



**New York City Alliance  
Against Sexual Assault**

## **PROJECT ENVISION**

### **Community Needs Assessment**

In 2008-2009, the Alliance provided training to six community researchers representing each of the demonstration sites: the South Bronx, the Lower East Side and Williamsburg, Brooklyn. The researchers learned how to conduct a community needs assessment using a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach to data collection. PAR emphasizes the importance of balancing the knowledge that experts bring to the field with the wisdom and personal experiences of the community being researched. Reflecting one of the stated goals of Project Envision, PAR promotes meaningful engagement of the community at each step of the research.

Through focus groups, street surveys, and interviews, the community researchers engaged over 500 New Yorkers in discussions about the conditions, which promote and permit sexual violence in their communities, as well as opportunities for prevention.

The needs assessment explored five questions:

1. What is the scope of sexual violence in the community?
2. What are the most common forms of sexual violence in the community (the prevention priorities)?
3. What are the root causes of sexual violence?
4. What are the most promising opportunities for prevention in the community?
5. What are the characteristics of the community that can support sexual violence prevention activities (the community assets)?

A PAR approach to the needs assessment not only generated important community-level data about sexual violence, but it also served as a community mobilizing tool: Community residents engaged in dialogue about the causes of sexual violence and opportunities for prevention, contributed to the data collection process, and were given the opportunity to stay involved as coalition members or community partners.

### **Recommendations**

Project ENVISION Research To Action 2009 describes the participatory action research used to conduct needs assessments in the three NYC pilot communities: Manhattan's Lower East Side, the South Bronx and Williamsburg, Brooklyn. The document below contains recommendations for policymakers on how to support communities in addressing sexual violence in a comprehensive way.

# ENVI Project ENVISION

A CITY WITHOUT  
SEXUAL VIOLENCE:  
COMMUNITY RESEARCH  
SUMMARY

Research to Action 2009

## **Research to Action:** Recommendations from the Community Needs Assessment

**In 2008, The New York City Alliance Against Sexual Assault (the Alliance), in conjunction with 11 of the city's rape crisis programs, initiated the second phase of Project ENVISION, a multi-site, multi-year sexual violence primary prevention project. In this phase, the Alliance trained community researchers in participatory action research methods to conduct needs assessments in three New York City communities: Manhattan's Lower East Side, the South Bronx and Williamsburg, Brooklyn.**

Sexual violence is any completed or attempted sexual act against a person's will or against a person unable to give consent. Sexual violence encompasses a continuum of acts, ranging from unwanted sexual comments or advances to completed rape.

**Sexual violence is a public health problem and a human rights issue that can be prevented.**

### **THE RESEARCH EXPLORED:**

- 1 Is sexual violence a problem in the community?**
- 2 What are the most common forms of sexual violence in the community?**
- 3 What are the root causes of sexual violence?**
- 4 How can we prevent sexual violence in the community?**
- 5 What are the characteristics of the community that can support sexual violence prevention?**

Participatory action research was utilized as a community mobilizing strategy: By emphasizing meaningful community involvement at all stages of the research and generating awareness about sexual violence prevention, this approach acts as a component of a primary prevention intervention.

Unlike other sexual violence prevention initiatives which rely solely on curricula or social marketing campaigns designed by practitioners, Project ENVISION demonstrates a unique approach that strives to incorporate the perspectives and experiences of community members into prevention programming.

Throughout this pilot, community researchers documented the perceptions, beliefs and opinions of a sample of 570 New Yorkers, while raising awareness about prevention and encouraging continued participation in the project. Research participants not only contributed to the data, but, in some cases, became coalition members, assisted with data collection, recruited friends and neighbors to participate, and helped disseminate the findings throughout the community.

## ● RECOMMENDATIONS

Members of these three demonstration sites have identified the forms of sexual violence that are particularly prevalent in their communities and the populations that are most affected. They have shared their perceptions about the community conditions that are at the root of sexual violence and brainstormed strategies for prevention. The following recommendations for policymakers would enable and support communities to address sexual violence in a comprehensive fashion.

- Speak out about sexual violence as a public health and human rights issue that can be prevented. Elected and public officials can utilize their influence to include this message in their spoken and written communications with the public.
- Ensure that public agencies prioritize primary prevention of sexual violence within the communities they serve and within their own workplace, taking the opportunity to model primary prevention principles in all of their work.
- Make the connections between sexual violence and other social and health issues. In order for sexual violence prevention to be effective, agencies that address education, youth development, health and mental health, economic development and social justice must audit their policies and practices for inclusion of sexual violence prevention.
- Increase resources for the development and evaluation of community-driven sexual violence prevention initiatives.



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**The Alliance is the only program in New York City to incorporate participatory research into a community mobilizing strategy for primary prevention of sexual assault. In addition to Project ENVISION, the Alliance utilizes participatory action research as a tool for preventing teen sexual and dating violence in the *Through Our Own Eyes Photovoice* project, as well as a method of engaging community stakeholders in dialogue about prevention of sexual violence against immigrant women, as reported in *Bringing the Global to the Local: Using Participatory Action Research to Address Sexual Violence with Immigrant Communities in NYC*.**



New York City Alliance  
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# ENVI Project ENVISION

A CITY WITHOUT  
SEXUAL VIOLENCE:  
COMMUNITY RESEARCH  
SUMMARY

11211 • 11206  
**WILLIAMSBURG**

In 2009, the New York City Alliance Against Sexual Assault, in conjunction with community stakeholders, conducted action-research on sexual violence prevention in three communities. In Williamsburg, Brooklyn, a community coalition comprised of local service providers, rape crisis advocates, parents, educators and activists, is using the data to develop effective solutions for preventing sexual violence in their community.

