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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Academia Meets Community Agency: How to Foster Positive Collaboration in Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Work

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Abstract Collaborative and supportive partnerships among academicians and community agency members represent one method of working successfully toward ending violence against women. Members of academia and service agencies are uniquely poised to collaborate with one another to foster both domestic violence and sexual assault research agendas as well as direct service to survivors. This paper provides suggestions and methods of how to create positive, collaborative relationships between academicians and service providers in the field of domestic violence (DV) and sexual assault (SA). Specifically, we will discuss the reasons for collaboration, useful steps in developing a partnership, issues of trust and time investment, research methods, and giving back.

Keywords Collaboration · Community agency · Academia · Domestic violence · Sexual assault

Domestic violence and sexual assault pose a myriad of devastating consequences to women. Collaborative and supportive partnerships among many members of community are necessary to work successfully toward ending violence against women. Members of academia and service agencies are uniquely poised to collaborate with one another to create meaningful partnerships that foster both domestic violence and sexual assault research agendas as well as direct service to survivors. Although these types of community-academic collaborations are somewhat new for some fields of research (Fielden et al. 2007), these two endeavors need not be mutually exclusive: research can assist the daily services that agencies provide to women survivors, and information and feedback regarding such services in turn enhances subsequent research.

In fact, there is a history of previous papers focused on such collaborative efforts (Edleson and Bible 2001) and the variety of challenges and systemic issues frequently encountered. These papers have been written from a variety of vantage points, including the perspectives of advocates (Gondolf et al. 1997; Williams 2004), domestic violence and/or sexual assault survivors, batterers (Edleson and Bible 2001; Gondolf 2000; 2009), researchers (Campbell 2009; Edleson and Bible 2001; Gondolf et al. 1997), and criminal justice systems (Feder et al. 2000). Challenges often cited regarding collaborative efforts between researchers and practitioners in the domestic violence and/or sexual assault field include the following: control of the research process (Edleson and Bible 2001; Riger et al. 2002); power differentials (Edleson and Bible 2001; Gondolf et al. 1997; Riger et al. 2002; Williams 2004), time commitment (Edleson and Bible 2001; Riger et al. 2002); trust (Edleson and Bible 2001; Riger et al. 2002); differences between disciplines, training, skills, and terminology (Edleson and Bible 2001; Gondolf et al. 1997; Riger et al. 2002), and human subjects issues (Gondolf 2000).

Concerns as to control of the research process involve apprehension from researchers that collaboration will limit the study's integrity and scientific rigor as well as the researchers' objectivity, whereas practitioners are trepidatious about potential negative findings that could reflect poorly on their services (Edleson and Bible 2001; Riger et al. 2002). Relatedly, the overt and covert power differentials inherent to collaboration efforts have been duly noted (Edleson and

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Bible 2001; Gondolf et al. 1997; Riger et al. 2002; Williams 2004); these power issues stem from differences in training (e.g., doctorate vs. high school diploma), status (e.g., academic researcher vs. community agency staff), and funding (e.g., grant funding more often awarded to academic researchers), and may be perceived by agency staff as recapitulating abuses of power seen in domestic violence (Williams 2004). Concerns relating to the time investment required for collaboration include delays in a researcher's tenure and career trajectory as well as added work on the part of practitioners given that research collaboration efforts are not an essential aspect of their typical work requirements (Edleson and Bible 2001; Riger et al. 2002).

Trust is a likely concern for researchers, practitioners, advocates, survivors, and batterers alike, given the high possibility of one group questioning others' motives, as well as questions of exploitation (Edleson and Bible 2001; Riger et al. 2002). Many authors have noted agency staff feeling used by researchers' "drive-by data collection" (Edleson and Bible 2001; Williams 2004). Differences between disciplines, training, and values of researchers and practitioners/advocates include conflicts such as esoteric research questions versus life-and-death crises faced by victims, and participant recruitment and data collection needs versus high-risk, vulnerable situations, and safety concerns (Edleson and Bible 2001; Gondolf et al. 1997). Finally, concerns related to human subjects stem from the lack of institutional review board (IRB) guidelines or protocols specific to domestic violence, thus, many IRBs have limited experience in this field to appropriately evaluate the unique human subject issues involved with domestic violence, and are in turn either overly cautious or too lenient (Gondolf 2000).

