

Teen Dating Violence Is the Topic of Dramatic Performance at 78th Precinct

'More Domestic Violence Calls' Come from 718 Than Almost Any Other Area Code in the Country'

By Eric Adelson
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LISA: Hey, Monique, talk to us for a little while.

LILLIA: Yeah, what's up with Michael? You never talk to us anymore.

MONIQUE: I can't. I got to go. Michael's waiting.

LILLIA: Chill. He can wait, we're your friends. Come on, what's up?

MONIQUE: Nothing.

LILLIA: What's that mark on your forehead?

MONIQUE: Nothing. I just fell.

SHAMEEKA: You fell? He hit you, didn't he?

MONIQUE: Look, I got to go.

This conversation came from a performance by a group of Westinghouse High School students, but it speaks to a problem which children often face before they reach driving age: teen dating violence.

Yesterday at the 78th Precinct in Park Slope, the student performance kicked off a meeting in which law enforcement officials and civic leaders

addressed the issue of community violence prevention, with Brooklyn's teenagers serving as the primary focus.

The program was the idea of the North Flatbush Avenue Business Improvement District (B.I.D.) and implemented by B.I.D. director Rick Russo.

The students stole the show, and for good reason. The majority of acquaintance rape victims are between the ages of 16 and 24, according to *Preventing Teen Dating Violence*, a book published by Transition House in Massachusetts.

"Violence may be going down in the streets, but more domestic violence calls come from area code 718 than from almost any other area code in the country," said Brownwyn Rucker, artistic director of Meltdown Inc., a social service arts company which put the performance together.

Some criminal justice experts predict that the coming decade will bring unprecedented amounts of juvenile

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violence. During the 1960s and 70s, a large jump in crime accompanied a swell in the teenage population. By the year 2005, the nation will have more teenagers than ever.

"Half the things [teenagers] talk about today, I never thought about at their age," said 26 year-old Paulette Easterlin, a Fort Greene resident who works at the Mental Health Juvenile Justice Division Project.

Specifically, adolescents must deal with the threats of drugs, AIDS, and date rape—problems which did not plague previous generations of children nearly as much.

"The violence is not just domestic," said Lisa Roxanne Walters, a CUNY student and contributor to Meltdown. "There's violence between students."

Walters has been involved in an abusive relationship, and takes part in Meltdown in part to educate youths who might not understand when they have been victimized.

"If you really push to get out there, it's education that people don't normally get, and things they don't even know," said Walters, wearing a leopard-patterned hat and a green shawl.

Among the newly educated are Park Slope's police officers, according to Capt. James Luongo of the 78th Precinct.

"The officers are sensitized to the fact that years ago [teen-dating violence] wasn't treated as much of a problem," said Luongo, a burly man with silver hair and a salt and pepper mustache.

The Brooklyn district attorney's office under Charles Hynes—whose mother endured abuse from her alcoholic husband—has also contributed to the effort to educate, becoming the first prosecutor's office in the city to establish a domestic violence bureau.

The office has also collaborated with local businesses on a project called "Safe Haven," which allows pedestrians suddenly threatened by violence to seek temporary refuge in participating stores.

"One of the reasons [violence] is going down is the community is getting involved," said Assistant District

Attorney Gordon Shaw.

But when it comes to violence among acquaintances, civic leaders can only do so much.

"The police can help, but people in the community must live with each other and deal with each other," said 19 year-old Jamal Phipps, another Westinghouse student.

The most important responsibility thus falls on victims, said Officer Diane Stubbs of the 78th Precinct.

"I've filed orders of protection for people, helped them move out, and then I get a report two weeks later that they're back at home," Stubbs said.

Zelise Mazyck, 17, said her role in the performance as the abused Monique reminded her of the film *Don't Tell Nobody*, about a teenaged girl battered by her next-door neighbor.

A well-dressed student with a soft voice and a bright smile, she said she will be ready if her next relationship takes a turn for the worse.

"The first thing that happens," Mazyck said, "I'm out the door."

If you have been abused by someone you know, call the New York City Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-621-HOPE.