for teenagers has averaged 49.5 deaths per 100,000 population. However, the risk of dying is not distributed evenly among all teenagers. Male teenagers are more likely to die than female teenagers at every single year of age from 12 to 19 years, and older teenagers are at higher risk of dying than younger teenagers. At age 12, for example, the death rate for males (20.2 deaths per 100,000) is 46 percent higher than the rate for females (13.8 deaths per 100,000). At age 19 the death rate for males (135.2 deaths per 100,000) is almost three times the rate for females (46.1 deaths per 100,000). (See Figure 1 below)

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Many youth feel trapped within the boundaries of their neighborhood because venturing outside of it can cost them their lives. The violence around them has effectively limited their mobility. Neighborhood rivalries are the basis for much of the more serious violence that occurs in Boston. Even within one’s neighborhood, spaces come to be known as safe or unsafe, not because of conflicts with outsiders but because of how the space is used by insiders. Youth who engage in illegal activities hang out in a particular part of the neighborhood. Youth who do not engage in such activities avoid this space for their safety.

Even babies are not safe in these high homicide areas. Mattapan’s Massacre was one of Boston’s grisliest mass murders in nearly two decades made all the more horrific by the senseless execution of a baby in his young mother’s final embrace - sent horror

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10 Ibid, 43.
rippling throughout the city, from the most powerful seats of government to the child’s devastated family. The community witnessed a two year old buried with his 21 years old mother. Trauma knocked on many doors in the wake of this mass murder. Many youth gathered at their make-shift memorial.

**Impact of Violence on Urban Youth Emotional Development**

The United States is especially violent relative to other countries; homicide rates are four times higher than those seen in industrialized countries. The aftermath of death always creates ripple effects that reverberate across the multiple contexts of development. Since adolescent grief, relative to other age groups, is characterized as particularly intense and emotional youthful survivors of homicide deaths, in addition to the normal grieving process, feel overwhelmed by their emotions, depressed, angry, and fearful of their own futures.

Clearly, with respect to homicides, the unique biological characteristics of the developing adolescent, especially with respect to immature cognitive and neurological development, compounded by non-optimal home environments, alienation from schools

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13. Ibid, 74.
that fail to respond to the needs of such at-risk youths, and association with antisocial peers, leads to potential for accidents and violence.\textsuperscript{14}

A young person’s reaction to traumatic events affects their personal development. Exposure to violence has been linked to a wide range of mental health problems for youth, including anxiety, depression, suicide ideation, and posttraumatic stress disorder. Most of this work has found that increased violence exposure has a positive, additive effect on increased mental health symptom reporting. Whether the individual is a witness, a victim, or even a perpetrator, exposure continues to be a major predictor of mental health problems among youth, particularly those characterized as low income, minority, and urban.\textsuperscript{15}

Elevated rates of children’s mental health needs among urban youth have been attributed to the characteristics of the urban environment, such as community violence, crime, gang activity, drug use, and poverty, which disproportionately affect minority children and place them at greater risk for the development of mental health difficulties.\textsuperscript{16}

Three critical issues related to the impact of community-level violence on children have been identified by Pynoos, Frederick, and Nader in 1987. Specifically, proximity to the violent incident was related to child distress, as were the closeness of the

\textsuperscript{14}David Balk and Charles Corr, \textit{Adolescent Encounters with Death, Bereavement and Coping}, 73-74.


relationship to the victim and the extent of prior trauma exposure. On the basis of these findings, inner city youth, with their increased odds of witnessing multiple violent incidents and having familiarity with victims of the community violence, are at increased risk for experiencing significant distress.\textsuperscript{17}

Although, urban youth are likely to have more serious mental health needs or complex social situations, they are less likely to receive any services. In fact, rates of service use are lowest for youth residing in low-income urban communities. Evidence continues to accumulate that as the level of mental health needs or the complexity of a child’s and family’s social situations increases, mental health service use decreases.\textsuperscript{18}

From developmental psychology we know that the teen years can be the most challenging of all times. One of the more prominent themes in life course research is the identification of factors that put one at risk for adversity in later life. Studies of poverty and joblessness, for example, often focuses on childhood and adolescent factors that inhibit the generation of human capital necessary for socioeconomic success.\textsuperscript{19} Likewise, research on psychological well-being pays close attention to the exposure to stress and trauma in early life that activate long-term trajectories of mental distress.\textsuperscript{20} While both life course studies and research on the consequences of criminal violence are important

\textsuperscript{17} Mary McKay, Cynthia Lynn, & William Bannon, \textit{Understanding Inner City Child Mental Health Need and Trauma Exposure}, 202.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid, 202.


\textsuperscript{20} Ibid, 2.
areas of social science inquiry, there have been few attempts to integrate their tenets toward a developmental theory of victimization. Yet, two empirical facts suggest the importance of victimization in the life course. First, violent victimization is strongly concentrated on early in the life cycle.  

Second, victimization, at least in the short term, has profound psychological consequences. As salient events that occur during pivotal stages of the life course play a significant role in shaping life course trajectories, violent victimization should have important implications for personal and social development. Childhood and adolescence are the periods in which the personal and psychological resources that guide cognition and decision-making are developed. It is also the period in which individuals accumulate the various "capitals," human, social, and cultural, that shape the content of later lives. Violence occurring during this critical period should have important developmental implications. Violence at other stages may ultimately have fewer life course consequences.  

The symptoms may be triggered by the sudden death of a loved one or friend because “it provides no opportunity to say good-bye—it leaves so many things just hanging, unsaid and unfinished.”  

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22 Ibid, 2.  
23 Ibid, 6.  
24 Ibid.  
actuality or in prospect—overwhelms the fragile defensive structures at this time of life, often leading to extreme reactions.”

When teens experience violence such as murder suddenly their innocence and certainties are shattered and their world no longer feels safe. Revenge and animosity toward the perpetrator can get in the way of truly grieving for the person who died.”

“The adolescent’s reaction to crisis is a product of the youngster’s ‘expectations, goals, and belief systems,’ and the extent of one’s vulnerability.”

An important feature of adolescent development is the formation of personal relationships between youth and adults in the larger community. In making the transition through adolescence into adulthood, young people need and benefit from relationships with a range of engaged adults outside of the family. These relationships can provide resources and benefits—social capital—that helps youth connect to and eventually make the transition into the adult world. Adult investment in youth not only promotes individual adolescent development, but also ensures the continuation of a healthy civil society.


27 The Dougy Center, Helping Teens Cope with Death (Portland: The Dougy Center or Grieving Children, 1999), 38.


The Challenges Faced by Clergy Ministering to Urban Youth

This section focuses on the challenges pastors face in trying to minister to urban youth. Research shows that while “teens often have an innate resistance to accepting help, they may be especially reluctant to help from professionals such as therapists, counselors, psychiatrists, clergy and doctors.” Two areas of particular concern for pastors are: 1. youth distrust of authority figures, and 2. the black church and clergy credibility. Both anecdotally and as a matter of practice, I can attest to these factors of concern.

Youth Distrust of Authoritative Figures

While working with youth of Morning Star Baptist Church and working with at-risk young black males in the community, I have found them to be hesitant about seeking assistance from adults or authority figures. For many of them, their relationships with parents and teachers are strained. They tend to seek guidance and assistance with their challenges and concerns from peers, and older young adults whom they admire. Many of them feel that adult authority figures in their lives are too pushy and controlling. They feel that they cannot voice their concerns or offer their opinion without being interrupted or abruptly shut down. Young people are frustrated with adults’ zero tolerance policy for violating any rules whether at home, at school, or at church.

Research has shown that zero tolerance policies, by increasing “student shame, alienation, rejection, and breaking of healthy adult bonds,” exacerbate negative mental-health outcomes for youth. There is little confirmation that zero tolerance has provided any positive effects for families or communities, and “no evidence indicating that the policies themselves have assisted parents or that family units have been strengthened”\textsuperscript{31} through the use of the policies: “As zero tolerance policies by nature do not provide guidance or instruction because they focus directly on punishment, such actions often are seen as unjust and may breed distrust of adult authority figures and nurture adversarial confrontational attitudes.”\textsuperscript{32} “By subjecting students to automatic punishments that do not take into account extenuating or mitigating circumstances, zero tolerance policies represent a lost moment to teach children respect and a missed chance to inspire their trust of authority figures.”\textsuperscript{33}

Contemporary Western society provides few opportunities for meaningful interaction with youth and adults in the community. The lack of contact between youth and community adults manifests itself in negative attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that adults direct toward young people. Youth notice these negative perceptions and


\textsuperscript{32} Ibid, 2.

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
behaviors, which, in turn, fuel their negative views of adults and reinforce their isolation from them.\textsuperscript{34}

Young people of color are often demonized as illiterate, violent, and promiscuous thugs. Youth bashing is most insidious when it causes society to turn its back on the challenges these young people face and to see their failures solely as the result of their own mistakes. Those in need of supportive social programs are seen as the least deserving and condemned as a generation. When society focuses on young people’s shortcomings and overlooks important environmental factors,\textsuperscript{35} it is easy to pre-judge them. More often than not, many black clergy also fall into this category of prejudgment.

The Black Church and Clergy Credibility

In the civil rights era, the black Church became the focal point of the black communities. Black clergy addressed the economical, political, and social concerns of the community, but after this era, many black pulpits limited their message regarding these concerns. I believe the young man mentioned in the previous chapter who criticized black clergy at the trauma training, was questioning the credibility of the black church and clergy. He wanted to know, where are the black clergy when the young people of the community need them the most? People of every demographic and lifestyle segment have come to disrespect both the church and its leadership because they have

\textsuperscript{34} Robin L. Jarret, Patrick J. Sullivan, and Natasha Watkins, Developing Social Capital through Participation in Organized Youth Programs: Qualitative Insights from Three Programs, Journal of Community Psychology, Volume 3, No. 1, January 2005, 42.

consistently opted for institutional convenience and have failed to adapt to the changing needs of the mission field. For centuries, the western church has assumed that the mission field is in some foreign land not realizing the mission field is their neighborhood.\textsuperscript{36}

Even some black clergy are questioning the credibility of black clergy. Some believe the reason why certain church leaders were not available to criticize the police and local political authorities during recent unrest was because they and their church projects were on the payroll and received funding from those organizations. Rev. Robert Beckford states that “when a church has sold out, it has no viable alternatives to offer. It becomes just another ‘gang’ competing for turf and resources in the community.”\textsuperscript{37} Rev. Bruce Wall declared that “the clergy, who had been active and visible in the wake of the murder of an eighth-grade male, were more concerned with grant money and social standing than in keeping peace on the streets.”\textsuperscript{38}

Rev. Eugene Rivers stated that the church is “losing a lot of young black men and prefers to ‘get high’ on the Holy Ghost.”\textsuperscript{39} He goes on to say that within the black church there is “a growing megachurch phenomenon which is not, in too many cases, connected


to the lived reality of poor black people."\(^{40}\) Rev. Dale Andrews stated in his book *Practical Theology for Black Churches* that “the black church is out of touch with black urban youth. He challenges the black church to re-examine itself so as not to dismiss its past nor hinder its future growth.”\(^{41}\)

To further agitate the situation, many inner city pastors live outside of the city of Boston. They are removed from the community they serve. Beckford states that “church members give up, move out and avoid confronting criminals in the community. Many black clergy have been ‘scared out’ of living or serving in the most deprived parts of the inner city.”\(^{42}\) Urban theologians and sociologists alike frequently challenge the black church to develop resources for youth who have been traumatized.

Beyond the review of literature pertinent to this study, I interviewed a couple of youth pastors who could lend a further perspective on the challenges clergy face in connecting with urban youth.\(^{43}\) Their responses were tied to the following question, “What challenges do clergy face in ministering to urban youth?”

What follows is a sampling of what two pastors said. One particular challenge in ministering to today’s urban youth is that they are frequently more engaged to a cell phone or computer screen than to human encounters. This creates pressure in building effective events and programs. These events and programs must be based on forming

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\(^{43}\) Rev Kara Dunn and Minister J. Matthew Borders, IV (February 2010).
relationships, as youth will thrive on the social aspect of the youth ministry. The substantial needs of the youth hinder building relationships and sustaining them. The needs are so great that youth pastors frequently do not have the all tools to meet their needs.\(^\text{44}\)

Often these young pastors find themselves counseling not only the youth, but family members as well. Many of the problems youth face are from the adults in their lives. They frequently suffer from street violence and violence in the home. Youth may not share family issues with youth pastors because many black families keep family secrets to themselves. In some instances, when a pastor approaches a parent, offense is taken and the pastor is instructed to focus on their child and not on the parent.\(^\text{45}\)

Limitations on church funding can also hinder churches from creating the necessary church events and programs. By contrast, the church often throws money into youth ministry without the proper support or structure. Complex dynamic exist in the area around the church dynamics of the want and needs of pastors, youth pastors and deacons versus what the youth want. Oftentimes church culture limits young people from freely expressing themselves. The challenge is having the church become relevant to these youth.\(^\text{46}\)

Beyond these obstacles, we often see absentee fathers’ at the most influential age or a frequent lack of home training producing layer upon layer of confused and conflicted

\(^\text{44}\) Ibid, (February 2010).

\(^\text{45}\) Ibid.

\(^\text{46}\) Ibid.
youth and a loss of self-identity. In such a state of uncertainty, youth validate themselves with misinformation, while struggling to cope with their own lack self awareness and emotional pain. To relieve their pain they frequently fall into addictive behaviors such as drug and alcohol abuse, and promiscuous sex. However, these addictive behaviors can be lessened if a young person can talk to an adult who genuinely cares.47

The Strategies for Clergy to connect with Urban Youth

Clergy, whether they reside inside or outside of the community, must be seen in the community if they wish to effectively connect with urban youth. Pastoral presence carries a sense of caring. Moreover, they must know at least the neighborhood that surrounds their church. While pursuing my Master of Divinity degree, I conducted a study on how well churches are connected to their neighborhoods. My findings indicated that many churches in the black community did not know their neighborhoods. This confirms Thomas Bandy’s statement that the “Church is addicted to the church.”48 It only focuses on the people within their four walls. Black pastors are accused of extreme passivity, and black churches are indicted with a general lack of significant community involvement.49 However, pastors need to connect with people in the neighborhood they serve.


48 Thomas Bandy, Why Should I Believe You, 3.

49 Dale Andrews, Practical Theology for Black Churches, 62.
Therefore, pastoral caregivers can connect with urban youth by not being judgmental but building a relationship with them. Pastors are use to talking, therefore, the challenge for many is to be a pastoral presence. Therefore, a pastoral caregiver must relinquish his or her agenda in order to connect with youth. When forming that relationship, it is important for the caregivers to allow the youth to interpret their own story to gain valuable insight. This limits clergy misconception of their own hermeneutic framework. It also allows pastoral caregiver to connect with youth by meeting them where they are.

Effective ministry with youth begins when an adult leader finds a comfortable way of entering into the life and world of an adolescent.\(^5\) Listening is the communication tool that allows us to enter into another person’s private world and helps us better understand what someone else is feeling or experiencing.\(^6\) Ministry will not occur until religious leaders earn the right to be heard by teenagers. Earning the right to be heard come when clergy is sensitive to youth feelings and demonstrate a willingness to listen and talk with them.\(^7\)

While being sensitive to the pain of homicide, pastoral caregivers must listen to youth stories with a heart in their ear. Pastoral care provider should want to, as Boston University Professor Chris Schlauch puts it, “do (pastoral caregivers) hear what (youth)
hears? (They) must be open to hearing something sacred, something more, something ‘of God’ in order to respond to what may heal, what may reveal from within them, between them and beyond them.” When people are in pain, many pastoral caregivers want to fix their situation but they have no power to heal; only God does. Therefore, they should not force their thoughts or beliefs onto the youth; they can only be with them in the process of healing.\footnote{Chris Schlauch, Do I Hear What You Hear: Responding to “A Something More” \textit{Transform: What is at the Heart of Us}, Manuscript, 2005, 3.}

The pastoral caregiver cannot offend the griever by repeating clichés such as, “your loved one or friend is in a better place”, “God knows what’s best”, or “time will heal all wounds.” Never should a pastoral caregiver tell a survivor to stop grieving and get on with his or her life. However, it is the caregivers’ job to encourage youth to be patient as they grieve. Most of all, the caregivers should be an available presence to comfort and listen to youth as they express their grief. Pastoral care providers need to help youth feel comfortable and empowered. Therefore, pastoral caregivers can connect with the youth by creating a climate of safety, trust, confidentiality and security as well as a circle of accountability.

However, a pastoral caregiver’s key tool for connecting to youth is utilizing empathy. In the area of trauma a pastoral care provider must have compassion for people and the ability to feel other people’s pain. Empathy is the ability to walk in someone else’s shoes. It is a balancing act. Empathy involves two simultaneous and opposite relational skills: 1) making connection with the another person by experiencing what it is
like to be that person, 2) maintaining separation from the other person by being aware of one’s feeling and thoughts.\textsuperscript{54}

African American Scholars and Pastoral Counseling

In preparation for this study, I undertook a review and assessment of research that addressed the relevant areas of pastoral counseling need, research methodologies and intervention strategies of noted African American scholars: Dale P. Andrews, Anthony Pinn, and Archie Smith, Jr.\textsuperscript{55} The work of these individuals has much to offer in effectively addressing the impact of trauma of teenage African American youth and young adults who are also willing to explore their religious or spiritual needs.