With such history, collaboration among advocates, practitioners, researchers, survivors, batterers, and criminal justice systems within the field of violence against women is a critical current funding issue and "hot topic." For example, Bonnie Fisher of the University of Cincinnati and Tami Sullivan of Yale University are currently funded by the National Institutes of Justice to document lessons learned about researcher-practitioner collaboration in the criminal justice system regarding violence against women. As well, Cris Sullivan and Rebecca Campbell, both professors of ecological and community psychology at Michigan State University, are currently funded by the National Institute of Mental Health to develop a violence against women research infrastructure in a field setting. These projects are currently in process, and as such, no published information is yet available. However, it is significant that during this time of economic hardship and recession, research dollars are being allocated to collaborative efforts in the field of domestic violence and sexual assault, and many funders require such collaboration.

Sieber (2008) noted that real world problems are "messy" and necessitate adapted research methods and creative thinking on the part of researchers in "full collaboration with the host agency" (p. 140). To that end, this paper offers readers tangible suggestions and methods of how to create positive, collaborative relationships between academicians and service providers in the field of domestic violence (DV) and sexual assault (SA). Specifically, we will discuss the reasons for collaboration, useful steps in developing a partnership, issues of trust and time investment, research methods, and giving back.

Why and How to Collaborate

Anecdotally speaking, many researchers and academicians (including the first author) receive no training in *why* or *how* to collaborate with a community agency. With the possible exception of the few individuals trained in programs like Community Psychology (there are 17 stand-alone community psychology doctoral programs; Society for Community Research and Action 2010), little to no information has been shared in respective graduate programs regarding why one would partner with a community agency, let alone how to (a) find an agency with which to work, (b) first approach said agency, (c) communicate ideas, (d) learn *from* the agency, and many other aspects. Relatedly, Edleson and Bible (2001) note that the interpersonal skills needed to develop and maintain collaborative partnerships are not typically a part of graduate training.

Why Collaborate with a Community Agency From a research perspective, those with interests in the field of DV/SA often have an inherent difficulty in conducting their work because access to survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault is a common obstacle. Given that many women who have survived such violence in their lives are reluctant to disclose this information to family, friends, police, and/or health care workers, they are likely to be even more reticent to participate in research with an unknown and untrusted individual (or team of individuals!). Thus, partnering with a DV/SA agency is a way to assist the researcher in having access to survivors and potential participants, and enable her to conduct her work. As well, current published research is more often stemming from "real world" contexts in an attempt to broaden implications (Garland et al. 2008; Sieber 2008). Partnering with an agency may provide the researcher with much richer sources of data compared to the often studied undergraduate population. However, many agencies have been reluctant to collaborate with researchers for a variety of reasons including discomfort with potential threats to client anonymity and confidentiality, lack of experience with research designs and implementation, unwillingness to use staff time for data collection, and potential harm to the agency from distribution of unflattering results. Therefore, it is critical to consider the appropriate steps to take when identifying, approaching, and communicating with an agency to seek a possible collaborative relationship.

Identifying a Community Agency Many steps and a great deal of time are required initially to establish a collaborative partnership with a community agency. Perhaps the first step is to identify an agency with which to work. Depending on the size of the community, this step may be a reasonably small one or a large undertaking as some communities will have only one agency devoted to DV/SA whereas others will have multiple agencies serving the area. Learning about each of the agencies in your community is essential to determine which would most fit with your interests. For example, some agencies provide counseling and advocacy for sexual assault survivors only whereas some provide direct services for domestic violence survivors only, and some agencies solely focus on providing shelter while others only provide a crisis-line. Therefore, it is important to gain knowledge about the specific population and services each of the agencies in the community serves. Additionally, speaking with other community members about the agency/ies is helpful in this process as the researcher can gain information as to how the agency is perceived in the wider community. Similarly, learning about the agency's philosophy is essential in understanding the agency as a whole and the staff who work there. These elements will assist in determining which agency is the best fit to the researcher's interests and view of DV/SA work.