Sexual violence is any completed or attempted sexual act against a person's will or against a person unable to give consent. Sexual violence encompasses a continuum of acts, ranging from unwanted sexual comments or advances to completed rape.

**Sexual violence is a public health problem and a human rights issue that can be prevented.**

2009

## THE RESEARCH EXPLORED:

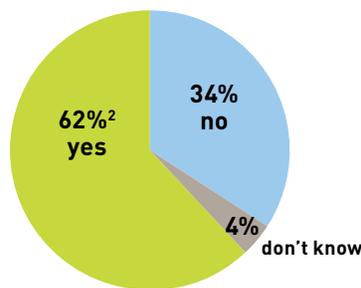
- 1 Is sexual violence a problem in the community?
- 2 What are the most common forms of sexual violence in the community?
- 3 What are the root causes of sexual violence?
- 4 How can we prevent sexual violence in the community?
- 5 What are the characteristics of the community that can support sexual violence prevention?

### 1 Is sexual violence a problem in Williamsburg?

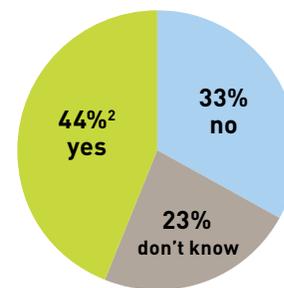
Have you experienced sexual violence...

...before the age of 15?	34% <sup>1</sup>
...after the age of 15?	48%
...perpetrated by a partner or spouse?	21%
...perpetrated in the workplace?	23%

Do you know someone who has experienced sexual violence?



Do you think sexual violence is a problem in Williamsburg?



Data was gathered using participatory action research (PAR) methods, including focus groups and street-intercept surveys. PAR methods emphasize meaningful community engagement in all phases of the research. A total of 191 community members participated in the research: 119 completed street surveys and 72 participated in focus groups. Data does not reflect a representative sample of the community, rather, a combination of both random and participant-driven, snowball sampling methods. For additional information on research questions, sampling methods, demographic data and a complete report coming soon, visit: [www.svfreenyc.org](http://www.svfreenyc.org).

1) Here, % represents the percentage of the 67 focus group participants who completed scope surveys.

2) Here, % represents the percentage of 119 street survey respondents.

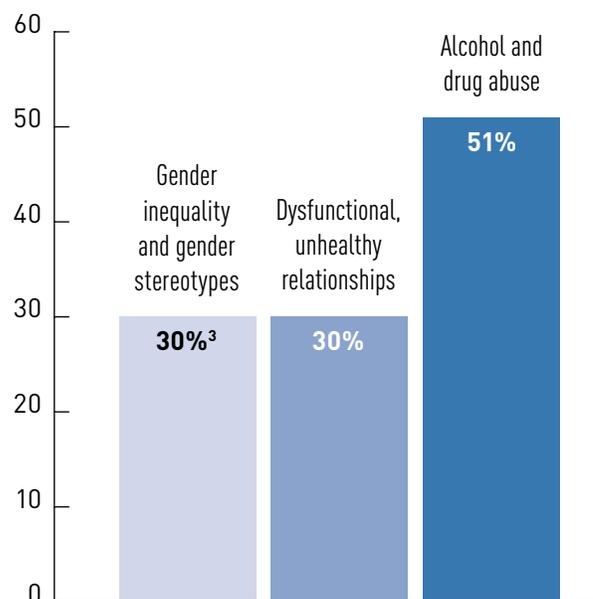
## 2 What are the most common forms of sexual violence in Williamsburg?

Community researchers asked focus group participants to identify the most common forms of sexual violence in Williamsburg. **The forms identified most frequently were:**