Dale Andrews states that American individualism and racism affect the psychosocial development of persons. These two ‘isms’ make a person feel in control (internal) of life or controlled by life (external).\textsuperscript{56} External control disrupts the confidence of the self-determination and the choices realistically available. Under the

\textsuperscript{54} Carrie Doehring, \textit{The Practice of Pastoral Care, A Postmodern Approach}, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 18.

\textsuperscript{55} Several noted scholars in this area include: (1) Dale P. Andrews, \textit{Practical Theology for Black Churches: Bridging Black Theology and African American Folk Religions}, Louisville: John Knox Press, 2002. Two sections of particular interest for this project are Chapter 3: Readdressing Black Theology to Black Churches (pg. 50+) and Chapter 4: The Convergence of American Individualism and Racism (pg. 67+); (2) Archie Smith, Jr., \textit{Siblings by Choice: Race, Gender, and Violence}, Atlanta: Chalice Press, 2004. This reference contains information regarding the historical, social, political, economic, and ecological dynamics that shape who we are and how we relate to one another. The author also includes a very significant discussion of the many layers and complexities of race, gender, class, and violence that makes change difficult to achieve and less likely to be sustained. and (3) Anthony Pinn, \textit{Noise and Spirit}, New York: New York University Press, 2003. Of particular interest to me and for this project is Pinn use and rationale for using rap as narrative theology as a primary framework for pastoral care in the African American community and congregation.

\textsuperscript{56} Dale Andrews, \textit{Practical Theology for Black Churches}, 70.
conviction that external responsibility belongs to a society unwilling to comply freely, the black urban youth lose hope for effective change.\footnote{Dale Andrews, Practical Theology for Black Churches, 76.} The Black church can be critically important in the lives of urban youth because it can enhance the psychospiritual development that provides hope by a reframing their identity and creating a new community of care for disaffected young people. According to Andrews:

The opportunity and enhancement of individual thriving is a goal of communal action and therefore a communal responsibility. Individual fulfillment means something quite different from self-interest. Human fulfillment and individual thriving fit well within the corporate vision of liberation and black ecclesiology. It is incumbent upon the black churches to resocialize the reality of self-interest intrinsic to personal salvation and religious piety.\footnote{Ibid, 65.}

Archie Smith, Jr. redefines sibling to be greater than blood relatives. He use the sibling term in a broader social context. He contends that as humans, we need one another to create and sustain loving relationships, trust, community, meaning and purpose, food, shelter, a sense of security, and well being. He realizes the differences of cultural, economical, social, political, and personal circumstances.\footnote{Archie Smith, Jr. and Ursula Riedel-Pfæfflin, Siblings by Choice: Race, Gender and Violence, (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004), 2.}

However, according to Smith, we are siblings by choice because we depend on one another, natural environment, and caring relationships to sustain the one world we share with all living things.\footnote{Ibid, 2.} To be called family is particularly relevant in poor
communities.\textsuperscript{61} Urban youth act on this concept by joining gangs. In addition, urban youth who have been traumatized by violence, for their safety, feel the need to join a gang. However, the psychological and social aspect of gang violence makes it difficult for urban youth to achieve personal goals and for them to sustain meaningful relationships.

For Anthony Pinn, urban youth live under the uncertainty of life. Rap music, a popular idiom of contemporary urban youth, speaks of the psychosocial subjugated knowledge of endings, and of death itself. Young people understand that their loved one or friend has “died”; they know “death” in the body. They are made to live in such a space of death, the gap between the child and the adult.\textsuperscript{62}

However, rap music is experiencing an emerging religious discourse founded on the rhymes of artists who speaks from a psychospiritual perspective. This new religious discourse is received although many inner city African American youth do not attend formal institutionalized religious services. But the lack of a relationship with formal, institutional religion has not stopped the yearning for a religious encounter. Gospel rappers provide the theological language of justice and hope desperately needed by urban youth.\textsuperscript{63}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{61} Archie Smith, Jr. and Ursula Riedel-Pfaefflin, \textit{Siblings by Choice: Race, Gender and Violence}, 6.}


\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{63} Ibid, 184-185.}
These three scholars offer substantive theory and conclusions that are significant and relevant to my thesis. Their scholarship addresses psychological, social, and spiritual issues prevalent in the black community. In addition, they have confirmed many urban youth concerns, especially those of young black males. In sum, such study makes a strong case for new and creative interventions by the church in the lives of urban youth affected by the violence and peril of their life circumstances.

Pastoral Counseling Invention Strategies with Urban Youth

Pastoral Care, Narrative Approach, and Trauma

One of the most challenging groups needing attention and assistance from pastors and pastoral counselors include youth and young adults. Geoffrey Canada states, “those of us in America’s ghettos—the poor, the powerless, the trapped—we worshipped at the altar of violence.” Homicide causes a war in the soul whereby those who have been traumatized are in a battle to survive. Therefore, young people of the inner city need a healing experience. Cheryl Townsend Gilkes characterizes the social role of black churches as a “therapeutic experience.” Spiritual direction and pastoral counseling provides a psychospiritual-moral perspective for understanding and respecting individuals’ unique spiritual journey of development, their experiences and striving to

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64 Geoffrey Canada, Fist, Stick, Knife, Gun: A Personal History of Violence in America (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 84.

grow and change their strengths and achievements, as well as their developmental deficits and unfinished business.\textsuperscript{66}

The black churches can tap into the spirituality of traumatized youth even if they are mad at God. Their anger with God allows them to begin to talk to God because spirituality is the bridge between chaos and order. Spirituality is important because it taps into the central core of a person. It transcends the human experience that causes light to come out of a dark past. Spirituality is the connection to a divine presence that helps those who are traumatize to survive and to continue to live through their traumatic experience. Barbara Glasson states that “survival is a process of hope in which enough safe space can be discovered, bonds broken and individuals and communities find the resilience to live.”\textsuperscript{67} Spirituality is critical in human transformation. Transformation happens when the soul of a person moves away from darkness and into the light of human restoration. Transformation to occur deep within the recesses of the soul and spirituality according to Gestalt theory is to “integrate and reintegrate our split-off parts into a whole person.”\textsuperscript{68}

Therefore, the pastoral caregiver has to create an atmosphere whereby the youth feels comfortable sharing his or her story. Dr. Earnest Johnson states, “Until a man accepts his hurts and talks out his feelings, he will be forever trying to hide from a part of

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\textsuperscript{67} Barbara Glasson, \textit{A Spirituality of Survival: Enabling a Response to Trauma and Abuse}, (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2009), viii.
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himself that he must confront and learn to love in order for him to become a whole man.”

Much or what I’ve researched suggests that intervention strategies of narrative art seem to work well for youth and young adults attempting to share their emotional concerns following a traumatic event. Narrative therapy is having increasing influence in a number of academic areas including therapy, spirituality, psychology and theology. Cook and Alexander encourages “counseling professionals, psychologists, pastors, social workers, and chaplains” to explore the effectiveness of using narrative therapy for transformative work with those they serve.

Since many pastors are great story tellers such narrative intervention approach does not take them out of their comfort zone. The idea of telling stories in therapy is not a new concept. Storytelling has been used in community projects, health promotion and disease prevention, coping with grief, and other concerns of a therapeutic nature. In addition, Milton Erickson was noted for his use of telling stories or anecdotes in session for therapeutic means. Giving youth opportunities and vehicles to tell their stories and to be heard and acknowledged is a critical part of the healing process. Letting youth know they are not alone in their fears and experiences helps them to own and assimilate such fears. It is particularly important to have an appropriate form of expressing grief and bereavement over the loss of family members, friends, possessions, culture, home or even


country. “Teens are the most difficult to work with in terms of assisting them with expressing their feelings and communicating grief reactions.”

Storytelling in therapy fits within the social constructionist framework as well. Gergen writes that “as children we are introduced to stories, fables, fairy tales, and family stories that begin to organize our world. Telling stories then, becomes an integral part of life, particularly in Western society.” Sternberg suggests that “stories not only organize our world, but also our love relationships. With stories so much a part of how individuals organize the world, the power behind storytelling in therapy becomes apparent. The use of stories not only allows for a change in emotion, but also could serve as a platform to deconstruct social inventions.”

Edward Wimberley is convinced that “Genuine pastoral care from a narrative perspective involves the use of stories by pastors in ways that helps persons and families visualize how and where God is at work in their lives and thereby receive healing and wholeness.” These narratives suggest ways to motivate people to action, help them see themselves in a new light, help them recognize new resources, enable them to channel behavior in constructive ways, sustain them in crisis, bring healing and reconciliation in


74 http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3658/is_200604/ai_n16350860/pg_9/?tag=content;coll1.

75 Edward Wimberley, African American Pastoral Care, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 1.
relationships, heal the scars of memories, and provide guidance when direction is needed.\textsuperscript{76}

Richard Hester states, “We understand ourselves in form of a story, and we perceive events in the form of a narrative. Story is our access to reality.”\textsuperscript{77} Two therapists, Freedman and Combs use narrative to work with people to experience their life stories in ways that are meaningful and fulfilling. They incorporate social construct because every person’s social, interpersonal reality has been constructed through interaction with other human beings and human institutions and to focus on the influence of social realities on the meaning of people lives.\textsuperscript{78} An individual’s dominant stories often have far reaching influences on their daily coping and living and even on the path of their life. Narrative interventions looks for even covered up stories which may aid, by highlighting them and bringing them forward, the destructive influence of overwhelming problems and overworked storylines.\textsuperscript{79}

\textit{Use of Expressive Arts as an Intervention Strategy}

The narrative methodology assumes that horrific experiences are stored in the memory in non-sequential fragments and should not be processed, at least not in the

\textsuperscript{76} Edward Wimberly, \textit{African American Pastoral Care}, 3.


\textsuperscript{79} \url{http://www.able-differently.org/PDF_forms/usingStories/Narrative%20Therapy.pdf}
beginning phases of intervention, using verbal techniques. Thus the use of art “the silent story” brings forth a visual presentation of remembered experience to express, to bring from inside to the outside, the traumatic narrative. Art is used as a means of communication. Again, ample theoretical and practical evidence supports the notion of expressive art therapy as a highly effective approach for allowing youth and young adults to share their feelings, thoughts, and concerns about a wide array of traumatic events and life situations.

Creative expression art activities can include the following: collage, dance, drawing, letter, and poetry. Through these and other mediums, art proves to be a powerful means for connecting to the emotional and spiritual impact of traumatic events. It can send light into the darkness of human’s hearts. There is substantial research that describes art as a tool for therapy. Art gives the youth a safe way to express themselves when verbal discussion is difficult or not possible. Art can be the path to the unconscious that leads to the road of self-expression. Frederich Schelling said that, “art reflects for us the identity of conscious and unconscious activity. Art is multi-dialectical; it stands at

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the intersection of revelation of consciousness and the world of nature. Art does both
sides of the dialectic: it begins in turmoil and it ends in peace.”

Schelling also said, “The resulting artwork is both real and ideal as it presents and
symbolizes the union of spirit and nature.” It can communicate the most inward
thoughts of the artist. It unlocks the tongue through the mind of the artist although the
artist never speaks. Thomas Merton reminds us, “Art enables us to find ourselves and
lose ourselves at the same time.” Stephen Destaebler says, “art is a kind of play in a
serious sense that tries to restructure reality so that we can live with the suffering…”

Poetry speaks of this, but I believe art also in expressing their deepest fears, insecurities,
and anxieties, gives voice to what we feel deepest with ourselves. This helps us find our
way back to the mainstream of society. Art can be a tool that allows these traumatized
youth to tap into their inner person; their spirituality.

Central to group art therapy is the healing capacity of the artistic process the
release of unconscious materials which, when consciously assimilated, can lead to the
release of creative potential for the individual. The physical nature of making something

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84 Ibid, 207.


can contribute to a release and relief of tension. Group work is an efficient and effective way to offer emotional support. Art and the creative process are agents of self-expression and can be transforming in nature. Combining the support of the group and the use of physical and creative activities offer the grievers what they need most: acceptance and nonjudgmental listening. The use of creative arts in group setting facilitates a way of comprehending some of the most complex aspects of human existence and provides a structure for our emotional chaos and a shared social setting for construction of meaning.

**Conclusion**

This comprehensive review of the literature provides the context for the thesis of a key role for the Black church in addressing the pastoral needs of urban youth traumatized by violence. In theory and practice, it can be seen that clergy have a unique opportunity to nurture as well as mentor these young individuals towards resolution of their distress and clarification of their options for proceeding toward a more meaningful life. Finally, evaluating the contemporary use of intervention strategies using expressive arts modalities yields compelling evidence of a well-traveled and broadly defined path for pastoral and lay leadership to minister to these youth struggling to communicate their feelings, needs, and concerns.

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CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Statement of Purpose

This project attempts to respond to the need for more adequate pastoral care to traumatized youth in the inner city of Boston where I work as a pastoral care provider.\(^1\) It has been designed to acquire information directly from these youth regarding their perceived needs, concerns, and desires. The project needed to create a common language and understanding in order to assist the youth in their healing process. The ultimate purpose of the project is to create an intervention model that gives traumatized youth a diverse and creative forum to heal from their pain in losing a loved one to homicide. Telling their stories is not only important to their self healing, but also to illuminate a path for more relevant and effective aftercare intervention ministries.

This project used focus groups and interviews as the qualitative methodology to collect data for this project from youth who have experienced trauma. This chapter will layout the methodology used to gathered valuable information from youth by recruiting them to take part in a focus group and/or interviewing them.

\(^1\) The inner city of Boston that is discussed in the project includes the areas of Roxbury, Dorchester, Mattapan and Jamaica Plain.
The project focused on Black youth between the ages of 13-21 in the inner city of Boston. Black youth in this age range are being killed disproportionately and more frequently than any other group of people in this community\(^2\). Information obtained from this research, including the project groups’ impressions and beliefs, as well as the impact of these traumatic experiences on their faith, will aid in the future development of techniques and resource materials to assist pastors in establishing ministries around this crisis.

**Data Collection**

In order to gather sufficient data, hearing from the participants was crucial in gaining a comprehensive view regarding the affects of violence on the trauma and identifying a potential healing processes for urban youth. I believed that I also must hear from clergy to determine if their churches already have trauma focused ministries in place. If not, my project would aim to provide a means for the church to effectively help youth move towards healing from traumatic events in their lives. Three fundamental steps were followed to acquire the desired information: (1) assessing the landscape, (2) process of participation, and (3) verification and data analysis.

\(^2\) [http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db37.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db37.pdf), (see Chapter Two for statistical detail).
Assessing the Landscape

In assessing the landscape, the following individuals have been resources and assisted me in completing this project: Rev. Gary Adams, Overseer of the Homicide Ministry of Morning Star Baptist Church (MSBC), Rev. Tim Allen of Greater Friendship Baptist Church, Rev. Jeffrey Brown, Executive Director of the Ten-Point Coalition, Rev. William Dickerson of Greater Love Tabernacle Church, Milton Jones and Tina Chery of The Louis D. Brown Peace Institute, Rev. Sandra Barnes of Grant AME Church (Grant) and Minister J Matthew Borders, IV, also of MSBC.

Rev. Gary Adams is keenly aware of the need to have an intervention program for youth violence survivors. He states that Homicide Ministry, as a pastoral care initiative, has no youth involvement, being almost exclusively comprised of mostly grieving adults who have lost a son or daughter to homicide. Within this ministry, he wants to develop a youth program around trauma. Rev. Tim Allen, a pastor who works for the Department of Youth Services and who deals with youth from various faith backgrounds, believes that many youth are acting out negatively, whether at home or in school, because their trauma is not being addressed. Many adults think that youth acting out is simply bad teenager behavior. What they frequently fail to understand is that youth are acting out

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3 The Boston TenPoint Coalition (BTPC) is an ecumenical group of Christian clergy and lay leaders working to mobilize the community around issues affecting Black and Latino youth…The Boston TenPoint Coalition is faith-based because faith breeds a sense of hope and provides the nurturing yet structured principles and environment that many youth lack. We are a coalition that collectively aspires to make the “Boston Miracle” continue to work.) http://www.bostontenpoint.org/about.php.

4 Rev. Gary Adams of Morning Star Baptist Church (Met with on November 8, 2008).

5 Rev. Tim Allen of Greater Friendship Baptist Church (Met with on February 7, 2008).
due to traumatizing violence. Interestingly enough, this project’s scope may be limited by the very fact that many of the impacted youth are not themselves aware that they are traumatized. They just do not know the conditions of trauma or the symptoms of grief.