Approaching the Community Agency Once the agency is identified, the researcher needs to strategize how she will approach the agency and meet with a staff member or two. It is often difficult to ascertain staff members' names and positions within an agency, particularly if the agency is one that serves survivors of DV/SA; for example, in an effort to protect staff and their identities, many DV/SA agency websites do not list staff members by name nor provide specific contact information for staff. Given this, one method of determining an appropriate staff member to contact is through word of mouth, again utilizing the community at large to learn about the staff at the agency. Another method is to call the agency directly and ask for the staff member who is in a specific position, such as Clinical Director/Coordinator, Volunteer Coordinator, etc. After establishing the point of contact in the agency, get in touch with that person to share some preliminary information about yourself and interests, and request a time to meet with her/him. At this point, it is recommended to be accommodating to the agency member's calendar and offer to meet at the agency to make it most convenient for the staff member. This is a critical period of "first impressions" and you want to demonstrate respect for the person's time and work, as well as communicate gratitude toward her/him making time to meet with you.

Communicating Who You Are and Your Ideas with the Agency At this point you have successfully earned an appointment with at least one staff member of the community agency you have identified as a potential collaborating partner. This initial meeting is invaluable regarding how and what you communicate with the staff member(s). You will want to introduce yourself in the broadest sense, conveying how you became interested in the area of DV/SA (e.g., volunteering on a hotline, a friend or family member) and what your current interests are. It is imperative to share with the staff member your passion and commitment to working in the field of DV/SA. Discussing how you became interested in this area is one way of demonstrating this. Additionally, it is helpful to share with staff what you have done previously in the field of DV/SA—perhaps you have provided direct services to survivors via crisis hotline work, advocacy and hospital accompaniment, and/or individual counseling/psychological services, in addition to conducting previous research. If you have written articles regarding DV/SA or advocacy, share copies of those with the agency staff; this will assist them in knowing more about you and your previous work in the area. Conversely, if you lack prior work experience in the DV/SA field, then it would be helpful for you to discuss *any* advocacy (e.g., advocacy regarding HIV/AIDS, disability) or crisis intervention (e.g., respite work with adolescents in crisis) work in which you may have engaged.

Other information you want to share are your credentials and previous training, being mindful however, to not convey yourself as hierarchical or elitist. This is a common pitfall for academicians who approach a service agency—there is a sense of entitlement on the part of the researcher that communicates a pejorative view of agency staff members, implying that the researcher thinks "less of them" in terms of research skill and knowledge as well as importance of work (Reback et al. 2002). For example, Hamberger and Ambuel (2000) discussed researchers being perceived by community agencies as outsiders who were only interested in getting the data they needed, while offering nothing in return to the agency or participants. Indeed, there is likely an unfortunate history of previous researchers who have approached this same agency with high expectations, a hierarchical attitude, and a manner in which they did not treat staff kindly and with respect. Sieber (2008) highlighted this by noting how agencies working with the disenfranchised have developed oral histories that include specific instances of disrespectful treatment by researchers. For example, researchers may expect the agency to "bend" their policies and/or practices to fit the research design and the academician's needs for the study (Giese-Davis 2008). Thus, most agency staff will approach this first meeting with the researcher with a great deal of caution, evaluating you based on their previous experiences with researchers (Hamberger and Ambuel 2000) and reluctance to make a commitment (Thomas 2002). However, do not assume this means the final answer regarding collaborating is a "no," and do not be deterred. The agency staff likely needs time to conduct their internal process of discussing this possible research collaboration, as well as ascertaining information about you through their networks.

In line with this, express interest in learning more about the staff member with whom you are meeting—what is her role in the agency, what does she do day-to-day, how did she come to work at the agency, what is her background. This type of inquiry is essential in laying the foundation for a *collaboration*, where information is shared in both directions, from/to agency staff to/from researcher.