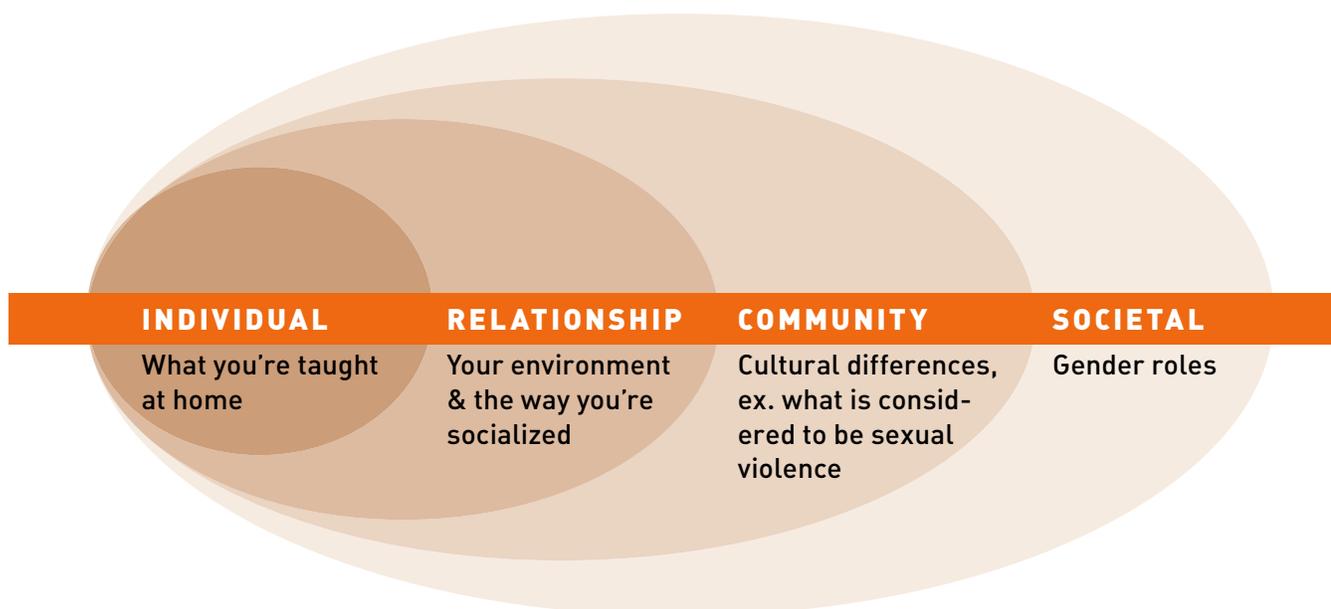
- ▶ Verbal sexual harassment
- ▶ Alcohol-related sexual violence perpetrated by strangers
- ▶ Alcohol-related sexual violence perpetrated by someone known to the victim

## 3 What are the root causes of sexual violence in Williamsburg?

Street survey data revealed community members' perceptions of what causes sexual violence in Williamsburg. Respondents selected from a list of potential causes, identifying those that best represent their perceptions. **The most frequently identified root causes were:** ▶



Focus groups provided more information about the root causes of sexual violence in Williamsburg. The root causes identified most frequently were organized into four levels that emphasize that sexual violence exists not just because of individual behavior, but also because of the social and environmental factors that influence individuals and groups. **The most frequently identified root causes emphasize a lack of knowledge about “what is ok” behavior and what is sexual violence:**

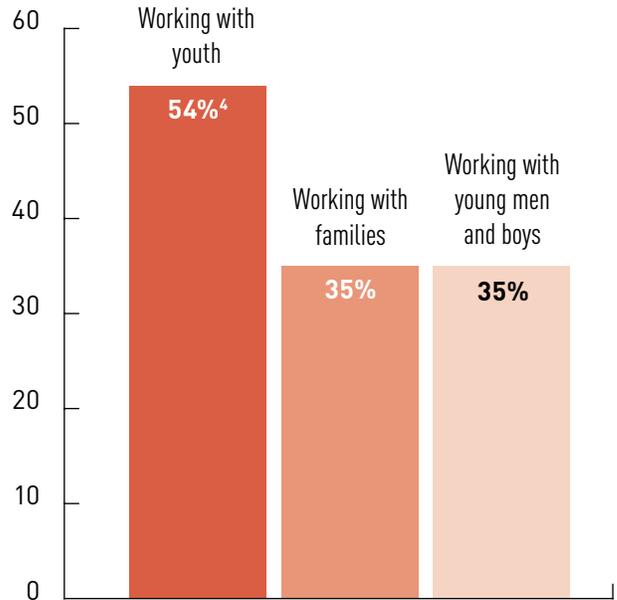


Adapted from: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2004.

3) Here, % represents the percentage of the 119 responses given for the street survey question, “Which are the 3 main causes of sexual violence?”

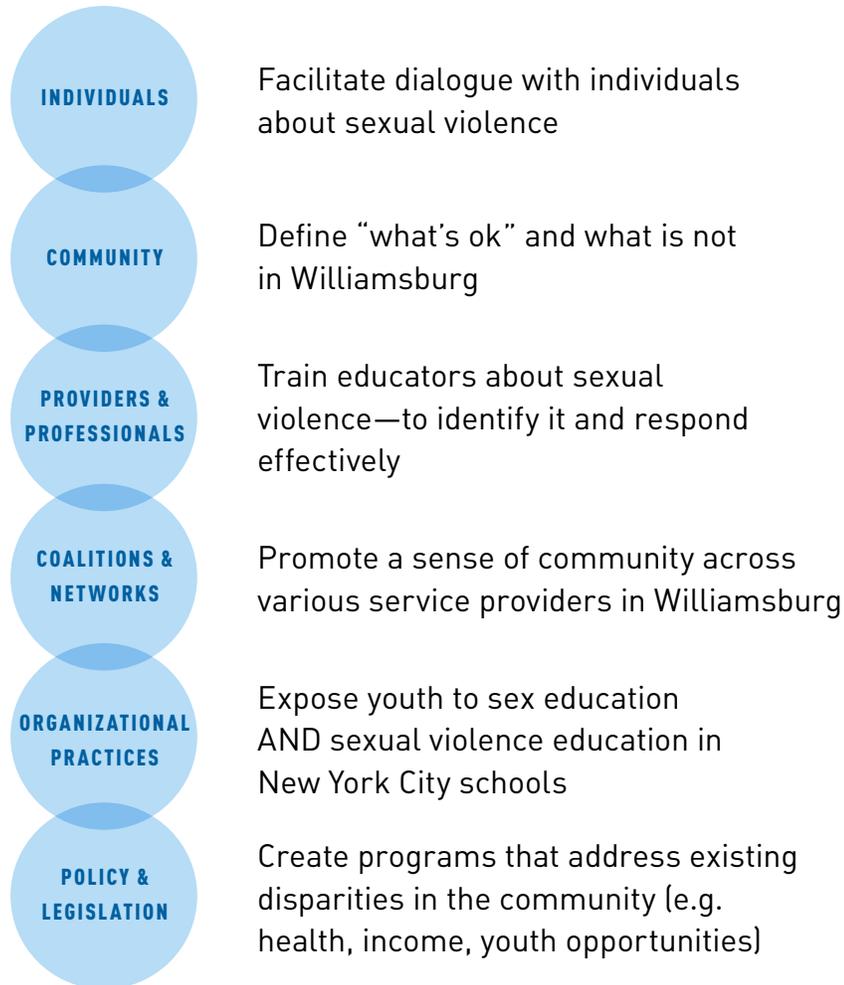
#### 4 How can we prevent sexual violence in Williamsburg?