Rev. Jeffrey Brown stated that Ten-Point Coalition basically has two crisis intervention methods. First, they are with the family after an incident to assess the family’s immediate needs, as well as help with the preparation of funeral arrangements. They conduct a vigil within a week after the incident to help the family with the grieving process. Second, they have a memorial a year from the incident for friends and family members, especially for those who could not make the funeral for various reasons. They gather with family and friends at the incident site with candles, music, and prayer.⁶

Rev. William Dickerson said that once he invited some youth to his church after a homicide to voice their grief over the incident. His church intervenes mainly through its First Response Ministry. A team of his fellowship’s laypeople go into the home of the victim’s family to offer comfort, support, and prayer. The team also goes into schools to help youth associated with the deceased. Here, they speak about alternative solutions, other than revenge. The team also walks within the community nearby and around the crime scene to assist neighbors with their grief.⁷

Milton Jones, a homicide survivor and the Director of Operations for the Louis D. Brown Peace Institute, assisted me in the focus group sessions I conducted, as an adult support in case any youth needed to talk with someone. The Louis D. Brown Peace

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⁶ Rev. Jeffrey Brown of Ten Point Coalition (Met with on October 8, 2009).

⁷ Rev. William Dickerson of Greater Love Tabernacle Church (Met with on September 17, 2009).
Institute’s mission is to create and support an environment where families can live in peace and unity. Its goals and objectives are threefold: 1. Schools: To develop programs and activities that teach and instill the value of peace and enrich the lives of young people. 2. Families: To assist and empower survivors of homicide victims with tools that not only rebuild their lives but also their communities through education, collaboration, and policy advocacy. 3. Community: To inform and educate the public about the causes and the consequences of violence on the individual, the family and the community, while transforming the community into an environment where young people are valued by adults and by their peers for their peacemaking efforts.8

It was evident from all that went before commencing the practical component of this project that a clear need for this model of trauma intervention has been established. My research did not uncover an available program or initiative that encompassed the specific intent, or the demographic, spiritual and cultural community that this project is focused on. I’m confident therefore that I have undertaken a valid study, one that will have merit beyond an intellectual exercise and a practical value that I hope to further demonstrate as time unfolds.

8 http://www.louisdbrownpeaceinstitute.org/
Process of Participation

Recruitment of Participants

The data collection phase was implemented from January 29, 2010 to May 24, 2010. Participants were recruited for this project from youth groups of Grant and MSBC and an afterschool community center group of Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD). Grant Youth “ComforCare” Ministry is a ministry for the Bereaved and Grieved based on traumatic experiences to help youth mourn effectively and to help them be restored. Grant’s mission is to develop believers as they mature in Jesus Christ; yielding to the will of Almighty God by bearing fruit to the spiritual, intellectual, emotional, environmental, and economic needs of all people of every clime and culture.9 MSBC “The Standard Youth Ministry” upholds the banner that God will rise up young people to oppose the work of the adversary. MSBC’s overall mission is to inspire and encourage men, women, and young people; to bring them to the Lord Jesus Christ.10

ABCD has remained devoted to its mission of promoting self-help for low-income people and neighborhoods. ABCD empowers disadvantaged people by providing them with the tools to overcome poverty, live with dignity, and achieve their full potential. It emphasizes education, skilled-job-training, and asset development. ABCD's Youth Explorations program focuses on the critical needs of at-risk and economically

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9 http://www.game-bos.org/html/ministries.html

10 http://www.msbcthestandard.com/aboutus.html
disadvantaged teens, providing them with opportunities to earn, learn, and achieve success in school and in life.\textsuperscript{11}

The Grant and MSBC session participants were recruited through the Facebook internet site and by locally dispersed flyers. ABCD session participants were selected by the Operation Manager and Director of Youth Programs who invited me to conduct the trauma focus group session for their winter youth session. All participants signed a consent form giving me permission to use their testimony. Consent and assent forms were delivered two to four weeks to both sites prior to the focus group sessions, to be completed beforehand. However, a few parents and youth signed them the day of session at Grant and MSBC. All of the ABCD participants had completed consent and assent forms prior to the session. As the primary researcher, I reviewed the completed consent or assent forms to confirm each participant’s signature and validate their participation. A parental signature was obtained from youth under 18 years old before they could participate. Only after consent / assent forms had been signed by both youth and/or their parents were the youth able to participate (see Appendix A for consent / assent forms).

\textit{Preparation}

Reverend Sandra Barnes, an Elder of Grant met with me in 2009 and agreed to mentor me on this doctoral project. She viewed it as a link toward helping Grant develop a more effective ComforCare Ministry for Youth, a ministry that gives voice to youth

\textsuperscript{11} http://www.bostonabcd.org/programs/youth%2Ddevelopment/
who have been traumatized by violence. Her view fell right in line with my future intention beyond the project, which is to help churches in Boston’s high violent crime areas to create ministries of healing and aftercare for young people, primarily youth who’ve been exposed to violence that has claimed the lives of their family members and friends.

The preliminary process consisted of meetings and conference calls with ministers and laypeople of Grant and MSBC in early January 2010. Since my project was geared toward youth, we decided that the youth should be involved in the preparation stage. Two youth volunteers from Grant agreed to help publicize the Trauma Focus Group session by preparing flyers and by using the social media network *facebook* to spread the word (See Appendix C for flyer). They suggested that we secure RSVP’s to get a general idea of how many people would attend. These volunteers assisted me in contacting youth ministers at area churches. One volunteer agreed to transcribe the session by hand to help capture the youths’ thoughts and feelings on the topic of trauma.

Everyone was given an assignment to complete. I assembled the project materials, consisting of art supplies such as scissors, glue, pens/pencils, colored markers, paper for collages and paper for drawing and writing. I also brought grief and counseling materials. Other adults involved brought in magazines for collages. The sound/audio person from MSBC, David Miller, agreed to do the videotaping and music. I also enlisted the services of a psychologist, Dr. Linda Crain, to conduct the interviews. Consent forms were delivered to MSBC and Grant a month prior to the focus group sessions.
It was decided to hold the first Trauma Focus Group session on January 29\textsuperscript{th} at MSBC. Minister J. Matthew Borders, IV, the Youth Pastor of Morning Star Baptist Church, was contacted to solicit MSBC’s youth participation and to conduct the focus group. He informed me that it was best to do it on a Friday night since the youth are already present. He agreed that he would turn that evening over to me. It was scheduled from 6 to 9 p.m. (a three hour session, with a meal of pizza provided afterward).

The second Trauma Focus Group was held in the morning at Grant on March 6, 2010, with the permission of its Pastor Ellis Washington. Rev. Sandra Barnes contacted Pastor Ellis Washington regarding his approval of the session. She also contacted members of Grant to solicit their support. Members of Grant volunteered to shop for the food. The refreshment menu included: yogurt, mini bagels (plain & raisin), cream cheese; grapes, fruit platters, orange juice, water, hot chocolate and coffee. We discussed the layout of the Grant trauma focus group session. A format similar to the one employed at Morning Star Baptist Church focus group was used for the Grant and ABCD focus groups (See format in Appendix B).

The Grant session began at 9:00 a.m. with registration. Breakfast followed at 9:30 a.m. At 10:00 a.m. a young lady opened the session in prayer; Rev. Barnes welcomed everyone to the session. They were followed by Rev. Darryl Elow (the researcher) who introduced himself and his thesis project to the participants. He also laid out the agenda for the rest of the day. He informed participants, if they agreed that they would also be interviewed by the researcher and Dr. Crain after presenting their creative expressions
and completing the project evaluations. The session ended at 2:30 p.m. (duration of 5.5 hrs) with Rev. Elow closing in prayer.

ABCD Operation Manager Lemuel Mills learned of my project and asked me if I could do a youth trauma focus group session on April 15th at his Roxbury location on Elm Street. He knew some of the young people in his youth programs were having issues dealing the loss of loved ones to homicide. The Operation Manager put me in touch with Cled Sully the Director of Youth Programs at ABCD. Cled and I met to discuss the nature of my project, the requirement that each participant to sign a consent form, and the agenda of the session. He informed me that I only had two hours (from 3 to 5 p.m.) to conduct the session. The Grant and MSBC focus groups prepared me for the ABCD session. However, I had to condense this session by one hour, exclusive of the interviews. If participants were willing to be interviewed, I would have to conduct the interviews in another session. The limitations of the project sample will be discussed in Chapter Five.

Focus Groups

Three trauma focus group sessions were facilitated; one at a community organization (ABCD) and two at different churches (MSBC and Grant). The focus group sites of a church and a community center were selected and made sense due to their safe, familiar and non-threatening environments. The notion of a safe environment was repeatedly referred to in the exploration of how youth see the church as a safe place to address trauma as they shared their stories of the impact of violence. The focus group
sessions were designed to offer an open-ended way of telling these stories. Participants were able, as openly and freely as possible, to share the emotional and theological implications of their traumatic experiences and their abilities to cope with them. This process was videotaped. This indispensable tool helped the researcher gather and assimilate the data.

There was no major risk to the young people in this study. However, sometimes recalling and sharing painful memories can be stressful, so there were ministers and a psychologist available if participants felt distressed or showed signs of needing to talk with someone privately. Participants were told that this study was entirely voluntary. Therefore, they were free to withdraw from the project at any time, or to ask for more information on what was being asked of them. The topic of each focus group session was centered on how community violence (homicide) has impacted the participants’ lives. There were a couple of participants who shared from the angle of suicide involving a loved one or a friend.

At Grant and ABCD, before delving into a very deep emotional and sensitive subject, we began with an ice breaker exercise to offset the tension of the subject matter. This ice-breaker also helped to establish rapport and gain the trust and respect of the participants and researcher. Following this activity, the youth talked about how violence had impacted them and their community. In addition, participants were encouraged to define grief and trauma. Afterwards participants completed their individual creative expressions on how violence or homicide had affected their lives. None of the participants did any artwork prior to this part of the session although they had the option
to do so. Each participant had the opportunity to present his or her creative expression to the group if he or she so chose to do so. After the focus group session, each participant had the opportunity to be individually interviewed, if he or she desired.

Grant youth participated in both the focus group and interviews, whereas MSBC youth only wished to participate in the focus group. Grant and MSBC participants’ creative expressions were videotaped therefore; the participants wanted to keep their individual creative expressions. These videotapes of both church groups greatly assisted in more accurately capturing these youths’ perspective of their world, their trauma and their own story. The community-based focus group and the completion of associated questionnaires were held at ABCD’s Roxbury location. Due to time constraints, the community participants attended two sessions, whereas the church-based participants only required one session (including interviews) to complete the trauma session regimen. ABCD participants allowed me to keep their art work due to a malfunction with their videotaping.

All of the focus group sessions dramatically demonstrated that art is a powerful means for connecting to the emotional and spiritual impact of traumatic events. It was a great tool for allowing these young people to express themselves and reflect especially when they could not or chose not to verbally express themselves. These expressions were also a valuable link to obtaining opinions from the focus group participants regarding their concerns related to pastoral aftercare.\(^\text{12}\) With a shared understanding of

“pastoral aftercare” was, all youth were encouraged to offer their opinions on what kind of pastoral aftercare they needed or desired. This information was assessed using a qualitative data analysis method. In this case, the research methodology included direct interaction with the study group where the researcher introduced a specific tool or tools for the purpose of capturing their information, observing their group dynamics, and interpreting their data output.

Each participant had the opportunity to choose one of the following forms of creative expression to document their story: collage, dance, drawing, letter, poetry, PowerPoint presentation, rap, or song. Many of them chose to do a collage, but a couple of youth expressed themselves through dance, drawing, letter and poetry.

Collage creation is a particularly easy and inexpensive way to assist those participants with varying degrees of artistic skill in creating an effective and attractive presentation. Pictures give the participants the opportunity to create something artistically that expresses what they may not be able to express verbally; and proved most frequently to be the method of choice. Among all participants, 28 out of the 35 persons chose this activity.

Dance therapy, or dance movement therapy (DMT) is the psychotherapeutic use of movement and dance for emotional, cognitive, social, behavioral, and physical conditions. Dance movement therapy strengthens the body and mind connection through
body movements to improve both the mental and physical well-being of individuals.\(^{13}\)

One participant chose this activity.

Poetry is widely recognized to as a medium for expressing humanity’s deepest fears, insecurities, and anxieties. It also gives voice to what we feel most deeply within ourselves. Two participants chose this activity.

“In my experience as a poet and an arts minister, it’s become clear that poetry (as well as dance and other visual arts) have a cathartic and therapeutic value during times of personal and congregational trauma. Numerous saints and students that I’ve worked with have told me that the opportunity to create poetry and journal about their sadness, grief or depression has truly helped them get past the pain. In fact, a lot of the success that I’m having with my first published book of poetry, *Brown Skin and the Bread of Life*, seems to stem from the fact that many pieces in the book deal with emotional hardships, spiritual disconnects, sickness, and death. People are clearly seeing themselves in the work and being released in tangible ways.”\(^{14}\)

One of the participants selected a drawing, and one a letter, awhile none of the participants selected a song, or a PowerPoint presentation to share their story. Out of all the participants, 79 % of the youth voluntarily presented their creative expression in the larger group. Some chose not to share their creative expressions openly. One young lady approached me after the session was over to talk to me about her presentation. She said that it was too painful to discuss openly. This project gave youth a voice and the space to share at their own pace. Their products are the focus of the discussion, sharing, and theological reflection of my thesis project.


\(^{14}\) From notes of extended conversation with MA-based poet, teacher, and arts minister Terry E. Carter, Braintree, February 10, 2011.
The use of artistic expression via a wide variety of multimedia venues has revealed that many youth and young adults feel less threatened to divulge information about feelings which initially may be too disturbing to discuss. Again, each focus group participant was videotaped to help the researcher gather and analyze data and to assess their emotional and behavioral attitude. They were assured that upon completion of project, the videotapes will be destroyed. The videotapes helped the researcher capture youth opinions regarding the impact of violence on their spiritual, religious and emotional well-being. A more specific and expanded discussion of these findings is included in Chapter Four.

After each focus group session ended, a project evaluation was distributed to each participant to complete (See Appendix D for evaluations). Information obtained from this evaluation was examined for the effective of the focus group model, as well as to assess the importance of and the need for effective pastoral aftercare. This information was used in the development of the recommendations section for the final presentation of this project proposal. At the conclusion of the focus group session, participants were given materials on grief and trauma so that they will retain language that speaks to their emotional concerns. Again, they were provided a list of grief counselors and psychologists available to them if they needed to reach out to someone other than clergy (See Appendix D for grief materials and professional resources).

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15 Betty Edwards (1989) contends that it is beneficial to discuss the part that creativity plays in acting as a catalyst to change; Fincher, (1991) has developed a comprehensive method of the Jungian use of mandala drawing for therapeutic movement. The mandala is used as the focal point of drawing; and Allan (1988) has been able to chronicle the child's journey toward wellness. He prefers the use of non-directive drawing themes. Their findings and others help to determine the use of artistic expression as a way to get at the focus group members concerns in a non-threatening manner.
Interviews

Wherever possible, interviews occurred after the focus group sessions. The spiritual leanings of the youth were assessed by an interview questionnaire. This questionnaire also focused on the traumatic event as it relates to religion (See Appendix D for interview questionnaire). The plan was to understand the current reality and religiosity of the youth, their understanding of how God plays a part in their healing process; and their individual approaches in dealing with trauma and violence.

At Grant, the interviews were conducted in a safe, non-threatening environment where participants could freely express themselves. Only the psychologist, Dr. Linda Crain, and the researcher interviewed the willing participants. By design, each interview lasted thirty minutes. By contrast, members of the MSBC focus group did not have time to be interviewed and were not willing to make time on another occasion. They felt that their creative expressions spoke adequately for them. This is alluded to in the limitations discussion of the overall project scope.

Members of the ABCD group did not initially want to talk about the sensitive subject of violence. Therefore, I realized that the methodology outlined in this project would work with this group. I needed a different methodological approach. At the risk of collecting data for my project, I informed the group that they could do a creative expression on any topic they wished. However, all of their creative expressions spoke, both articulately and passionately to the core idea of trauma and violence. Members of the ABCD group also did not want to be formally interviewed. Therefore, I incorporate an exercise with word trauma. I had the group provide words that represent each letter of
the trauma that describe trauma. This exercise gave voice trauma to their trauma experiences. In addition, Cled Sully, the youth director at ABCD, insisted that I leave the interview questionnaire with him. He preferred to give it to them in a few weeks to complete. He felt that this would be a less threatening approach than doing a one-on-one interview. This was an indication that different approaches may have to be implemented for different groups of youth. It also spoke to the nature of leadership style as a factor in the service delivery continuum. Still, the youth completed the interview questionnaires without a problem and Mr. Sully delivered these questionnaires to me on May 24, 2010.

Verification and Data Analysis

The data analysis concentrated on these youths’ physical, psychological, social and spiritual response to violent trauma. This project’s aim was to learn whether or not participation in creative expression activities and related exercises can help youth work through trauma. An audio tape recorder was used to capture all of the activities associated with the focus groups activities. This included taping of the group members as they received instruction, while they were assembling their responses, and presenting their creative expressions. Videotaping occurred only to view and review participants’ artistic expressions, and this was done only if they agreed to be videoed. The participants’ faces were not featured on the video tape.

These methods of data collection made it possible for the researched to facilitate the process without a distracting focus on taking verbatim notes. The recordings were later transcribed to identify, extract and analyze the embedded social and/or theological
context in the content of the group members’ conversations and participation. The researcher listened to the recording for themes and messages that arose from the focus groups and the youth presentations. To further capture the voices of the youth and nuances of their interaction, I asked ministers or laypeople from MSBC or Grant to take notes.