Once such groundwork has been established, the researcher will want to discuss her explicit interests and ideas for collaborating with the agency. If you have a specific research project that you want to conduct with the agency and their clientele, then prepare a summary of the research questions and overview of the study for the staff member. A handout of this information in jargon-free language is advised; it is encouraged to not expect agency staff (or clients) to be familiar with research methodology and/or terminology (Sieber 2008). This will allow the agency member to see your preparedness in the meeting and to follow along with your discussion of the research project. It is highly recommended to explicitly discuss the ways in which you believe this research would be beneficial *to the agency and their clients.* Simply focusing on how your study will advance the research/scientific literature is insufficient to garner access and collaboration with a community agency—advancing research is most likely *not* the mission, need, or the desire of community agencies and their staff. Thus, the interest of an agency in working with a researcher is greatly diminished if there is not a clear sense of how this research will directly enhance the services they provide and the work they do with clients. From an agency standpoint, the most successful research projects are those that collect information while offering a direct and immediate benefit to participants. This conversation should also include your inquiry into the needs and/or research questions the agency may have. It is our experience that agency staff *do*, in fact, have areas about which they have questions and would like research conducted on, but due to the time demands and daily needs of the agency, exploring these questions simply cannot be prioritized. As well, many agencies do have a history of welcoming the participation of those who have skills in program evaluation and needs assessment, as these activities are useful to agency positioning for funding, program development, and evaluation of existing services. Thus, you can benefit the agency by being an outside resource with whom to partner in an effort to address the research questions that the staff have generated and want/need.

Conversely, you may not have a specific research question or project in mind, but would like to begin establishing a connection with the agency. This is a good strategy to lay a foundation for future work, and to begin the important process of gaining the agency staff's trust (more on this below). It may be a bit harder to get a conversation going since you are simply seeking to build a collaborative relationship and do not have a specific focus (yet). However, it may be an easier beginning as you are coming to the agency with an open-mind, seeking to learn the needs and questions of the agency rather than approaching the agency with something *you* need and want.

Learn from the Agency Once you have shared who you are, your experience/training, background, and interest in forming a collaborative partnership with the agency, it is critical that you learn from the agency (Edleson and Bible 2001; Giese-Davis 2008). Although you may have specific ideas and various topical areas of interest within the field of DV/SA that you would like to investigate, it is imperative to hear from the staff about *their* specific needs and questions that could benefit from research endeavors. For example, a researcher may be interested in examining the role of attachment in terms of partner violence and sexual assault. However, attachment issues may not be a current priority or interest of the agency staff, and what would be more pertinent and timely (e.g., due to current grant funding parameters) would be exploring the co-incidence of substance abuse problems and intimate partner violence. Thus, to foster a true *collaboration*, it is highly recommended to sincerely hear the current needs of the staff and agency, and then develop research pursuits that can be mutually beneficial to the agency and you as the researcher (Chorpita and Mueller 2008; Dutton 1988; Edleson and Bible 2001; Gondolf et al. 1997; Thomas 2002).

Ultimately, working in this manner may result in more meaningful and useful research questions and outcomes (Edleson and Bible 2001; Williams 2004) that contribute to the literature, but more importantly, benefit clients. This is likely an atypical way for academicians to develop a research agenda, however, in developing partnerships with community agencies, this approach may generate a plethora of research questions and projects for years to come as an agency's needs and priorities change over time due to factors in the local community, grant and funding sources, media coverage of high profile DV/SA incidents, and legal cases. Sieber (2008) noted that such collaboration translates to the agency and the academician learning from each other as they work in partnership over time to evaluate issues and solutions.

In addition to learning about the potential research interests/needs of the agency, there are a number of other areas in which garnering information from and about the agency would be helpful. For example, some agencies have a formal review process for research requests similar to institutional review boards at universities. Indeed, non-profit agencies can benefit greatly by establishing their own "in-house" committee to review and respond to inquiries from researchers. It is helpful to have specific research policies, application procedures, and a standing research review committee established prior to becoming active as a research site. To illustrate, the agency where the second author works has an established research review committee that is chaired by the Clinical Director of the agency and includes the Executive Director, a Client Advocate, and a university professor who volunteers her time for this role; this committee could even be improved with the addition of a client representative. Thus, ascertaining if the agency with whom you are interested in partnering has such a review protocol and what that protocol entails is essential. This process typically involves the researcher submitting a written research proposal with specific research questions, hypotheses, and aims delineated, as well as a copy of consent forms and questionnaire packets.