Street survey data revealed community members' perceptions of the most effective approaches to prevent sexual violence in Williamsburg. Respondents selected from a list of approaches, identifying those that are best suited for their community. **The most frequently selected approaches were:** ▶



In focus groups, participants gave more information about strategies for preventing sexual violence in Williamsburg. Researchers organized the strategies discussed most frequently into six different levels, below. Prevention strategies must operate at multiple levels, as sexual violence cannot be prevented solely through individual behavior change.

**The most frequently identified strategies were:**



Adapted from: Prevention Institute, 1999.

4) Here, % represents the percentage of the 119 responses given for the street survey question, “Which are the top 3 ways to reduce or prevent sexual violence?”

## 5 What are the characteristics of Williamsburg that can support sexual violence prevention?

Street survey data revealed perceptions of various community characteristics that might influence efforts to prevent sexual violence in Williamsburg:



Focus groups discussed the ways in which existing community strengths might be utilized to prevent sexual violence in Williamsburg.

**The most frequently identified community strengths were:**

- ▶ Local faith-based organizations & churches
- ▶ Community meetings and forums (e.g. Northside Town Hall, Community Board 1, Tenants Associations)
- ▶ Local non-profit organizations (e.g. El Puente, Right Rides, Los Sures, Neighbors Allied for Good Growth)
- ▶ Ethnic and cultural diversity in the community



## Help prevent sexual violence in WILLIAMSBURG!

### JOIN THE COALITION

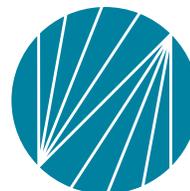
Email: [envision-williamsburg@svfreenyc.org](mailto:envision-williamsburg@svfreenyc.org)

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5) Here, % represents the percentage of the 119 street survey respondents. Data that does not total 100% indicates "No Response."

# ENVI Project ENVISION

A CITY WITHOUT  
SEXUAL VIOLENCE:  
COMMUNITY RESEARCH  
SUMMARY

10451 • 10452 • 10456  
the SOUTH BRONX

In 2009, the New York City Alliance Against Sexual Assault, in conjunction with community stakeholders, conducted action-research on sexual violence prevention in three communities. In the South Bronx, a community coalition comprised of local service providers, rape crisis advocates, community members and activists, is using the data to develop effective solutions for preventing sexual violence in their community.

Sexual violence is any completed or attempted sexual act against a person's will or against a person unable to give consent. Sexual violence encompasses a continuum of acts, ranging from unwanted sexual comments or advances to completed rape.

**Sexual violence is a public health problem and a human rights issue that can be prevented.**

## THE RESEARCH EXPLORED:

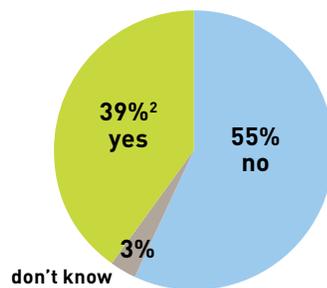
- 1 Is sexual violence a problem in the community?
- 2 What are the most common forms of sexual violence in the community?
- 3 What are the root causes of sexual violence?
- 4 How can we prevent sexual violence in the community?
- 5 What are the characteristics of the community that can support sexual violence prevention?

### 1 Is sexual violence a problem in the South Bronx?

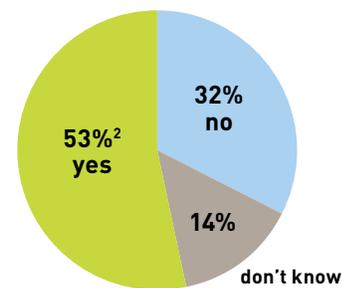
Have you experienced sexual violence...

...before the age of 15?	50% <sup>1</sup>
...after the age of 15?	50%
...perpetrated by a partner or spouse?	28%
...perpetrated in the workplace?	22%

Do you know someone who has experienced sexual violence?



Do you think sexual violence is a problem in the South Bronx?



Data was gathered using participatory action research (PAR) methods, including focus groups and street-intercept surveys. PAR methods emphasize meaningful community engagement in all phases of the research. A total of 169 community members participated in the research: 92 completed street surveys and 77 participated in focus groups. Data does not reflect a representative sample of the community, rather, a combination of both random and participant-driven, snowball sampling methods. For additional information on research questions, sampling methods, demographic data and a complete report coming soon, visit: [www.svfreenyc.org](http://www.svfreenyc.org).