As the researcher, I read and analyzed all the data collected. I attempted to identify themes, concerns, and outcome indicators associated with the topic of youth trauma. The focus group sessions closed with a written evaluation. There were two fundamental reasons for conducting an evaluation: 1. to gain direction for improving pastoral aftercare projects as they are developing, and 2. to determine the projects’ effectiveness after they have had time to produce results. Therefore, evaluations were used as part of the project’s qualitative methodology. These evaluations solicited feedback to determine the usefulness of the session activities and future need for such sessions. The evaluations have been used for both data and narrative analysis. Information obtained from the written evaluation will continued to be examined for the process clues it yields and for the range of recommendations and unique perspective offered by the members of the focus group who completed the entire process.

Each interview was analyzed and themes were coded. I coded the interviews by marking each data unit with a label to categorize themes the youth provided. The thematic coding of embedded theology in the information obtained during the focus


groups will be the qualitative data evaluated. I observed how the participants’ stories formed their own practical theology as an expressed action plan for pastoral aftercare. One of the purposes of the data analysis was to examine the meaningful and symbolic content of qualitative data.

Qualitative modes of data analysis provided ways of discerning, examining, comparing and contrasting, and interpreting meaningful patterns or themes. Qualitative analysis was critical for this project because it allowed me to be open to new implications from the data collected. The data collected are presented in a chart or matrix form to extrapolate patterns, themes and differences. This methodology also allowed me to revisit and cross-check the data for any unexpected verifiable and concluding evidence. This information will form the basis for much of my summary narrative and proposed recommendations in the final section of this project.

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CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The project proposes to create a pastoral intervention model that gives traumatized youth a diverse and creative forum for expressing their pain losing in loved ones to homicide. Their voices will provide the tools for pastoral caregivers to be more effective in assisting youth suffering close experiences with violence and death. Pastoral caregivers must learn directly from these young survivors of homicide in order to provide more adequate, relevant, and meaningful intervention as they deal with traumatic occurrences. The design of the project provided youth with the opportunity to voice their opinions, issues, and or concerns regarding the impact of violence on them and their communities. The methods used to capture the voices of these youth included creative expressions (art, dance, poetry, etc.), focus groups, and individual interviews coupled with an evaluation tool to determine the effectiveness of the intervention strategy.

This results chapter includes the following sections: Part I: A description of the participants of each group, Morning Star Baptist Church of Mattapan (MSBC), Roxbury’s Grant AME Church (Grant) and Action for Boston Community Development’s Roxbury satellite (ABCD), a chart detailing the participants’ individual forms of creative expression, and a compilation of group commentary on similar themes, based on “focused” group discussion. Part II: Researcher interpretation consisting of: 1.
the psychosocial concerns of the participants; 2. the psychospiritual concerns of the participants; and 3. a summary of selected insights.

**Part I: Description of Participants**

My process for recruiting young people into this study included the cooperation of a number of local area ministers and community youth leaders. It was important to include this particular group in the global discussion for three key reasons. First, in any on-going use of this approach for pastoral intervention, these folks would be at the forefront. Second, they had the best access to a population of young people who would be likely to willingly participate. The majority of the participants recruited reside in one of the three high homicide areas in Boston spoken of in chapter two. Thus I chose three locations where such youth leaders were known and available: my home church, Morning Star Baptist Church in Mattapan (MSBC), Grant AME Church (Grant) in Lower Roxbury, and the Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD) satellite office serving Roxbury and North Dorchester.

My thinking was also that the selection of these distinct sites would yield data that was unique to each location’s group, but that data set similarities would help to confirm my thesis assertions on need and effectiveness. I also felt that the relationships built would allow for follow-up and extended conversations, if necessary.

A total of 35 participants were involved in the three focus groups. 34 were African Americans and 1 was Caucasian; 10 were males and 25 were females ranging in
age from 13-21 years. The characteristics of each cohort of participants are further described in the individual group summaries and a more complete description of the actual recruitment process is contained in Chapter three.

As a way to begin the intense process of creating healthy group dynamic and collecting consistent information, an ice breaker was employed. This particular introductory exercise was called *When the Wind Blows*, we set up a circle of chairs with just enough for all but one person in the group. The designated person stands in the middle of the circle without a chair. Therefore, there is always a person in the middle, who speaks for “the wind blows”. For example, the person in the middle might say something like “the wind blows for anyone in the circle who is wearing blue jeans.” Those who have on blue jeans now have to get up and find an open chair, joining the person in the middle who is also looking for an open seat. The last one standing goes to the middle and speaks for “the wind blows”, as the exercise continues. The researcher facilitated this exercise for 15 minutes. As suspected, the exercise proved to be a good device for relaxing the participants and a good way for the researcher to establish rapport with them. It is also believed that this ice breaker allowed participants to be in the right “space” to address their pain and express their psycho-social and psycho-spiritual concerns about the violence they’ve personally experienced or been impacted by.
Morning Star Baptist Church Focus Group

The initial focus group was conducted at MSBC on January 29, 2010 from 6:00 PM to 9:00 PM. A total of 15 participants were involved in the focus group. All were African Americans; six were males and nine were females ranging in age from 13-19 years old. The majority of the participants chose to create a collage and one chose to do a drawing/letter. An hour and a half was allotted for them to complete these tasks. The group dynamic was vibrant and highly interactive during this time. They shared their stories along with the art work. Each participant had the opportunity to present their creation only if he or she was willing to do so. The majority presented their creations and all permitted the researcher to retain their work. The following chart lists the random number given to each participant with an explanation or a researcher interpretation (for those who did not wish to share) of their creative output.

| 1. Male Collage | Theme: **Change** – Collage had a white road and a road with two boxers and blood. **Explanation:** Many blacks are still trying to get on right road towards happiness where they can live like a normal life. The boxers on the bloody road of murder are revolutionary fighters who are willing to make a difference in their city in their |
community. The pictures of watches present that “it is time to change the mindset of the community to walk together in brotherly love. This will only be accomplished when all regardless of color and ethnicity are connected to the source of life, which is God the King.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2. Female Collage</th>
<th>Theme: <strong>Healing</strong> – Collage with phrases: A tough migraine needs a tough migraine medicine. Pictures: Ladies with a caption called ‘Bruised’ When it comes to depression, there is no glass ceiling. A Scripture: “When the enemy comes against us as a flood, God will lift up a standard against it.” (Isa. 59:19 is scriptural basis for the Youth Ministry at MSBC) <strong>Explanation:</strong> “Violence has left many bruised and depressed trying to find healing. Families that are separated from their loved ones are trying to find the beauty in life again but they need the medicine that can take away their hurt and pain. The only medicine that can work is God who provides healing, peace, joy, and forgiveness in the midst of pain.”</th>
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<tr>
<td>3. Male Collage</td>
<td>Theme: <strong>Violence</strong> – Collage had white background with a black sun and bird or vultures hovering over a stop sign next to a park bench near grass and on the grass is a scroll of the Ten Commandments with a cross on a chain “Thou shall not kill” in bold red letters at the end. <strong>Explanation:</strong> “Violence is like a black sun with vultures hovering over that land. However, the sun will shine again if the people of land stop the killings and obey God’s Ten Commandments.”</td>
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<td>4. Male Collage</td>
<td>Theme: <strong>Economics</strong> – Collage had a book entitled White Collar Crime Just got a Lot More Deadly: The Importance of Being Dangerous; dollar signs and bucket full of money. Words: power, poor, violent, lost lives, lie, television, America. Phrase: on the brink. <strong>Explanation:</strong> “When poor it is easy to get caught up in a life of crime. However, white collar crime although can be deadly and go more unnoticed than street crimes.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Female Collage</td>
<td>Theme: <strong>Dream</strong> – Collage had a quote: Making the Right Choice: ‘You have to determine what you want to be’ (Choices are yours); Inspiration Comes from Every Generation. The front cover of Ebony that reads In Our Lifetime: Are We Really Witnessing the Election of the Nation’s First Black President? <strong>Explanation:</strong> “Greatness can be achieved by everybody but so many young people are not living long enough to achieve it. There are so many things in life young people can accomplish that will bring honor and even greatness rather than a life of violence.”</td>
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| 6. Female Collage | Theme: **Voice** – Collage consisted of Words: Free, love, strong, clear, joyful, and true. Pictures of artificial flowers. Phrases: You don’t have the complete picture, things fall apart, and I have a voice. **Researcher Interpretation:** One is strong when he or she can talk truthfully about your pain. Healing and freedom happen when one
| 7. Female Collage | Theme: **Stress** – Collage with a question for parents, Is Your Child Stressed Out? Pictures of boxing match Roy Jones getting hit across the chin and kick boxer King George; Picture w/Rev. Dr. MLK & protestors were marching from Selma to Montgomery Alabama  
**Researcher’s Interpretation:** When the blows of life hit youth on the chin it can causes stress, regardless of social status. Instead of resorting to violence, youth can march to the beat of a different drum by listening to God who watches us all. |
<p>| 8. Female Collage | Theme: <strong>Violence</strong> – Collage consisted of Words: News, Stolen lives, why, silent no more, and Black Men. Pictures: Mother and daughter at the trial of suspect who killed their loved one. A chalk outline of a murder victim w/caption: ouch; pictures of Bacardi = alcohol and pills = drugs; a question mark with a wedding ring and band; Scripture: “Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight and was full of violence.” Gen. 6:11 &amp; 2nd Chronicles7:14; <strong>Explanation:</strong> “Drugs and violence have families in court listening to grueling details of their loved one’s murder. The death of young people will impact the potential growth of the black family structure. This is how youth feel about violence.” |
| 9. Female Collage | Theme: <strong>Violence</strong> – Collage had phrases “Stop the Violence.” Survival: Who’s the next Victim; and the Pursuit of <strong>Life</strong> after prison – next stop is the church. Sunglasses with key questions: Do you want to hear that your son or daughter is dead because of violence? Do you want to live seeing violence every week? <strong>Explanation:</strong> “We are tired of seeing violence every week over unnecessary drama (senseless killing) and we are tired living in fear. Stop the violence unless you want to get the knock at the door and hear that your son or daughter was the latest victim. One must pursue life after prison and the first stop should be the church where survival is possible. Do not be numb to the violence or it could be your life that is destroyed.” |
| 10. Male Collage | Theme: <strong>Change</strong> – Collage had R.I.P. w/11 names of lost loved ones, Phrases: Live Your Life; Lot of pictures of President Barack Obama and rap artists; the word change is all over the collage. <strong>Explanation:</strong> “It is time for change because too many young lives of my loved ones are being lost to the streets. We must stop idolizing the rappers and celebrities but live with great ambition to be the next president.” |</p>
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<td><strong>11. Female</strong></td>
<td><strong>Collage</strong></td>
<td>Theme: <strong>Change</strong> -- Phrase: Blood of the Brothers is crying from the Streets for change A change is gonna come! Words: Peace, Hope, Love, Courage, and Forgiveness. A drawn hand w/ a peace sign entitled Peace on the Street!! <strong>Explanation:</strong> This collage described the extent of violence and neglect in her community. “There is a void in the community when so many young black people are killed. They are somebody’s relative; more importantly it could have been me or you. Their blood cries from the street for change. Peace must prevail in the street in order to obtain hope for future generations.”</td>
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<td><strong>12. Male</strong></td>
<td><strong>Collage</strong></td>
<td>Theme: <strong>Dream</strong> -- Collage entitled Respecting the Past, Embracing the new; Pictures of influential Black Men: Marcus Garvey, W.E.B. DuBois, Carter G. Woodson, Martin L. King, Malcolm X, President Barack Obama; <strong>Explanation:</strong> “Young black males need to learn their black history so they can respect the future by honoring their past. They need to go after their dreams without selling their soul to obtain their dream(s). They have to know that greatness lies within them.”</td>
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<td><strong>13. Male</strong></td>
<td><strong>Letter/Drawing</strong></td>
<td>Theme: <strong>Cope</strong> -- Collage had a large drawn cross with a verse from Psalm 23 at the top of the cross: “Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will not fear evil, for Thou are with me, Thou rod and staff, they comfort.” <strong>Explanation:</strong> In the middle of the cross is a letter to a friend who was murdered entitled: To My Friend: Missed and Loved. “I know you are not here right now to listen to me and even hang around the block. But I wish we could have spent more time together and maybe if life was not so hard you would be here right now. One of the things that I will never forget about you was your nice smile and your sense of humor. One thing I wished you would have changed was your hard head. You don’t even know how much pain and heartache you put your family and friends through. I know I can’t erase the past but if I could you would be here right now. But time heals all wound. I pray that you are in a better place looking down from heaven in everlasting paradise. I pray every day that the Lord had mercy on your soul. Even though you weren’t a church boy, I wish that your soul suffers no more, now and forever. You will be missed but not forgotten. A letter to a friend who died describing the pain of his death to him as well as the friend’s family due to him not listening. A letter describing his love for his friend that he prays daily for his soul to be at rest whereby God had mercy on him where he did not have to suffer anymore.”</td>
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</table>
| **14. Female** | **Collage** | Theme: **Change** -- Collage had names of lost loved ones. Quote: “we have become numb to the words. Phrases: You’re in control; the stories of our lives; The message I Can; Question: Is your child stressed? **Explanation:** “The youth need to take a look at themselves in order to change the culture of disrespect or the killings will never
end. However, parents have some responsibility as well. They need to know the warning signs when their children are stressed out. What should they look for in their children? 1. Tune into their moods, 2. Watch what they watch, 3. Focus on positive, 4. Instill confidence, and 5. Lead by example. The community cannot become numb word describing today’s youth because it only leads to annihilation and separation. Youth need to voice their opinion and tell their stories.”

15. Female Collage

Theme: **Trauma** -- Pictures and words describing what trauma is: hurtful, painful, harmful, aggressive, affects the family and friends losing friends, it’s very devastating. **Explanation:** “Families are torn in half, especially when mother is holding a dead child causing extreme pain and agony. I know life and death is a part of human existence but when a life is taken violently then it leads to great devastation in its pathway. If there was more forgiveness in the world then life would not be as painful.”

Grant AME Church Focus Group

The next focus group was conducted at Grant on March 6, 2010 from 9:00 AM to 2:00 PM through its Youth “ComforCare” Ministry. A total of eight young people participated in the focus group (seven were African American; one was Caucasian and only two were males, ranging in age from 13-21 years old. Five of the participants did collages, two did a poem and one did a dance. Interviews took place immediately
following the Violence and Trauma focus group session on March 6, 2010. Six out of eight participants agreed to be interviewed (four African American females, one African American male and one Caucasian American male). Many of the participants had been touched by violence mostly in terms of homicide and one by suicide. Ministers, church laypeople and a psychologist were present in case youth needed individual counseling.

The following chart lists the random number given to each participant and a description of each creative output. The majority presented their creations and decided to hang onto their work. The researcher captured their artwork by videotaping and recording notes. It should be clear that the recording note were only used when participants chose not to individually present their work and are supplied by the researcher so as to present a more complete data compilation.

**Chart Detailing the Creative Expressions by the Youth of the Grant Focus Group**

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Theme: Cope – Collage: Entitled: Remember the Victims. Names of victims covered the collage with handprints and footprints. Explanation: “One way of coping with the loss of a loved one is to cherish their memory. Their memories have left handprints and footprints on the lives they touch. Love never dies!”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Male Collage</td>
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</table>

|   | Theme: Violence -- Poem entitled: What is Violence? “Violence is an epidemic, So many people affected. But because of lack of awareness, many don’t know they are affected. Violence is manifested in life disguised as strife; fights are no longer with fists but with guns or knives. On the block and around the corner, Out loud or in a crowd, upstairs or anywhere. All I hear is noise, I’m reminded of Moses and how he feared the presence of God. When God showed His glory upon him. The only thing that comforts me is God Himself is in this evil world where everything is unpredictable. When nothing seems real, I grieved by my feelings. But I’m reminded that God is greater than my feelings. So when I fear I hear God’s voice telling me I’m here.” Explanation: “Violence has directly and indirectly affected so many people even when they do not realize that it has. Violence is everywhere; no one can hide from it.” |
| 2. Female Poem | |

<p>|   | Theme: Trauma -- Collage: Words of love and family covered the |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collage</th>
<th>collage with handprints and footprints. Pictures of a daughter laying her head on her mother’s shoulder at the court hearing of the perpetrators who killed their loved one with the phrase “Remembering the victims”. <strong>Explanation:</strong> “Family members and friends are shattered as they bear witness to the testimonies of their loved one’s death in court. There is no closure when the perpetrator(s) are never brought to justice. But we must never stop remembering our loved ones who died violently.”</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>4. Female Collage</td>
<td>Theme: <strong>Dream</strong> -- Words: Dare/Dream/Do. Confident. Phrase: My blackness is a gift from nature. Quotes: “There are no excuses” Our gifts are natural. <strong>Explanation:</strong> “There are no excuses for African American boys and girls not to succeed. African American youth have to dare to dream and understand their gift to the world. Adults must listen to us to find out how they can help develop our gifts.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Female Collage</td>
<td>Theme: <strong>Cope</strong> -- Collage: Entitled: Now what? Phrase: The time has come to reaffirm our enduring spirit. <strong>Recording Notes:</strong> Young lady still mourning the loss of her older brother who was killed a few months ago. She was unable to speak to the larger group. But she was able open up to one female participant who conveyed that she is having a hard time coping with the loss.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Female Collage</td>
<td>Theme: <strong>Dream</strong> -- Collage: Entitled: Live your Fantasy. There are pictures of President Barack Obama and hip hop celebrities. <strong>Explanation:</strong> “Do not be afraid to live out your fantasy with your whole heart whether it’s the president of the United States or a celebrity of some kind.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Male Poem</td>
<td>Theme: <strong>Violence</strong> -- Poem: “Sometimes I wonder why people do the things they do, why the world is filled with such hate and violence. Why teens are around acting like something when they are not to be accepted as a friend or why there is always a shootout or a killing going on in some part of the world today. All the fights going on at school over things that are not even necessary. Why can’t people accept one another for who they are whether, gay, bisexual or lesbian. No matter who you are I feel as though everyone should be accepted as a unique individual. And love one another as if they were your own son, daughter, sister, or brother. Over the past month I lost someone very close to me and I wish for him to come back. But he is gone forever. We spent a lot of time together I just wished it could have lasted a little longer. We didn’t leave off on good terms so I experience a lot of regrets but now there nothing I can do about it.” <strong>Explanation:</strong> “We have to make things right with our loved ones because tomorrow they could be gone.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Female Dance</td>
<td>Theme: <strong>Healing</strong> -- She danced to Byron Cage song “Broken but I’m Healed” and dedicated it to her god-brother who committed suicide. Here are the lyrics to the song:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
So you enter into this building, You brought your burdens, brought your pain. I have a message for you today, That when you leave here, you won't be the same.