1) Here, % represents the percentage of the 32 focus group participants who completed scope surveys.

2) Here, % represents the percentage of 92 street survey respondents. Data that does not total 100% indicates "No Response."

2009

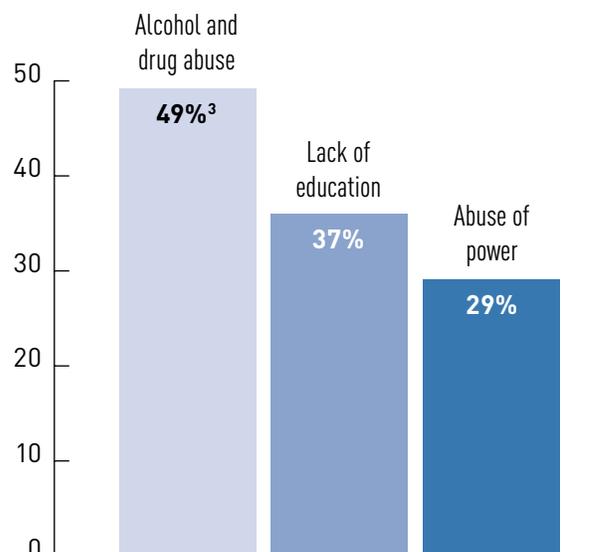
## 2 What are the most common forms of sexual violence in The South Bronx?

Community researchers asked focus group participants to identify the most common forms of sexual violence in the South Bronx. **The forms identified most frequently were:**

- ▶ Sexual violence within intimate relationships (teens are a priority)
- ▶ Sexual harassment (verbal and physical)
- ▶ Childhood sexual abuse/molestation

## 3 What are the root causes of sexual violence in the South Bronx?

Street survey data revealed community members' perceptions of what causes sexual violence in the South Bronx. Respondents selected from a list of potential causes, identifying those that best represent their perceptions. **The most frequently identified root causes were:** ▶



Focus groups provided more information about the root causes of sexual violence in the South Bronx. The root causes identified most frequently were organized into four levels that emphasize that sexual violence exists not just because of individual behavior, but also because of the social and environmental factors that influence individuals and groups. **The most frequently identified root causes were:**

### INDIVIDUAL

Exerting/taking advantage of power, control or authority

### RELATIONSHIP

Cycle of violence/normalization of violence within families

### COMMUNITY

Poverty/low socio-economic status

### SOCIETAL

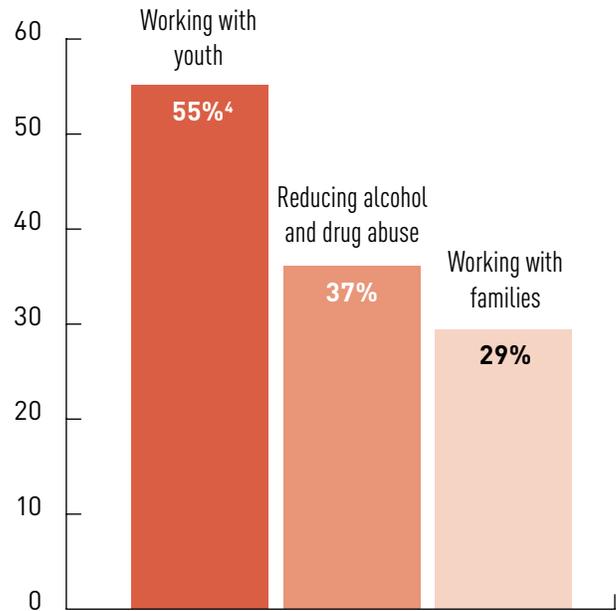
Gender (norms, socialization, inequality)

Adapted from: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2004.

3) Here, % represents the percentage of the 92 responses given for the street survey question, "Which are the 3 main causes of sexual violence?"

#### 4 How can we prevent sexual violence in the South Bronx?

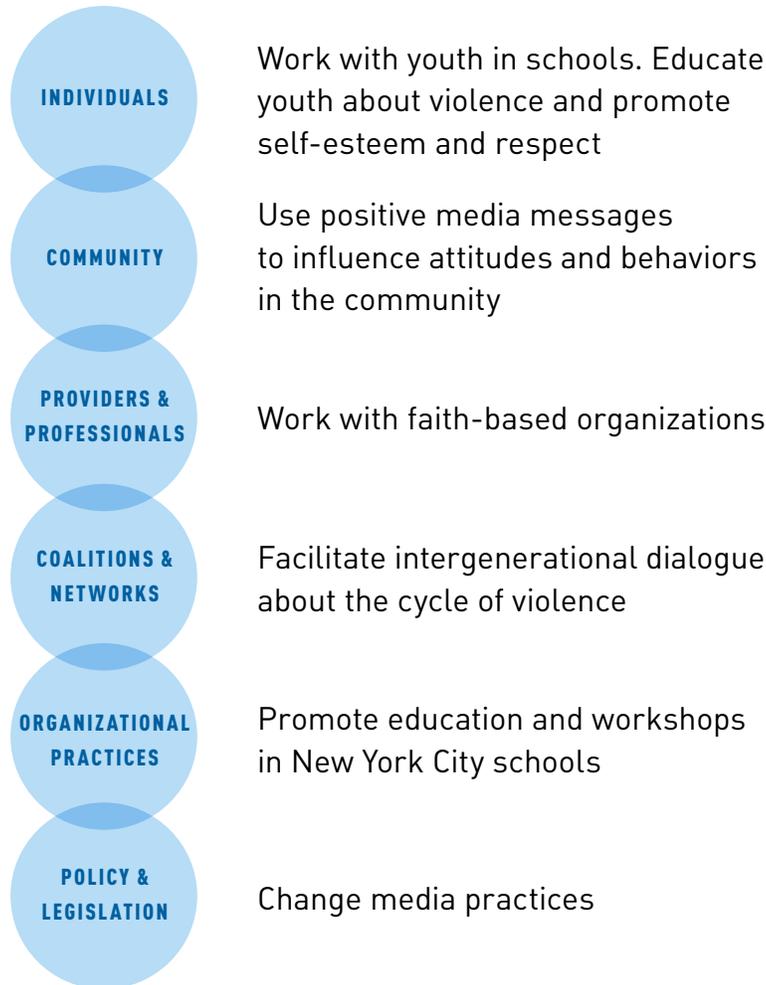
Street survey data revealed community members' perceptions of the most effective approaches to prevent sexual violence in the South Bronx. Respondents selected from a list of approaches, identifying those that are best suited for their community. **The most frequently selected approaches were:** ▶



In focus groups, participants gave more information about strategies for preventing sexual violence in the South Bronx. Researchers organized the strategies discussed most frequently into six different levels, below.

Prevention strategies must operate at multiple levels, as sexual violence cannot be prevented solely through individual behavior change.

**The most frequently identified strategies were:**



Adapted from: Prevention Institute, 1999.

4) Here, % represents the percentage of the 92 responses given for the street survey question, "Which are the top 3 ways to reduce or prevent sexual violence?"

## 5 What are the characteristics of the South Bronx that can support sexual violence prevention?

Street survey data revealed perceptions of various community characteristics that might influence efforts to prevent sexual violence in the South Bronx:

	YES	NO
Do you have family in the community?	73% <sup>5</sup>	27%
Do you have friends in the community?	83%	17%
Do you attend any groups or organizations in the South Bronx?	35%	62%
Would community members be willing to contribute to a community project?	67%	11% 19% don't know

Focus groups discussed the ways in which existing community strengths might be utilized to prevent sexual violence in the South Bronx. **The most frequently identified community strengths were:**

- ▶ Churches
- ▶ Shop owners
- ▶ Parks
- ▶ People look out for children
- ▶ People work hard to survive
- ▶ Immigrant population
- ▶ Highbridge Life Center
- ▶ Channel 67 Bronx
- ▶ Community Boards
- ▶ Hair salons
- ▶ Pregones Theater



## Help prevent sexual violence in the SOUTH BRONX!

### JOIN THE COALITION

Email: [envision-southbronx@svfreenyc.org](mailto:envision-southbronx@svfreenyc.org)

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5) Here, % represents the percentage of the 92 street survey respondents. Data that does not total 100% indicates "No Response."

# ENVISS

## Project ENVISION

A CITY WITHOUT  
SEXUAL VIOLENCE:  
COMMUNITY RESEARCH  
SUMMARY

10002 • 10003 • 10009

the LOWER EAST SIDE

2009

In 2009, the New York City Alliance Against Sexual Assault, in conjunction with community stakeholders, conducted action-research on sexual violence prevention in three communities. In the Lower East Side, a community coalition comprised of local service providers, rape crisis advocates, community members and activists, is using the data to develop effective solutions for preventing sexual violence in their community.

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**Sexual violence is a public health problem and a human rights issue that can be prevented.**

### THE RESEARCH EXPLORED:

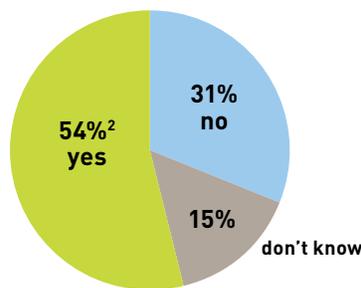
- 1 Is sexual violence a problem in the community?
- 2 What are the most common forms of sexual violence in the community?
- 3 What are the root causes of sexual violence?
- 4 How can we prevent sexual violence in the community?
- 5 What are the characteristics of the community that can support sexual violence prevention?

### 1 Is sexual violence a problem in the Lower East Side?

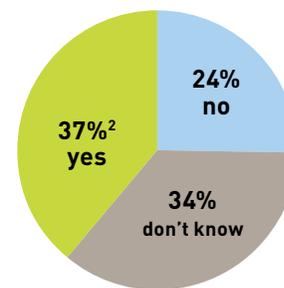
Have you experienced sexual violence...

...before the age of 15?	31% <sup>1</sup>
...after the age of 15?	46%
...perpetrated by a partner or spouse?	40%
...perpetrated in the workplace?	14%

Do you know someone who has experienced sexual violence?



Do you think sexual violence is a problem in the Lower East Side?