So you tell me you've been to your physician, Look at you there's been no change in your condition.

Reach out and touch the Master's Throne, There's healing for your mind, your body, and your soul.

God can heal, He can deliver. He can mend your brokenness. He has a miracle to fit your needs, Once you trust Him, you will receive. God knows about your situation, But with every test and every trial there is revelation, That God is able to supply every one of your needs; He's here to touch you, heal you, He'll set you free.¹

ABCD Focus Group

The final group session was conducted at ABCD Community Center on April 15, 2010 from 3:00 PM to 5:00 PM. A total of 12 young people from the after school program participated in the focus group. All were African American, with ten females and two males, who ranged in age from 15-18 years old. Eleven of the participants chose

¹ Broken but I’m Healed, An Invitation to Worship, Byron Cage, Zomba Gospel CD, 2005.
to create a collage and one created a drawing. A pastoral caregiver and psychologist were present if ABCD youth needed to talk with someone.

Initially it appeared that a particular cohort of ABCD participants did not want to discuss the topic of trauma and experiencing violence. Perhaps there were personal dynamics related to violence that were more acute and more unresolved with this group. It is difficult to say, beyond the fact that three quarters of the group did not want to talk about the sensitive subject of violence. Therefore, the group was urged to do their creative expression on whatever theme they desired.

Surprisingly, the majority did collages on violence and how it has affected them and their community. Participants here had the opportunity to present their creations as well. Some participants asked if they had to share personal details regarding violence and trauma. They were urged to share as much or as little as they preferred, or none at all. Several were not willing to share further and this was acceptable. However, all permitted the researcher to retain their creative expressions. The following chart lists the random number given to each participant and a description of the each creative expression.

<p>| Chart Detailing the Creative Expressions by the Youth of the ABCD Focus Group |
|---|---|
| 1. Male Collage | Theme: <strong>Economics</strong> -- Collage: words and pictures including: Easy does it; a picture of a stethoscope with “what to do; a cartoon called “Pest Control”; a note suggesting that all “need to be heard.” A reference was made regarding the selling out and the fabric of the Black community. <strong>Explanation:</strong> “Our community has sold out to the violence for materialism. But no one is listening to the voices that need to be heard, the youth. Violence is destroying our community. Something has to be done to save it.” |
| 2. Female | Theme: <strong>Family</strong> – Collage with phrases: The importance of having |</p>
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Collage</th>
<th>stable families cannot be overstated; give back and less is more. Words: Hope, Family, challenges. Pictures: a son looking up at his father; a daughter kissing her mother. <strong>Explanation:</strong> “Violence is the indication of the hidden mental illness of the black family. The challenges lie in stabling the black family. The hope lies in sons looking up to a positive father figure and daughters uniting with their mother.”</th>
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<tr>
<td>3. Female Collage</td>
<td>Theme: <strong>Self Hatred</strong> – Collage: A red background with scribble over words (hidden between the lines covered so no one can see the destruction). Words: courage, respect, power, hate with a backward e. Phrases: Black on Black crime versus unity. <strong>Explanation:</strong> “Hatred is causing black on black crime, which is destroying our community. Life is difficult in the city but we must hope for a better future. Love and respect can unite the youth in our community. There must be justice for the killing of black youth.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Female Collage</td>
<td>Theme: <strong>Change</strong> -- Collage: White sheet with a black bull’s-eye like image in the middle with the words not talkative. <strong>Explanation:</strong> “This person shared that she did not want to talk, and felt we had talked enough, and that it is time for things to change. Enough talking has taken place; let’s get straight to the solution.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Female Collage</td>
<td>Theme: <strong>Cope</strong> -- Collage: Lists the many ways this individual expresses herself. Self-expression: taking pictures, talking on phone, communicating by way of internet, expressed through traveling around the world, listening to music. <strong>Explanation:</strong> There are ways to cope with violence in our community. We can cope through listening to music, taking pictures, talking on phone or by internet, and traveling. Various communication outlets help ‘when terrible things happen in the hood.’ Self expression is necessary in order to be you and it’s an inspiration for others to be them.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Female Collage</td>
<td>Theme: <strong>Dream</strong> – Collage: Yellow background; Pictures of birth and death; with a sense of optimism and despair. Pictures: center of paper is a picture of President Obama and First Lady Obama at the inauguration dance with the word change underneath signifying that change has come. <strong>Explanation:</strong> “Violence has caused a sense of despair. President Obama and First Lady Obama have allowed Black Americans to crack the glass ceiling of American democracy therefore it time to change our way of thinking realizing that we can dream big. It time for black people to think big and do away with the slave mentality. The slave mentality is taking too many lives in the black community. Black babies should have the right to live in this world peacefully and where they are able to chase their dreams.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Female Collage</td>
<td>Theme: <strong>Economics</strong> – Collage: Pictures with guns, money, and cars with the word sex. Red background labeled blood. At the bottom of paper are words shading over a tearful eye crying for the loss of loved ones</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collage</td>
<td>Theme</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Female</td>
<td>Cope – Collage: Words: Afraid, communicate and hide; hurt, my thoughts; music notes, tears, sunshine, stars, flowers; the love of music; lines of life. There was a road that leads to a housing development. <strong>Researcher’s Interpretation:</strong> Many youth are wounded by the senseless violence. They cope by hiding behind their music so not to talk about their harsh reality of violence. They are simply trying to find the road to life where they can live out their dreams.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Female</td>
<td>Voice – The collage was entitled “Voices: The Stories of Our Lives.” Included phrases: like beauty is within; money problems; discover yourself, on my own, our community, on top of the world; natural beauty; hope happens; and moving forward. <strong>Researcher’s Interpretation:</strong> The voices of the youth are filled with hope as they pursue wisdom and love. Youth in the community faces many personal challenges, yet they remain optimistic. They can see the beauty within every youth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Female</td>
<td>Change – Collage contrasting despair and hope. Words: Love, trouble, discover, family, violence, greed, teens, Boston, Roxbury, deep, give, rain, world, climb, lost, believe, watch. Phrases: fight gangs, please join us, be well, Best of Boston – people choose, what you do, running scared. <strong>Explanation:</strong> “Boston is troubled with gang violence but it is time to resolve Boston’s trouble and stop running scared. It is time to discover the hope that lies in Boston’s violent communities. It is time for young people to make the right decision so we can reach our destination. The sky is the limit!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Female</td>
<td>Violence – Collage: Words: Silent, hates, doctors, money, jealousy, dating, betrayal, common sense, family, hear no evil, and standout. Pictures: Police yellow tape, young happy girl school girls, and shades of red. <strong>Researcher’s Interpretation:</strong> Love misleads many young ladies and leaves them hurt or worse by jealousy and dating violence. They can be killed emotionally or physically by someone who says they love them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Male</td>
<td>Happiness – Collage was entitled “Keys to Happiness”. Pictures of happy people doing what makes them happy. <strong>Researcher’s Interpretation:</strong> The pictures detail this young man’s philosophy of life. He believes people’s desires cause them to commit hideous crimes to get what they want. People who pace themselves are happier than those who live the fast life.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Looking at this statement

“Violence is one of our most significant public health issues. Between 20 percent and 50 percent of children in the United States are touched by violence, either as victims or, even more commonly, as witnesses. The emotional impact may be profound. Children exposed to violence frequently develop post-traumatic stress symptoms. They are more likely to have behavioral problems, poorer school performance, more days of school absence, and feelings of depression and anxiety. Violence affects all racial, ethnic, and economic groups, but its burden falls disproportionately on poor and minority children—the very children whose mental health needs are least likely to be met by the health care system.”

and other similar assertions across the landscape of urban youth trauma, it is not unreasonable to suggest that a “culture of trauma” exists among young people living in inner city neighborhoods and beyond. Not surprisingly common themes and values emerged in the participant presentations. As summarized below, they clearly reflect the most prevalent beliefs and more pressing concerns expressed by young people throughout this study.

In presenting this part of the discussion it should be made clear that the ABCD findings were the product of a slightly modified process. The reluctance on the part of this cohort to individually present creative work made it necessary to report out their collective data via recording notes and a the researcher’s interpretations of their expressions. In looking at the summary of ABCD findings, this should explain the variation in the discussion output and in structure.

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A number of themes emerged from the three group of participants’ creative expressions (i.e., voice, violence, cope, trauma, change, safety, family, economics, and dreams), which represent their major concerns expressed in the process. The group discussions continued to yield a rich output of emotion, narration and information. This data and interpretation can be seen to evidence both the psycho-social and psycho-spiritual aspects of what the young people expressed. What follows is a summary of each of these themes. In the final section of this chapter, the researcher will discuss each of these themes.

**Voice** - Some participants expressed the feeling that no one is listening to them. Many said they want to voice their opinions and tell their stories of how they felt about the violence that is destroying their community. They talked about being tired of seeing senseless violence every week and being tired of living in fear. The participants agreed that they were fed up with seeing the chalk drawn figure of black victims. Many described having had enough of watching lives being stolen without anyone speaking out against it.

**Violence** – Nearly all participants agreed with the assertion that their generation lives in a culture that promotes violence. The majority of them stated that violence has impacted them deeply. They talked about being torn from their loved ones and about the extreme pain and agony this separation causes. They agreed that these experiences cause many youth to question, “when will the healing come?”

**Coping** - Many participants talked about learning to cope with violence in the black community. They said they cope by listening to music, taking pictures, talking on
phone or by way on internet, and traveling. One participant writes poems as a coping mechanism. Some of the participants stated that they have coped by celebrating their loved ones life in various ways such as memorials, basketball tournaments, scholarships, etc. However, one participant from the Grant group has lost six friends to homicide in last three years. She states that she does not know how to feel anymore nor does she know how to express her sadness, pain, hurt, and anger. She said that she tries to find ways of coping. Her experience seems to suggest a sort of “numbing out”, or becoming numb to the trauma being faced.

**Trauma** - Participants from the MSBC and Grant focus groups offered multiple, personal definitions for trauma:

“It means when someone is personally affected by a devastating event.”

“Trauma means when you have something mentally scaring you.”

“Trauma means to worry from a past or present problem.”

“Trauma means an event you will always remember; it keeps you thinking about the event.”

“Trauma means stuck, you cannot move because of fear. Trauma means shock.”

“Trauma means when something dramatic happens in your life.”

“Trauma means when it makes me want to break down and makes me sad.”

“Trauma means injury.”

“Trauma means something that happened to someone that has brought great pain to your life.”
The ABCD focus group displayed considerable resistance to individual interviewing and was concerned about articulating their personal experiences with violence. Therefore, an alternate activity was implemented, asking participants to list as many words as they could for each letter of the word TRAUMA. The words were to be directly related to their experience of trauma. As revealed in the list below, this exercise proved to be very significant. The participation was dynamic and yielded fresh insights.

Several resulting lists follow:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>T</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>U</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tears</td>
<td>Race</td>
<td>Abuse</td>
<td>Unity</td>
<td>Mourn</td>
<td>Alignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trouble</td>
<td>Rage</td>
<td>Afraid</td>
<td>Used</td>
<td>Murder</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teens</td>
<td>Revenge</td>
<td>Abandoned</td>
<td>United</td>
<td>Mistake</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Retaliation</td>
<td>Accident</td>
<td>Us</td>
<td>Mother’s tears</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torn</td>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>Unique</td>
<td>Misery</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torture</td>
<td>Rejection</td>
<td>Awful</td>
<td>Ugly</td>
<td>Mad</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Moving beyond the theme of trauma and the exercise used to tease out these impressions further from the ABCD group, we will be able to now go through the remaining themes reflecting back to the aggregate reactions of all three project groups. Based on the structural concerns that may arise from such a shift, the researcher is confident in asserting that the discussions which emerged remained confluent in most aspects of the three studies. It simply seemed prudent to tweak the information gathering process in those areas where emotional or attitudinal differences existed in the dynamics of the three groups involved in the project.
**Change** - This discussion theme offered one of the most extensive exchanges of opinion in the group discussions. Participants emphatically stated that it is time for change not only the culture of violence but also the culture of trauma. In fact, it was said that the “blood” of violence victims cries out for change. They admitted that youth need to take a look at themselves in order to change the culture of disrespect, or the killings will never end. They said that the community needs young revolutionary “fighters” who are not afraid to make a difference in their communities.

From the researcher’s note: the meaning of the term “fighters” seems to be suggestive of a more enlightened young person, more concerned with promoting a culture of peace and actively speaking out for violence victims that cannot speak out for themselves. They frequently alluded to the peace that must prevail in the street in order to obtain hope for future generations. Participants expressed the understanding that the family unit is essential to the survival of future generations. They offered the view that in order to accomplish change they also need parent, community and ministerial leaders to persuade the youth to travel down the right roads.

Although, a different methodological approach was taken for the ABCD group, couple of participants from this group was willing to share their creative expressions. They voiced that “black youth must stop idolizing rappers and celebrities that promote violence and self-hatred. Self-hatred exhibits itself in today’s hip hop music; black men illustrate their hatred for each other as well as for black women who are portrayed as nothing more than sex objects. Self-hatred is destroying the black community because it is taking too many lives in the black community.” One participant’s collage suggested
that with a black president, young black people must think big and do away with the self hatred.

The participant’s also expressed the belief that love is the essential ingredient that will bring about change. Some said that love can produce healing and peace in their community. Without this virtue, participants offered some doubts that their communities would be safe for their kids’ generation.

**Safety** - Participants spoke passionately about wanting the children of the community to have the right to live in a safe and comfortable environment “like they did in their mother’s womb,” as one young person put it. Participants described feeling safe at home; a majority expressed feeling safe at school, but over half said they felt unsafe in the community due to violence. One participant stated that she only felt safe in her own room and another only felt safe at church.

**Family** - Participants stated the feeling that violence is destroying the black family. They talked about the limitations of starting a family when so many young people will be dead or in prison. Participants expressed the belief that parents need to know the warning signs when their children are stressed out or if they are in a gang. They said that adults can no longer turn a blind eye to these warning signs.

**Economics** - Some of the participants understand that violence has economic implications. They said that when you are poor it is easy to get caught up in the life of crime. Several suggested that money, drugs, and fast cars will only lead to trouble. A participant from ABCD group believes that the black community has sold out in order to
obtain social status and materialism. Another participant from this same group said that
the drug dealers’ appetites cause them to want something by any means necessary.

**Dreaming** - Acknowledging that the black community exhibits despair,
participants still offered up the belief that if youth dare to dream, “not even the glass
ceiling of America can stop them from reaching their destiny.” This was a particularly
poignant statement offered by one of the young people. They also said that there are so
many things in life they can accomplish that will bring honor to them and their
community. One participant wants programs that help youth cultivate their gifts so they
can live out their dreams.

**Part II: Researcher Interpretation**

All of what took place in the group sessions, during interviews, and in the creative
expression of these three sessions yields a great deal of insight into the psychological,
spiritual, and social context in which these young people find themselves. In attempting
to summarize the data gathered, it will be useful to speak specifically to the psycho-social
and psycho-spiritual aspects that consistently emerged in all areas of conversation and
creative process.

**Psychosocial Concerns Expressed by Participants**

This project aim to determine the effectiveness of the focus groups in helping
youth deal with their experiences of violence. As participants were allowed to express
their pain and psycho-social concerns through the various creative expressions, such as
collage, dance, drawing, journaling, and poetry, and as informed by several common themes, such as voice, violence, cope, trauma, change, safety, family, economics, and dreams, a rich interpretive context emerged. A summation of that context organized by themes follows:

**Voice** – More than anything else, it appears that these young want to have a voice that matters in the life of their communities and the larger society. They do not want people in the community to become numb to the violence and want to speak out about this. Moreover, the participants do not want the community to become numb to the negative words describing today’s black youth because it only leads to marginalization and separation. They want to hear and to speak words that will uplift their people and not feed into urban stereotypes. They wanted to get to a place where all people care about and vocally raise concerns about anyone losing a family member or a loved one to violence.