Data was gathered using participatory action research (PAR) methods, including focus groups and street-intercept surveys. PAR methods emphasize meaningful community engagement in all phases of the research. A total of 210 community members participated in the research: 144 completed street surveys and 66 participated in focus groups. Data does not reflect a representative sample of the community, rather, a combination of both random and participant-driven, snowball sampling methods. For additional information on research questions, sampling methods, demographic data and a complete report coming soon, visit: [www.svfreenyc.org](http://www.svfreenyc.org).

1) Here, % represents the percentage of the 35 focus group participants who completed scope surveys.

2) Here, % represents the percentage of 144 street survey respondents. Data that does not total 100% indicates "No Response."

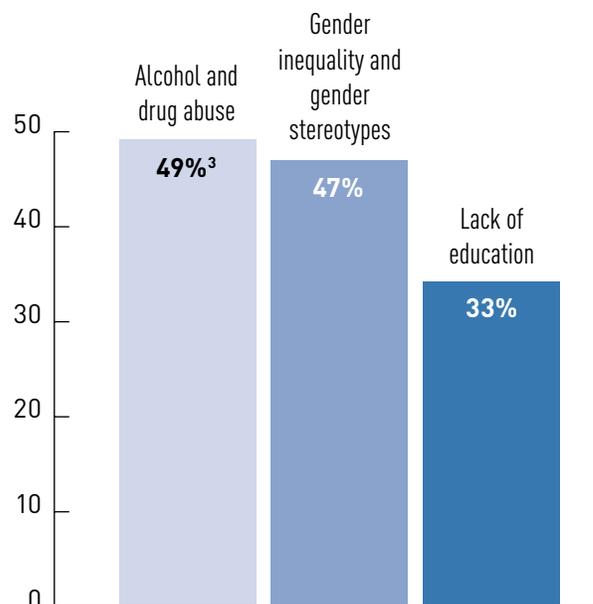
## 2 What are the most common forms of sexual violence in the Lower East Side?

Community researchers asked focus group participants to identify the most common forms of sexual violence in the Lower East Side. **The forms identified most frequently were:**

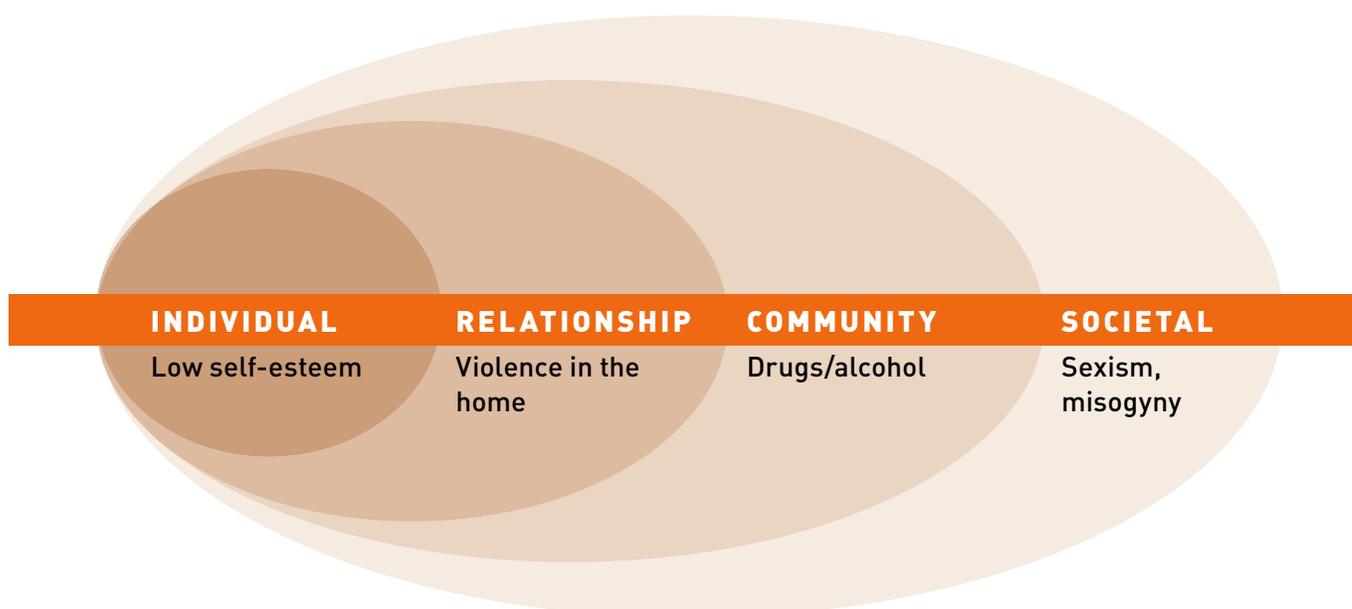
- ▶ Intimate partner violence
- ▶ Sexual violence related to gender inequality
- ▶ Alcohol-facilitated sexual assault related to the “bar scene”

## 3 What are the root causes of sexual violence in the Lower East Side?

Street survey data revealed community members’ perceptions of what causes sexual violence in the Lower East Side. Respondents selected from a list of potential causes, identifying those that best represent their perceptions. **The most frequently identified root causes were:** ▶



Focus groups provided more information about the root causes of sexual violence in the Lower East Side. The root causes identified most frequently were organized into four levels that emphasize that sexual violence exists not just because of individual behavior, but also because of the social and environmental factors that influence individuals and groups. **The most frequently identified root causes were:**

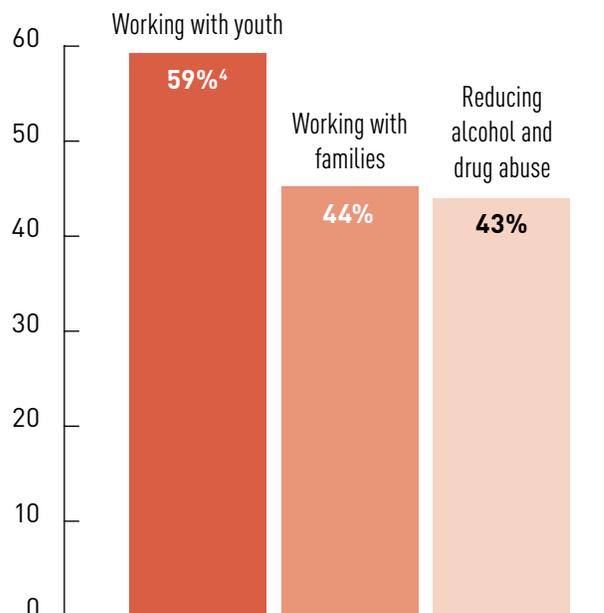


Adapted from: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2004.

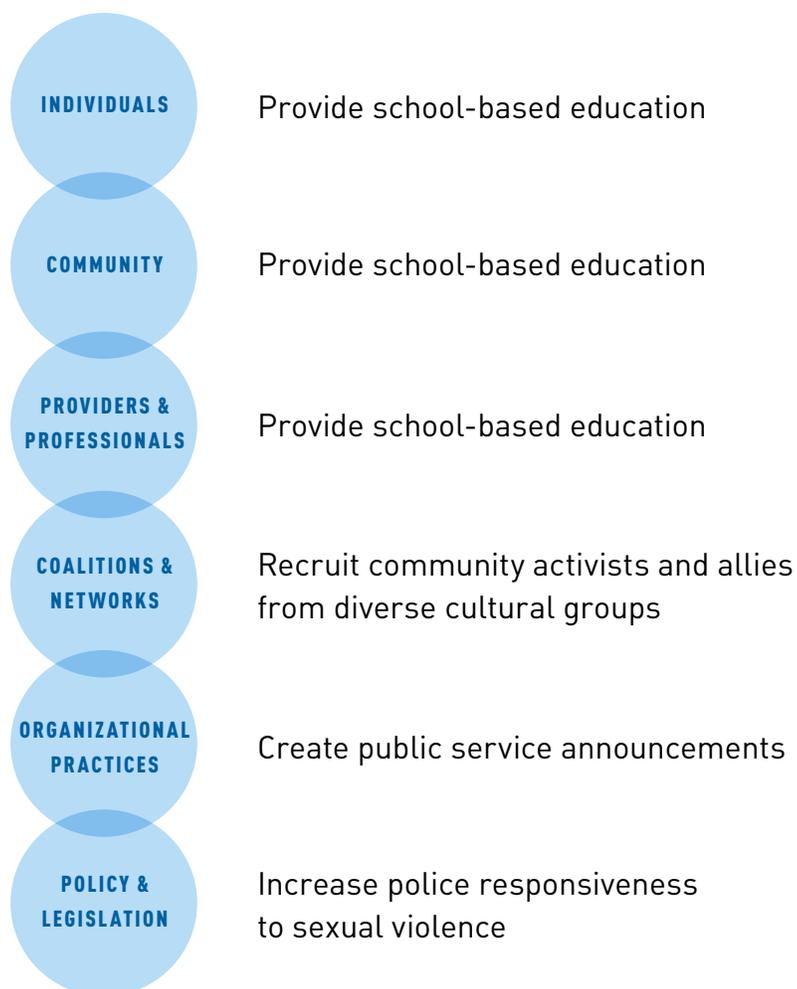
3) Here, % represents the percentage of the 144 responses given for the street survey question, “Which are the 3 main causes of sexual violence?”

## 4 How can we prevent sexual violence in the Lower East Side?

Street survey data revealed community members' perceptions of the most effective approaches to prevent sexual violence in the Lower East Side. Respondents selected from a list of approaches, identifying those that are best suited for their community. **The most frequently selected approaches were:** ▶



In focus groups, participants gave more information about strategies for preventing sexual violence in the Lower East Side. Researchers organized the strategies discussed most frequently into six different levels, below. Prevention strategies must operate at multiple levels, as sexual violence cannot be prevented solely through individual behavior change. **The most frequently identified strategies emphasized the need for education on sexual violence:**



Adapted from: Prevention Institute, 1999.

4) Here, % represents the percentage of the 144 responses given for the street survey question, "Which are the top 3 ways to reduce or prevent sexual violence?"

**5 What are the characteristics of the Lower East Side that can support sexual violence prevention?**

Street survey data revealed perceptions of various community characteristics that might influence efforts to prevent sexual violence in the Lower East Side:



Focus groups discussed the ways in which existing community strengths might be utilized to prevent sexual violence in the Lower East Side. **The most frequently identified community strengths were:**

- ▶ **Community arts centers (e.g. The 6th St. Community Center, ABC No Rio)**
- ▶ **Lower East Side Girls Club**
- ▶ **Community theaters (e.g. Theater for the New City)**



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5) Here, % represents the percentage of the 144 street survey respondents. Data that does not total 100% indicates "No Response."