**Violence** – It’s clear in the personal narratives of these young people that many of their families are trying to find beauty in life again after experiencing a traumatic loss. Relationships are severed by homicide. One collage conveyed violence as a black sun with vultures hovering over the community. These young people see that violence is everywhere and that no one can hide from it. Violence has made many of them more aware of their surroundings in their travels and caused them not to trust everyone. Participants know that life and death is a part of human existence, but when a life is taken violently, it leads to great personal and communal devastation.
Coping – In the absence of any immediate relief from the violence that plagues the neighborhoods that the study participants come from, psycho-social coping methods have been developed by most. They cope by listening to music, taking pictures, talking on phone or by way on internet, and traveling. Some journal or writes poems and some cope by celebrating their loved ones lives through memorials, makeshift shrines, scholarships, and the like. Clearly, however, when one youngster loses six friends to homicide in a three year span, it will indeed be hard to know how to feel anymore or how to express the sadness, pain, hurt, and anger. Here, remedies beyond individual coping skills, most probably spiritual ones, are definitely called for.

Trauma – Here it seems most informative to look at the fact that the ABCD focus group was reluctant to discuss their personal experiences with violence. This speaks clearly to thesis that creative approaches beyond simple discussion scenarios will be necessary to get at the deep-seated psychological and emotional pain that accompanies personal loss in violent situations. Thus the Trauma activity, in which the entire ABCD group participated, did move the discovery process forward in a very meaningful way. Surely an opportunity to engage these young people further, based on the words they shared would move a counseling or pastoral resource into an even more enlightened and effective space. The data we obtained clearly illustrates that this opportunity exists and is a desirable outcome for trauma respondents.

Change – It seems that beyond all of the other ways in which they address the need for positive change in their communities, these participants know that the mindset of youth must change in order for their generation to walk together in communal or familial
love. They believe in order for their community to be saved, the violence has to stop. Many of them believe that something has to be done in order to rescue the black community, which is being destroyed by the plague of violence. They were candid in their conclusion that enough talking has taken place. The researcher took this to mean that the young people we interacted with were concerned with what actions might take place to address their concerns beyond the “talking stage.” They clearly seemed to feel that sometimes talking is all that ever happens.

They recognize that it is past time to resolve Boston’s gang issue and stop “running scared.” It is time to discover the hope that lies in Boston’s violent communities. They feel that it is time for young people to make the right decisions in order to reach their destiny. Participants feel that the youth can change the situation of the community by coming together as young men and women ironing out their differences through the use of meaningful dialogue, talking problems out among opponents, not the use of weapons. In fact, they wish there was a ban on weapons, particularly guns.

Particularly impactful were the assertions that “black youth must stop idolizing rappers and celebrities that promote violence and self-hatred. Self-hatred exhibits itself in today’s hip hop music; black men illustrate their hatred for each other as well as for black women who are portrayed as nothing more than sex objects. Self-hatred is destroying the black community because it is taking too many lives in the black community.” This was a particularly mature and impactful observation made a participant in the ABCD study group. One participant’s collage suggested that with a
black president, young black people must think big and do away with the self hatred. Youth must live their lives with greater ambition. These youth clearly realize that young black boys and girls need to learn their history, so they can respect the future by honoring their past.

**Safety** - Many of the participants feel that their safety is beyond their control. Some of the participants are fearful they will not live to be an adult. They live in gang-infested neighborhoods and they are afraid that one day a stray bullet may strike them. Therefore, participants believe that they cannot take life for granted because tomorrow is not promised to them. They also believe that everyone must make things right with the ones they love so as to not live with regrets if that person dies. Such a dim view of the future clearly speaks to fault lines that lie within the psyche and spirit of many urban youth. Exposing these fault lines and then engaging effective pastoral ministry to mitigate such raw emotional need is what this project desires to advance.

**Family** – Black families obviously don’t wish to be the subjects of the day’s most heinous news stories nor do they wish to be in court listening to grisly accounts of the violent death of a loved one. Participants were very clear on this. Some of their hopes of avoiding exposure to community violence clearly rest in an ability to look up to a positive father and mother figures, as well as neighborhood heroes. The challenge is stabilizing the black family, mentally and economically. Churches, pastors and the entire faith community can play a key role in this psycho-social arena. Of added significance is the notion raised by a few participants that the black community must also confront the possibility that violence may indicate hidden mental illness in black families. This
recognition of the psychological pathology of violence was both surprising and germane to a thesis of pastoral care.

**Economics** - Participants understand that violence has economic implications. They know when you are poor it is easy to get caught up in the life of crime. They understand money, drugs, and fast cars will only lead to trouble. A participant from ABCD group believes that the black community has sold out in order to obtain social status and materialism. Another participant from this same group knows that these dealers’ appetites cause them to want something by any means necessary. He understands that the key to happiness is living in a steady life not a reckless life. Youth have to go after their dreams rather than living a life of violence.

**Dreaming** – Despite the violence and death that is so prevalent in their world, it remains heartening to see that so many of these young people have not abandoned the notion of having a dream. Herein lies a key area of ministry and pastoral care. The faith community must nurture the success dreams of young people. This contribution was desired and requested directly by the youth. One participant wants programs that help youth cultivate their gifts so they can live out their dreams. With the possible exception of the schools, no other community than the church institution seems as uniquely suited to this cultivation, to this “sowing of seed and reaping of the harvest.

**Psychospiritual Concerns Expressed by Participants**

In the urban setting, one could argue that the connection between theology and trauma exists whether or not an affected young person attends church. God talk is always
occurring, especially in the midst of trauma. Only 2 of the 12 of the ABCD participants go to church, but according to the questionnaire, 10 of them stated they believed in God. In fact, with the exception of one participant, all youth within the three groups believed that God exists. Based on the interviews and interview questionnaires, participants explained their psychospiritual concerns. Generally the discussion focused on two key spiritual forces, God and pastors. In sum, what follows is what was gleaned from our interactions.

God

Within all elements of this study it was evident that most of the participants’ views on God did not change as a result of trauma. They view God as their protector. They believe that God does care and will see them through their trauma experience(s). Even in the midst of violence, they believe that God will protect them and guide them to the right path in life. For most of them, God exists no matter what. Many of the participants see their connection with God as their source of survival. They rely on God, who provides comfort, healing, joy, and peace in the midst of pain. With the wave of violence in their community, participants view life as an everyday battle zone. They know that the street operates on the policy of “no forgiveness and no mercy.” Still, they realize that this battle is not just a physical warfare, but also a spiritual one.

These young people know that there are evil forces. In language that was frequently biblical in tone, this was a frequent assertion. Although the evil force of
violence has caused life to be unpredictable, knowing that the presence of God is with them brings a sense of relief and comfort.

Participants know that God prohibits murder. They could quote God’s commandments which states, “You shall not murder.” (Exodus 20:13) They believe that all human life belongs to and is highly valued by God. God did not create them to kill one another but to love another and even to be their brother’s and sister’s keeper. They understand that God has made each one of them with different gifts and talents. They know that God wants them to have an abundant life, full of joy and peace, not sorrow and pain. Participants believe God has given young people the ability to heal this city; but they clearly saw that they must fight violence with the laws of the God and not the laws of the streets. Participants agreed that young peoples’ mindset must change. They believe that young people have to let God lay hold to their souls so that a spiritual transformation can take place.

All these participant beliefs, however, did not preclude some deep spiritual questions. Some participants raised a series of questions and comments based on the nature of violence. There were questions like “Why do we live in such a violent world? What kind of life is this and why are you (God) letting some suffer for others foolish behavior? When will you stop the violence that is taking so many of our friend’s lives?”

Some participants felt that God either does not care or was too busy to deal with their concerns. Paradoxically, violence has made some youth feel resentment and even anger toward God, while it has made others get closer to God. In at least one instance,
God was viewed as an anchor. While in others, participants were either just learning about God or unsure about how to respond to God as it related to violence.

**Pastors**

Along similar lines, the majority of the participants feel that the church is a sign of hope and is what young people need today is hope. Many of these youngsters communicated that they and their peers are crying out for help. It was suggested that pastors can help youth better understand why their loved one died and why they are having problems coping with that loss. Participants felt that pastors could help by creating church programs for those affected by violence and by offering supportive, safe fellowship. Participants want pastors to preach about violence and the effects that it is having on the black community.

Moreover, the pastor can help by providing emotional support. Participants feel that pastors can encourage and console young people through their grief. They also want to know that a pastor cares for them and has not cast them aside. Listening to them ensures them that pastors are serving them. Participants suggested that the pastor can serve youth by just praying for them and often wished that pastors could spend more time with them, speaking their language in relation to God.

The participants know that God’s message comes through pastors. Some would therefore, challenge pastors to really believe in God and take Christ and heaven even more seriously. Many of them do not want pastors to judge youth, but rather to give young people a reason to believe in God. Part of this challenge would require that
pastors allow the youth to talk about things they experience as young people. A couple of participants feel that there should always be someone they can talk to at church, such as a youth pastor, an adult or a friend they trust. The groups also recognized that the pastor can help to manifest young people’s talents and gifts. Pastors can also demonstrate living right to young people; keep them from being distracted by the realities of a hard world, and providing more community activities.

Summary of Selected Insights

I started with the intent of creating a pastoral intervention model which would give traumatized youth a diverse and creative forum for expressing their pain losing in loved ones to homicide. Our strategy was to use their voices to provide the tools for pastoral caregivers to be more effective in assisting youth suffering close experiences with violence and death. Using three study groups in church and community-based settings, the project indeed provided youth with the opportunity to voice their opinions, issues, and or concerns regarding the impact of violence on them and their communities. The methods used to capture the voices of these youth included creative expressions (art, dance, poetry, etc.), focus groups, and individual interviews coupled with an evaluation tool determine the effectiveness of the intervention strategy.

At Morning Star Baptist Church and Grant AME Church our research process was very similar, as the researcher found two groups of young people anxious to openly share their feelings and insights about violence and trauma. At the ABCD satellite office in Roxbury, however, we encountered a group that was initially more hesitant to verbally
discuss their trauma experiences. Modifying our methodology slightly we were able to effectively capture and record their creative output and personal insights nonetheless.

A common vocabulary shared with all three groups provided a consistent framework for eliciting their creative expressions and their individual stories, needs, desires and fears. The themes of *Voice, Violence, Coping, Trauma, Change, Safety, Family, Economics, and Dreaming* provided a shared language and a focus for the participants to use in framing their responses throughout the group and individual activities.

In all instances, it was clear that the young people we gathered information from were deeply affected by the circumstances and impacts of the violence they had witnessed, known of, or had intimate experience with. We heard of and recorded impressions of anger, fear, withdrawal, resignation, confusion, hopelessness, and helplessness. We also clearly heard these young person’s pleas for help and their desires to be heard and taken seriously. The research results demonstrate all of this quite vividly and in a fairly definitive way.

Linking our results to the psychospiritual aspects of violence trauma among young people was equally illuminating. In looking at their perception of God and the church, we concluded that while our youth frequently expressed feelings of anger, confusion, fear and resentment toward God and the clergy, they also exhibited the emotions of hope, relief and an embrace of the role of faith in the trauma healing process.

An examination of the pastoral response in the face of our results only amplified the findings we put forward. Inner city clergy seem to be acutely aware of their
challenges, their shortcomings, and their opportunities to play a critical role in giving these young people both a voice and a safe harbor as they navigate through the treacherous waters of the violence that permeates their neighborhoods.

So, as we end this chapter examining the place of God and of pastors in the lives of these young people, a fertile ground was definitely revealed for greater pastoral care, creative intervention strategies, and a full-court press by the local church on the psycho-spiritual issues of the violence-affected young people in their communities of concern. The final chapter of this project will discuss our results more fully and make recommendations for action as well as further research.
CHAPTER FIVE
CONCLUSION

The purpose of the project was to create an intervention model that gives traumatized youth a diverse and effective forum for expressing in various ways their pain in losing a loved one to homicide. It was critical to give youth a voice but also interpret that voice effectively. The intervention model is for both care provision and future prevention. The methods used, focus groups and interviews, have provided the participants with the opportunity to express or convey their thoughts and feelings. This chapter will cover the following: Discussion: 1) Reason why participants agreed to participate in this project, 2) Evaluation of the effectiveness of the focus group sessions based on the formal project evaluation, completed by each participant at the end of the session; 3) Evaluation of the role of pastoral aftercare in the problem area; and 4) Limitations of the project. In closing, I will offer Critical Findings and my Conclusion, including suggestions for further research implied as a result of my efforts, and further ideas, issues, and concerns this project has created that I, or others, might investigate.

Discussion

Reasons for Agreeing to Participate

There were various reasons that the youth gave for why they came to the focus groups. Many of the participants chose to come to these sessions because they have been affected by the loss of loved ones to violence in Boston and wanted to talk about it. A
few of the participants came even though they believed that they have been sufficiently educated on the subject of violence. But those youth still felt the need to talk about their experiences. One participant said she came because it was something to get her out of the house. She later admitted to becoming interested in the subject matter of the session. Another participant felt that attending this session was a way to pay homage to those who have been killed. Still another young person chose to come because she felt that this would be a good outlet after losing more than twelve loved ones within a year. Many of the participants wanted to be part of a positive movement for youth. Participants also desired to help their peers who have been affected by violence.

Discussing why youth came to participate in the three site locations is important for a few reasons. One, it validates the key assertion of this project that young people in the inner city need help in dealing with these difficult emotional issues of trauma. It also affirms that these young people feel as though their voice is absent from any discussion of what might be done to assist them and how to bring about real change in their circumstances. Lastly, it lays a foundation for much of what was expressed by the young people as they look to be part of the change they want to see.

Effectiveness of Focus Group Sessions

The participants had the option to write original poetry, create a collage, perform a dance, draw, or write a letter that illustrated and communicated their feelings regarding the impact of violence in their lives. The majority of the participants (N=28) expressed themselves through the creation of a collage. The other participants (N=7) expressed
themselves through dance, a drawing, a letter and poetry.

The effectiveness of the project was based on the following project evaluation questions: 1. What did you like about the focus group? 2. What did you not like about the workshop? 3. What will you do different? 4. Did the focus group help you deal with your traumatic experience? 5. Was the focus group worthwhile? 6. Are these types of focus groups needed in your community? The evaluations of the participants of each of the three groups revealed that they benefited from the session in two primary ways. 1. They valued the opportunity to express themselves through art and share it with others. 2. They were able together to communicate how they really feel about how violence and the ways it has affected them and their communities.

Most of the participants were pleased with the session and felt that the session was positive for youth. Several participants expressed that they were uncomfortable talking about violence. However, all participants from each group felt the sessions were worthwhile and that this type of intervention is needed in their community. Many of them stated that they would not change anything about the focus group session. Still, some participants at the Grant session suggested that they would change the time to later in the afternoon in order to get more youth to participate. They felt that their 9:00 a.m. start was too early for many of their peers.

Participants believed that the creative expressions served as a great tool to give “a voice to the voiceless,” especially since many youth are unable or hesitant to talk about their traumatic experience(s). They believed that this type of intervention is warranted because many of the young people do not know how to express their feelings. One
participant said that the session helped him to clear his mind from the negative thoughts and feelings and helped to relieve the stress of losing loved ones, and the stress of living in his community. One stated that the session really opened her eyes to the pain she had been experiencing and that she felt encouraged and overjoyed. Many liked the sessions because they were hands-on, which helped them to better deal with their loss. The expressed result of these positive feelings is that most of the participants said they would attend future sessions. Since many of their friends have lost loved ones, they would also encourage friends to come to these types of sessions. They know that their friends need support and to share their stories as well. They expressed that they liked the support and encouragement given by the adults when sharing at their focus group sessions. For example, one participant stated that the pastoral caregivers who were present helped him understand his feelings regarding his traumatic experiences.

It was important for me as a pastoral caregiver to listen to the youth and allow them to inform me of how I can best serve. Since many youth today have trouble with authority figures, listening to them may increase their comfort level with pastoral authority. Additionally, informing participants that they are experts on their own feelings might increase youth’s trust and respect for pastoral caregivers. This thought proved to be useful for the participants, as well as for included pastoral caregivers. In fact, one of the creative expressions gave me insight on how to write a eulogy for a homicide victim.
Role of Pastoral Aftercare

The results of the evaluations and interviews indicate the need for pastoral aftercare. Many of the intervention programs offered by social service organizations for traumatized youth exist outside of the affected areas in which most of these youth reside. For this reason, churches are in a far better position to provide this kind of intervention. Churches are in the affected neighborhoods; with compassion and genuine interest they can gain the trust of these young people. Following a series of traumatic events involving youth in Boston’s inner city communities, the request for clergy aftercare revealed the need for pastoral caregivers to be more effectively informed and trained. Also, these events revealed the need to develop dynamic, creative intervention programs.

Overall, it appears that various community violence prevention programs seemed not to be working with those most directly impacted by all the recent killings in the city of Boston. Therefore, aftercare intervention is needed to supplement the prevention programs. The data from this project suggests that more pastoral intervention is needed in times of crisis. However, the black church cannot handle trauma alone. It needs to collaborate with other professional organizations, corporate and community organizations, healthcare practitioners, psychiatrists and therapists, mentoring programs, educational and employment agencies, and the political and judicial systems.

It must be noted that although black faith communities are becoming increasingly more involved with crime victims’ issues, even the most well-intentioned faith communities are not always equipped to provide substantive assistance. After speaking with some of the black pastors of the Black Ministerial Alliance, I did discover that the
black faith community in Boston is keenly interested in the outcome of this research. These clergy desperately want to help youth in pain due to homicide. Many clergy receive little or no training on how to help victims of trauma, and they have little information about available services, or how victims experience the adjudication process.¹

In March of 2006, flanked by several of Boston's prominent clergy members, Mayor Thomas M. Menino said "'We will give the faith community the training to help deal with trauma." Menino has joined a growing number of civic leaders who describe crime as a "public health problem," which is why he asked the city's Public Health Commission to work on a solution. As a result the commission decided to contract with an outside company to provide trauma training for some 150 clergy members.² As a member of that clergy group, I have since been certified as a trauma response person. However, this training focused more primarily on "on-the-spot" intervention. Trauma response groups typically are one-time efforts, usually beginning 24 to 72 hours after an episode of acute violence.³ It did not provide clergy with intervention methods related to the potential needs remaining after the funeral and beyond.

The question then arises, if clergy do not participate in some form of trauma training then what does the black church have to offer traumatized youth? What are the

¹ http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/publications/infores/faith_based_vict_asst/insufficient_training.html

² Adrienne P. Samuels, “City Offers Trauma Program: Aims at Ministers and Youth Workers,” Boston Globe March 1, 2006.

pastoral, theological resources of the black church? The Black church serves as a counselor, prophet, and protector. In dealing with trauma, youth and their families are in need of pastoral aftercare. Psychosocial literature would suggest that these participants are identified as patients of a family system problem when the trauma occurs in their community. Psychospiritual intervention helps break the silence within and helps the affected one cope with a traumatic event. Giving them space to share their story allows them to unlock their hidden pain and make meaning of it. This type of intervention also allows a person to come to some level of normalcy. The church, in all of its roles—counselor, prophet and protector, can serve in this psychospiritual area of need.

The black church also provides youth with a cultural identity that lets them know who they are as a people, incorporating themes of liberation and survival theology within its mission statement. This consistent statement conveys a sense of shared history. Such knowledge allows youth to understand better the struggles of the black community and encourages them to honor their community. The black church can thus give youth a sense of belonging and a sense of community that is socially responsible for them. Because the church provides youth with identity, a sense of community, and a source of history, it must also meet youth in their areas of struggle, and most acutely in the area of trauma. Most assuredly, the black church has a unique role to play.

Limitations

The present study has certain limitations. A key limitation is the fact that some of the participants were unable verbally to express themselves and some were not be ready
to do so. This, of course impedes the researcher’s ability to capture the full breadth and
depth of their traumatic experiences. Therefore, we do want to acknowledge the presence
of limiting factors in the research design.

Also, while the project was advertised on *facebook* to a wider audience, the youth
who agreed to participate in this project were already a part of a church or social service
organizations. Clearly, a single project, no matter how robust or well-executed, cannot
speak for all youth. The methodology I employed may ultimately need to be broader in
scope to reach youth who are considered at-risk or high-risk. Future iterations of the
research design may well need to be less restricted. All in all, I believe that this pilot
research has made an important contribution to the investigation, design and
implementation of effective intervention models for youth experiencing trauma related to
violence and death.

**Critical Findings**

Critical findings based on interview questionnaire revealed that the majority of
the participants are planning on finishing high school then going to college. They have
not let violence stop them from reaching for their goals and aspirations. One of female
participants from the ABCD group plans to finish college after she has her baby. The
questionnaire also revealed that many of the participants do not see themselves as
stressed or depressed over violence but by personal issues such as school, work, or by a
friend or family member. However, few if any participants are oblivious to their
traumatic experience(s). This is an indication that youth are more resilient than they
think that they are. It must be noted that some youth can move in and out of trauma more effectively than others. Some exhibit a higher capacity for resiliency than others. They are able to bounce back from the stress of a devastating loss.⁴ Some participants realized that they need to talk to someone to discuss their pain.

Another finding was that each youth group had to be approached differently. There were a few clear distinctions between the participants that attend church versus those who do not attend church. Nonetheless, participants from MSBC and Grant were more open to discuss their pain and the impact of violence on them and their community, while participants of ABCD initially were not even willing to discuss violence although they agreed to participate in the project. They informed me that being bombarded by violence daily was the reason for their hesitancy to talk about it.

MSBC and Grant participants willingly presented their creative expressions moreso than ABCD participants. Again, participants were not forced to share and present their work. Therefore understanding the concerns of these ABCD youth came not from verbal exchanges but rather from nonverbal process of art that provided a wealth of information, free of distractions that so often clutter the therapeutic relationship when words and verbal interaction is the focus.⁵


The MBSC group believed that their explanations of their creative expressions spoke for them; therefore, they did not see the need for the interview. The majority of the Grant group was open to be interviewed. Those who attend church appeared to be emboldened to share their stories and release their pain while the non-churchgoers appeared to be more reserved, electing to withhold some expressions or reflections. The ABCD group felt threatened by the interviewing process. Therefore, they agreed to complete the interview questionnaire detached from a live component.

In many ways, these distinctions in approach are highly suggestive of the need for more personalized and creative trauma intervention as a crucial step in rebuilding the inner person of violence affected youth. This project has great potential to assist in the development of trauma intervention ministries in Boston’s urban areas. This project also suggests that additional research will be needed in the future to validate further or to expand upon my overall findings.

**Conclusion**

This project opens a key door to other areas and avenues of related research, such as intervention methods for the perpetrators who have been traumatized by the taking of a life and those who have been traumatized by surviving an attempted murder. The following are recommendations for future research that I or others can implement based on information gathered in this study:

- *Utilizing the Louis D. Brown Peace Institute as a case study to illustrate how an organization offers a theology of peace as an alternative to a theology of suffering*
and trauma – There appears to be a plethora of research on the intervention of trauma but not enough on youth intervention of peace.

- **Telling the story of just how youth do attempt to maneuver in America's urban culture of violence** - The youth in this project had multiple ways of avoiding violence. An investigation needs to occur in this area to inform at-risk of high-risk youth on how to maneuver in the urban setting without being involved in the nature of violence.

- **A study that measures youth’s suffering due to violence** – Many participants mentioned that they had been impacted by the homicide of a loved one or friend, yet many of them claimed not to be stressed over the situation. Therefore, research needs to be done in measuring the depth of youth’s suffering. It would be further instructive to learn what enables some youth to tolerate trauma at a higher level and be more resilient in the face of traumatic events.

- **Parental intervention through active listening** – A couple of participants questioned if parents knew if their child was stressed. A study on parents listening for and observing for their child stressors after a traumatic experience through the child verbally and nonverbal responses. In addition, instructing parents in learning how to respond appropriately.

- **An intervention model for perpetrators as well as victims who survived the attempted homicide** – Youth who commit murder are also traumatized by the event as are those who survived the attempted murder. Clearly both groups need intervention. Many youth are paralyzed by gunshot wounds. They are traumatized by being shot and psychologically damaged by being wheelchair bound.

- **Development of a resource guide for pastoral aftercare** – In order to create an effective trauma ministry, pastors need a resource that can train them in dealing with trauma and intervention methods. This guide could provide various intervention models for traumatized individuals as well as resources citing various professional who work in the trauma field.

- **Development of a course to train seminary students for urban ministry** - The course could be titled: “Urban Youth in Trauma from a Pastoral Theological Perspective.” This course can provide seminary students with techniques that will cultivate an intellectual, meaningful, and spiritual conversation that bridges the gap between youth and religious leaders. It could equip and prepare seminary students to be better religious leaders in the locale where they will serve, especially those who will serve in a community overwhelmed with violence. The
result anticipated is that youth will have greater confidence in pastors, which will lead to helping religious leaders provide better aftercare with others in trauma.

This project serves as a pilot study for expanded work in critical urban and metropolitan areas facing similar challenges. I have already been approached by funders to develop an intervention program based on this project. Therefore, this thesis project can assist in the initial step in developing a body of knowledge and information specifically designed to address the pastoral aftercare needs of teen survivors of trauma.

The project can be used for discussion to explore the development of methodology for practical theology in working through churches with urban youth in trauma. This project indicates that ongoing youth intervention is needed to address the psychologically and emotionally damaging effects of trauma. This project also indicates that, instead of being prescriptive or reactive to the community in the wake of violence, the Black church needs to pro-actively research and create models that truly respond to their community’s needs. Finally and perhaps most importantly, this study has consistently asserted and practically determined that the critical first step in the continuum of pastoral aftercare and the Black Church’s response to youth in trauma has to be a focus on hearing directly from the youth. Assessing what they need, what they expect, and what they desire will go a long way toward establishing a pastoral aftercare model based on mutual trust and respect that permeates the faith communities of urban Boston and beyond.
APPENDIX A
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of Study: Traumatized Youth and Narrative Theology: Resources Materials for Pastoral Aftercare

Principal Investigator: Darryl A. Elow, M.Div.’05 - Doctor of Ministry Candidate
Boston University School of Theology

Participant:
This research project is a part of my doctoral work at Boston University School of Theology. Its purpose is to get the perspective of young people like yourself who have been impacted by homicide in the community so that pastors can provide more effective care to you and your families.

Participants are invited to participate in a program for youth who have been traumatized in some way by the violence of homicide. This program will consist of two group meetings of about two to three hours each and an individual interview after the group sessions are complete. The interview and evaluation will take approximately 30 minutes to one hour to complete. In the first meeting, we will get acquainted and share our experiences of violence in the community. The second session will provide the opportunity for some type of creative expression about the experience of violence (such as an art project, a song, a dance, etc.). Participants will have the opportunity to share their work with the group. The meetings will take place at Morning Star Baptist Church or the Grant AME Church. Church members from both who are assisting me with this study will attend the focus group sessions.

I will be writing a lengthy report based on what I learn from each participant. Therefore, I will need to audio tape each session. And I would like to video tape your art work at the second session if you agree to let me. But you will be offered the specific opportunity to refuse to have your art video- taped. And all tapes will be destroyed after my final report is written.

There will be from 12 to 15 young people in the group; your confidentiality cannot be entirely assured. We will all be in a group together. I hope that we will all respect one another’s confidences shared in these conversations and I’ll urge everyone not to talk
about the content of the group to those outside of it. However, I can’t be sure that everyone will follow this request. I can assure you, however, all data that I collect for this study (from audio/video tapes or notes) will be kept in a locked file cabinet and will be destroyed after the results have been analyzed and my final report written. And I can assure you that no names will be written on any of the interview materials, nor will any names appear in the final report, nor will faces be shown on the video tape, nor will names be mentioned in audio tape. All participants will be anonymous in any report coming from this study.

There is no specific risk to your participating in this study. However, sometimes recalling and sharing painful memories can be stressful, so there will be counselors available if you feel distressed and want some individual help. Sometimes sharing painful memories can be freeing and healing as well. So you might find that participation in this process may have some benefits for you as you try to put your painful experience into perspective in your life.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from the project at anytime, or to ask for more explanation of what we are doing. And if you decide to stop your participation at any point, it will not affect your being welcome at all of the other events and groups that are held by the organizations supporting this research.

Statement of Consent
I have read the above statement and I hereby consent to the participating in this study. I have received a copy of this form. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and they have been answered to my satisfaction. Even after signing this form, I know that I may withdraw from this study at any time. If I have any questions later, you may contact either:

Principal Investigator (for questions about this research project):
Darryl A. Elow, M.Div. ’05
Doctor of Ministry Candidate
Boston University School of Theology
745 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA 02215
617-230-7132
elowdi@comcast.net

Or
Advisor (for questions about this research project):
Carole R. Bohn, EdD
Boston University School of Theology
745 Commonwealth Ave., Suite 424A
Boston, MA 02215
617-353-3058
cbohn@bu.edu

Or
Coordinator of the Boston University Institutional Review Board (for questions about my rights as a participant in this research project):

David Berndt
Charles River Institutional Review Board
Office of Sponsored Programs, Boston University
25 Buick Street, Boston, MA 02215
617-353-4365
dberndt@bu.edu

☐ I hereby consent to the participation in focus group and interviews, the use of quotes, and the taking of photographs, audio or video tapes.

Signature of Participant (age 18 and over)  Date

Signature of Person obtaining consent  Date
Title of Study: Traumatized Youth and Narrative Theology: Resources Materials for Pastoral Aftercare

Principal Investigator: Darryl A. Elow, M.Div.’05 - Doctor of Ministry Candidate
Boston University School of Theology

Purpose of the Thesis Project:
This research project is a part of my doctoral work at Boston University School of Theology. Its purpose is to get the perspective of young people like your child who have been impacted by homicide so that religious leaders can provide more effective intervention care to your child and your families.

Description of the Project:
Your child will be one of twelve to fifteen youth, ages 13-21 to be recruited through neighborhood and church organizations (see below) to participate in two structured focus groups and one individual interview.

A focus group is a non-threaten approach to gathering information. It involves a facilitator and a small group of people that come together to discuss a specific topic. I will the facilitator and the topic will be how has community violence impacted the participants. In the first focus group session there will be an ice breaker will take place then I will give an explanation of the project, I will ask the youth to introduce themselves and then have them talk about violence in the community. This session will end with explaining what the second session will entail. The goal of the first session would be to establish rapport and gain the trust and respect of the participants.

The second session will consist of participants creative expressions on how violence of homicide has affected their lives. Each member will be asked to create an artistic expression of what their experience has been like and what theological questions have surfaced as a result. Your child can prepare his or her artwork prior to this session or in the session. He or she will have the opportunity to present his or her creative expression if he or she so choose to do so. This session would close with a written evaluation in order to get their feedback to determine the usefulness the sessions. Both focus group sessions will be approximately two to three hours long. The focus groups and interviews
will meet take at Morning Star Baptist Church or the Grant AME Church. Church members from both who are assisting me with this study will attend the focus group sessions. After the focus group each participant will partake in an individual interview if he or she agrees to do so. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes to one hour to complete.

Participants will be from Boston’s inner city will be recruited by staff from the Louis D. Brown Peace Institute, ministers or laypeople of Morning Star Baptist Church and Grant AME Church who will refer to me all participants that are willing to participate. Only after parents and youth have agreed will participants name and contact information be forwarded to me. I will contact the participants to review together a written explanation of the project. Only after a consent form has been signed by both youth and/or their parent will the teen be able to participate. A parental signature will be obtained from youth under 18 years old before they can participate.

Risks/benefits:
There are no specific risks with your child being this study. However, while your child tells his or her story of his or her traumatic experience(s), he or she may become distressed. Therefore, there will be counselors available if you feel distressed and want some individual help. This is one reason why art is being used. Art is a powerful means for connecting to the emotional and spiritual impact of traumatic events. It is a great tool to allow people to express themselves nonverbally. Nonverbal expression reduces the risk of retraumatization.¹ The project may benefit the participant by allowing them a contained opportunity to express their feelings and possibly reducing their need to act out aggressively whether at home, school or in the community.

Confidentiality:
Your child’s name will not be written on the interviews questionnaire or creative expressions. All participants will remain anonymous in any publications or report regarding the research. Participants’ faces will not be show on any media outlet nor will I mention any names being quoted. The records of this study will be kept in a locked file

and will be destroyed after results have been analyzed and recorded. However, in a focus group setting I cannot guarantee that the information will remain confidential.

Voluntary nature/questions:
Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You and your child are free to withdraw from the project at anytime, or to ask for more explanation of what we are doing. And if you decide to stop your child’s participation at any point, it will not affect your child being welcome at all of the other events and groups that are held by the organizations supporting this research. Both you and your child must sign the respective forms in order for your child to participate in this study.

Statement of Consent
I have read the above statement and I have received a copy of this form. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and they have been answered to my satisfaction. Even after signing this form, I know that my child may withdraw from this study at any time. If I have any questions later, I may contact either:

Principal Investigator (for questions about this research project):
Darryl A. Elow, M.Div.’05
Doctor of Ministry Candidate
Boston University School of Theology
745 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA 02215
617-230-7132
elowd@comcast.net

Or

Advisor (for questions about this research project):
Carole R. Bohn, EdD
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745 Commonwealth Ave., Suite 424A
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617-353-3058
cbohn@bu.edu
Coordinator of the Boston University Institutional Review Board (for questions about my rights as a participant in this research project):
  David Berndt
  Charles River Institutional Review Board
  Office of Sponsored Programs, Boston University
  25 Buick Street, Boston, MA 02215
  617-353-4365
dberndt@bu.edu

☐ I hereby permit my child to the participation in focus group and interviews, the use of quotes, and the taking of photographs, audio or video tapes.

__________________________________________  ____________________________
Signature of Parent, Legal Guardian, or Witness  Date
(If participants are under the age of 18)

__________________________________________  ____________________________
Signature of Researcher  Date
Title of Study: Traumatized Youth and Narrative Theology: Resources Materials for Pastoral Aftercare

My name is Reverend Darryl Elow. I am doing a research project as a part of my doctoral work at Boston University School of Theology. I am trying to learn how ministers can help youth when they are sad because of someone they know and love was killed. If you would like, you can be in my study.

If you decide you want to be in my study, you will be involved in a focus group with youth from age 13-21 and will be asked to complete a questionnaire and evaluation. A focus group is a small group that comes together to talk about a certain subject. If you agree to participate in this study, you will get the chance to share how violence against someone you know has affected you. You will be able to express yourself by words or by using art such as: (1) Creation of a Collage, (2) Dance, (3) Drawing, (4) Letter writing, (5) Rap or poetry, (6) Song or music, and (7) Computer presentation. You have a chance to present your artwork to the focus group but it is not required. In fact, you can stop at any time if you decide that you no longer want to be apart of the study. Finally, you will be asked to complete an evaluation and an interview. The focus group sessions will be about two to three hours long. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes to one hour to complete. Both the focus group sessions and the interviews and evaluations will be done at Morning Star Baptist Church or Grant AME Church. Church members from both who are assisting me with this study will attend the focus group sessions.

Remembering your painful experience of losing someone you know and love might make you sad. There will be someone that you can talk to if you need it. By talking or by using art to communicate you painful experience might help you feel a little better. The study can help understand better what you are feeling.

Other people will not know if you are in my study. I will put things I learn about you together with things I learn about other youth, so no one can tell what things came from you. When I tell other people about my research, I will not use your name, so no one can tell who I am talking about. If you are angry or acting out then the study might help you understand why you are doing what you are doing.
Both you and your parent(s) or guardian has to sign a form for you to be in this study. After they decide, you get to choose if you want to do it too. If you don’t want to be in the study, no one will be mad at you. If you want to be in the study now and change your mind later, that’s OK too. Again, you can stop at any time.

If I have any questions later, you may contact either:

Principal Investigator (for questions about this research project):
Darryl A. Elow, M.Div. ’05
Doctor of Ministry Candidate
Boston University School of Theology
745 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA 02215
617-230-7132
elowd@comcast.net

Or

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David Berndt
Charles River Institutional Review Board
Office of Sponsored Programs, Boston University
25 Buick Street, Boston, MA 02215
617-353-4365
dberndt@bu.edu

I will give you a copy of this form in case you want to ask questions later.
Boston University
School of Theology
745 Commonwealth Avenue
Boston, Massachusetts 02215
617/353-3050
Fax: 617-353-3061

Agreement
I have decided to be in the study even though I know that I don’t have to do it. Darryl Elow has answered all my questions.

☐ I hereby consent to the participation in focus group and interviews, the use of quotes, and the taking of photographs, audio or video tapes.

________________________________________ _____________________________________
Signature of Participant (age 17 and under) Date

________________________________________ _____________________________________
Signature of Researcher Date
FOCUS GROUP GUIDELINE:

Introduction of researcher
Introduction of participants
Ice breaker
Explanation of project
Have participants define grief and trauma
Have participants talk about the impact of violence in his/her community
Explanation of creative expression
Creative expressions of his/her trauma
Presentations of creative expressions (If choose to share)
Evaluations
Explain details of interviews
Interviews (Only if agreed)
APPENDIX C
A Pathway for Healing

The Come for Care Ministry is a ministry designed to give youth who have been traumatized by violence a voice. Youth please join us as we continue to grow and have an opportunity to share our story.

- Continental breakfast will be provided
- Judge free environment
- Creative Expression Session for the youth

We would love to see your face in the place!!!!!!!

Place: Grant A. M. E 1906 Washington St. Boston, MA 02118 (617) 427-0670
Date: Saturday March 6, 2010 Boston University School of Theology
Time: 9am- 1pm in conjunction with

For more information please contact:
Rev. Barnes at (617) 427-0670
Rev. Elow at (617) 298-0278
APPENDIX D
Evaluation

1. What did you like about the workshop?

2. What did you not like about the workshop?

3. What will you do different?

4. Did the focus group help deal with your trauma experience?

5. Was this workshop worthwhile?

6. Is this type of workshop needed in your community?
Interviews

Interviews will be conducted at a safe, non-threatening environment such as a church or a place where participants can freely express themselves. The interview could take about thirty to one hour. The purpose of the interview is to understand the current reality and religiosity of young people and how they deal with trauma and violence.

Participants will be asked the following questions for consistency:

1. How has violence impacted you?
2. What does the word trauma mean to you?
3. What does the word grief mean to you?
4. Are you depressed or stressed?
5. If so, what is causing you to be depressed or stressed?
6. Are you taking medication for your depression?
7. Do you feel safe at home?
8. Do you feel safe at school?
9. Do you feel safe in your community?
10. Do you believe your generation lives in culture of violence?
11. If so, how do you deal this with the culture of violence?
12. How are you planning your future?
13. What were your views of God before violence occurred?
14. What were your views on God after violence occurred?
15. If you were to talk to God, what would you say?
16. What do you want to say to pastors?
17. How can the church help young people dealing with trauma and violence?
UNDERSTANDING GRIEF AND TRAUMA

Emotions of Grief

A person experiences grief in three ways: 1) psychologically grief affects one’s thoughts, feelings and attitude, 2) socially grief has an affect on how one behaves towards others, and 3) physically grief affects one’s body and health. Note that there is a difference between grief, mourning, and bereavement. Grief is described as “intense emotional suffering caused by loss, misfortune, or disaster.” (Conrad, 1998, p.8) Bereavement means “the state of having suffered a loss.” (Therese Rando, 1988, p.12) Mourning “refers to the conscious and unconscious processes that 1) gradually undoes the psychological ties that had bound you to your loved one, 2) helps you adapt to his or her loss, and 3) helps you to learn how to live healthily in the new world without him or her.” (Therese Rando, 1988, p.12) There is no timetable on grief.

A griever goes through the following: shock, denial, fear, guilt, anger, resentfulness, helplessness, detachment, and meaninglessness.

Shock is the initial emotion of being astonished when hearing the news of the death of a loved one. A person experiences numbness, this numbness is a body’s mechanism used to protect the person after hearing the devastating news that his or her loved one has died, until he or she is ready to accept the reality of the death.

Denial is the emotional disbelief that a loved one has died. Like shock, denial serves as a protector from the reality of the griever’s loved one’s death.

Fear grips the griever who knows that his or her course of life has been forever changed and does not know how he or she will cope with this change. The fear of not being able to live without that loved one that has died increases the griever’s pain. Thus, the griever fears that they will not be able to move past this point in his or her life.

Guilt is a form of self blame. The grievers believe that they dropped their guard of not protecting their loved one from homicide. Many grievers believe if they had done something differently that their loved one would still be around.

Anger can have many components to grief. The griever could be angry with the deceased, with him or herself, with the perpetrator(s), with the hospital, with the legal system, and even with God.
**Resentfulness** can be directed toward anyone or anything. The griever could be resentful for lacking the power to prevent the death of his or her loved one. The griever could be resentful that his or her life is forced to be altered by the death of a loved one. The griever could be resentful of those who are not grieving.

**Helplessness** is an emotion of vulnerability. The griever feels helpless when he or she realizes that there was nothing they could have done to prevent the death of a loved one. He or she may even feel helpless in trying to put his or her life back together after the loss.

**Detachment** causes the griever to feel disconnected from the rest of the world. The griever feels alone and feels that no one understands. Whether consciously or unconsciously, the griever pulls away from the rest of the world because he or she feels nothing else matters or feels like others are avoiding him or her. The griever desperately wants to return to the normalcy of the life he or she knew before the death.

**Meaninglessness** is an emotion that life has lost its meaning. For many, the purpose of living is to fulfill the role of a mother, father, brother or sister. When this role is compromised due to death, the griever questions his or her purpose in life.

**Trauma**

**Trauma** is defined as “emotional shock: an extremely distressing experience that causes severe emotional shock and may have long-lasting psychological effects and bodily injury: a physical injury or wound to the body.” (http://encarta.msn.com/dictionary_18.../trauma.html)

A traumatic experience deeply wounds the soul, which can alter an individual’s personality because the very foundation of his or her beliefs has been shattered. **Homicide** is a form of interpersonal trauma, which can freeze a person in the period of time when the traumatic event took place. Survivors of homicide have a difficult time unlocking the door to their future. If they do not persist in opening the door then it could forever remained closed. Many who are traumatized by homicide resist coming face-to-face with their human vulnerability.

**Self-Care after a Traumatic Event**

Everyone who is in **any way** involved with a disaster or traumatic event may experience trauma reactions. You might experience these reactions if you:

- Were a witness or were involved in the event.
- Arrived upon the scene of the event.
- Had a "near miss" or were almost involved in the event.
Knew or know others who were killed, harmed, or involved in some way.
Have a relationship with family or friends of victims.
Have heard a lot about the event through media or friends.
Are reminded of other traumatic incidents in your life by this event.

Trauma reactions are normal reactions to extremely abnormal circumstances. It is difficult to predict what type of trauma reactions you will experience following a disastrous event. It is important to allow yourself permission to have your reactions, and take care of them both by yourself and by asking for help from others, as best you can. Many people find it helpful to have information about what constitutes a typical reaction to trauma.

**Typical Reactions to Trauma**

Not everyone experiences the same set of responses to trauma, but people typically experience reactions that fall into four basic categories. Here are some reactions that you may be experiencing:

**Psychological and Emotional**

- Heightened anxiety or fear
- Irritability, restlessness, or over excitability
- Feelings of sadness, moodiness, more crying than usual
- Feelings of helplessness or hopelessness
- Feelings of numbness or detachment
- "Survivor guilt", or feelings of self-blame that you escaped the tragedy
- Re-experiencing of the traumatic event, possibly including:
  - intrusive thoughts or images of the event
  - distressing dreams or nightmares
  - flashbacks about the event
  - distress when exposed to events that remind you of the trauma
- Feelings of estrangement or isolation from others
- Hypervigilance (feelings especially attuned to events around you, scanning environment for possible danger)

**Cognitive**

- Difficulty concentrating
- Feelings confused or distracted, slower thought than normal
Physical

- Headaches
- Nausea or upset stomach
- Exaggerated startle response (tendency to startle easily at loud noises)
- Fatigue or feelings slowed down

Behavioral

- Hyperactivity, or less activity
- Heightened tendency to behave irritable
- Withdrawal, social isolation
- Avoidance of activities or places that remind you of traumatic event
- Insomnia
- Strong need to talk about the event, read accounts about the event

You may recognize yourself as experiencing some of the above reactions. Remember that your response is normal. Immediately following a traumatic event you will probably feel disrupted, dazed, and somewhat confused. You will notice that you are not behaving as you typically would. It is important to take care of yourself as best you can. Here are some self-care suggestions for you.

Self Care

Keep reminding yourself that your responses are normal responses to a stressful situation. Give yourself permission to do whatever you need to do to take care of yourself. Your body and mind will tell you what you need to do--your job is to listen to them.

Get plenty of rest when you're tired, and use the energy you have if you experience hyperactivity at times. Don't force yourself to be active if you don't have the energy, or rest when you feel tired. Talk to people as much as you need to. Reach out. You may experience a need to talk repetitively about the trauma. If you can find someone who is willing to listen, use her/him to talk to about how you are feeling. If you do not have anyone in your support network to use, consider calling a crisis line, going to a crisis center, or using other community resources--they are there to help you.

Spend time with others, even if you don't feel like talking. It can be very comforting to know you're not alone. Try to find someone or someplace that feels safe and comforting.
to you, and spend time there. Don't make any major life decisions or big life changes if at all possible. This is not a time to put pressure on self to do anything out of the ordinary. Concentrate on taking care of yourself. Do things that feel good to you--take baths, read, exercise, watch television, spend time with friends and family, fix yourself a special treat, or whatever else feels nurturing and self-caring. Allow yourself to cry, rage, and express your feelings when you need to. Try not to numb your feelings with alcohol or drugs. This will only complicate your situation.

The Process of Recovery

Proverbs 14:30 says, “A heart at peace gives life to the body.”

It is important to know that recovering from a trauma is a process that may take a long time. The initial response of disruption (perhaps alternating with numbness) may last days, weeks, or longer. Don't be surprised if you continue to experience these reactions for longer than you expected. It is impossible to predict how long you will experience effects of the trauma, but usually trauma reactions gradually decrease over time. If you experience another stressful event while recovering from this trauma, you may find that your trauma reactions reappear for awhile. This re-activation, or delayed trauma response, is perfectly normal.

At any time during this process, you may find it useful to ask for professional help from a counselor or mental health professional. There are some circumstances under which you should definitely get professional help:

- if you find yourself feeling suicidal or contemplating suicide
- if you find that your daily functioning continues to be impaired so that you cannot carry out your life tasks
- if post-trauma fears interfere with your ability to return to certain places or situations that remind you of the trauma

Resources

Therese Rando, How To Go On Living: When Someone You Love Dies, Copyright@1998 Lexington Books

Bonnie Hunt Conrad, When a Child has been Murdered: Ways you can help the grieving parents, copyright@1998 Baywood Publishing Co., Inc. (Amityville, NY)

Doug Manning, Don’t take my grief away from me: How to Walk Through Grief and Learn to Live Again, Copyright@1979 In-Sight Books, Inc. (Hereford, TX)
Lula Redmond, *Sudden Violent Death*, in Kenneth Doka and Jack Gordon editors, *Living With Grief After Sudden Loss: Suicide Homicide, Accident, Heart Attack and Stroke*, p. 53-71 Copyright@1996 the Hospice Foundation of America

Thrive Boston Counseling
875 Massachusetts Ave., Suite 83
Cambridge, MA 02139
**Phone:** 617-395-5806
**Email:** ThriveBoston@gmail.com

Louis D. Brown Peace Institute
1452 Dorchester Ave., 2nd Floor
Dorchester, MA 02122
**Phone:** 617-825-1917
**Website:** [http://www.louisdbrownpeaceinstitute.org/](http://www.louisdbrownpeaceinstitute.org/)

Living After Murder Program
300 Martin Luther King Blvd. Boston, MA 02119.
Phone: 617-541-3790.
**Website:**

**Counseling Resources**

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**Web Sites**

- The Good Grief Program (Groups) [www.goodgriefgroups.com](http://www.goodgriefgroups.com)
- Fike Enterprises, Inc. [info@goodgriefgroups.com](mailto:info@goodgriefgroups.com)
  - General information [faq@goodgriefgroups.com](mailto:faq@goodgriefgroups.com)
  - Grief Questions
Figure 1: Violent crime rates for Massachusetts and the nation, 1960 to 2007.

Figure 2: Homicide rates for Massachusetts and the nation, 1960 to 2007.
Figure 3: Boston homicides per year, 1976 to 2007.

Figure 4: Massachusetts homicide offenders, males ages 14 to 24, 1976 to 2007.
Figure 5: Percentage gun homicides in Massachusetts by age of offender, 1976 to 2007.

Figure 6: Massachusetts arrest rates for violent crime, 1986 to 2007.
Table 1: Massachusetts homicide victimization rates by age, race and sex, 1976 to 2007.

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The bibliography of my project includes texts that are related to various theological approaches and scholarly views on the follow areas:

1. Pastoral Counseling and Caring for Traumatized Teens
2. Trauma and Life Stories
3. Art and Trauma
4. Grief and Coping
5. God and Violence

1. Pastoral Counseling and Caring for Traumatized Teens

This section of the review of the literature identifies pastors, pastoral counselors, chaplains and other professionals who offer care to young people.


Kowalski, Kathiann. *Violence Hits Hard*, *Current Health* 2; Stamford: vol.30, Iss. 7, March 2004


Shelton, Charles M. *Pastoral Counseling with Adolescents and Young Adults*. New York: Crossroad, 1995.

2. Trauma and Life Stories

This section includes a comprehensive review of the literature relating to trauma and life stories.


3. Art and Trauma

Art is a powerful means for connecting to the emotional impact of traumatic events. This section include references which document and expand this notion.


*Broken but I'm Healed*, An Invitation to Worship, Byron Cage, Zomba Gospel CD, 2005.


4. Grief and Coping

This section include references which document and expand the notion how teens cope with losing someone close to them.

Ball, Thomas. God as My Therapist, *Psychology Today*; Boston: July-August 2005 p. 8


Flaherty, Michael and Joel Abrams, “As You were Saying…Violence is Never Healthy,” The Boston Herald; Boston: August 11, 2007.


Jerome, Richard. Trauma DOC Stops the Bleeding, People Weekly; March 26, 2007.

Knight, Heather and Cecilia Vega, San Francisco: Big Problems for Survivors of Shootings; Doctor Tells Board of Epidemic Affecting Young Black Males, San Francisco Chronicle; San Francisco: April 24, 2007.


The Dougy Center, Helping Teens Cope with Death (Portland: The Dougy Center or Grieving Children, 1999).


5. God and Violence

This section include references which document and expand on the subject matter of God involvement in a violence world.


Gilkes, Cheryl Townsend “The Black Church as a Therapeutic Community: Suggested Areas for Research into the Black Religious Experience,” *Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* 8 (Fall 1980).


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http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/publications/infores/faith_based_vict_asst/insufficient_training.html


Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

Isaiah 40:30-31 (NRSV)