As well, learning about the culture of and the staff who comprise the agency is important in developing your collaborative relationship (Thomas 2002). For example, it is helpful to know: about the agency's history; how long staff members have worked there; what type of staff turnover exists; how does the staff interact and make decisions; what types of services the agency provides and if there are any current struggles in providing such services; how is the agency funded and are there current stressors in this regard; and in what ways does the agency interact and/or work with other local agencies. Garland et al. (2008) highlighted this same point of researcher becoming learner as they encouraged academicians to determine the respective organization's goals, services, and clientele, and to understand the staff's roles, conflicts, and perspective differences, as well as clients' perceptions of the agency and services.

On Trust and Time

At this point, you have now formed the basic foundational elements for a collaborative relationship with the community agency—you have realized why collaborating with an agency would be beneficial to your work and contributions, researched the potential agencies with whom to partner and selected the most fitting, approached the agency and met with representative staff, communicated who you are and your interests in working together, and begun to learn more about the agency, staff, and clients. These are critical pieces of creating a collaborative relationship with the staff and agency; however, there are more necessary ingredients to include: trust, commitment, and persistence.

Building a Relationship through Trust The importance of building trust with the agency's staff and clients cannot be emphasized enough (Edleson and Bible 2001; Riger et al. 2002; Thomas 2002). In conceptualizing your ultimate goals of ongoing work and collaboration with the agency, it is helpful to focus on developing a *relationship* (Chorpita and Mueller 2008; Hamberger and Ambuel 2000). Perhaps the most necessary aspect of creating and sustaining any relationship is trust. Your endeavor with the agency should be viewed similarly—you are seeking an ongoing relationship and thus, you need to foster and earn trust. How do you do this?

Some of the steps you have already taken have actually initiated the process of trust building. More specifically, your approach in meeting the staff member at her office at a time convenient to her, and your sincere interest in learning about the needs and interests of the agency and clientele (and not simply focusing on your needs and interests) have planted seeds of trust. Additionally, sharing some of the experiences and previous work you have done in the area of DV/SA has likely garnered you some trust—this is particularly true if you have volunteered or worked at a similar agency in the past as the staff at the current agency will see that you "get it."

Another important aspect of developing trust and building a relationship with the agency is showing a commitment that you are in this for the long haul. Many researchers (particularly those located in a town/city where there is a research intensive university) who approach an agency for research purposes are looking for access to conduct a "one-time" data collection for a specific study in which they need DV/SA participants. This has been referred to by other practitioners and advocates as "drive-by data collection" (Edleson and Bible 2001; Riger et al. 2002; Williams 2004). Thus, most researchers simply want to get into the agency, collect their data, and move on, and some researchers never even offer to return to the agency to present the findings of the investigation that they conducted with the agency's clients (Hamberger and Ambuel 2000). This method is clearly one that only serves the researcher and does not foster trust, collaboration, mutual benefit, or any aspect of a relationship. We highly encourage you to avoid a "drive-by data collection" strategy in working with an agency, particularly a DV/SA agency with a vulnerable population who has been used for others' gain in previous life experiences (after all, that is why they are seeking services from a DV/SA agency!). This approach is antithetical to building trust and developing a collaborative relationship; moreover, you will most likely not meet with success regarding the agency allowing you access to their clients. However, even if you have a study that does involve a one-time data collection methodology, then at a minimum, you are strongly recommended to (a) share the results of the study with the agency, (b) be intentional in finding ways that the information is helpful to staff and their clients, and above all, (c) continue working with the agency on future projects and volunteering your time.

In line with demonstrating your commitment to the agency, you and your research team (if you have graduate or undergraduate students working with you) should attend volunteer and/or staff training, as well as consider making a commitment to volunteer some time with clients. This is one powerful way to signify your investment in the collaborative relationship, and the experience will improve the quality of the research project(s), enhance respect for the clientele, and improve the staff's willingness to trust you and help facilitate your project. Most agencies rely on numerous volunteers in order to provide a plethora of services to clients, thus, volunteer trainings are typically offered a few times a year. These trainings are often 30 to 40 hours in duration and are scheduled over a few evenings or weeks. By participating in volunteer training and investing your time in learning from the agency, you express a sincere dedication to the organization and offer an indication that you are looking for a more than a one-time shot at obtaining data. Similarly, another way to volunteer your time and commit to a longer-term relationship with the agency is to serve as a member of their Board of Directors. Agencies need support from a number of people in the community, and one role that community members can play is serving as a Board Member. As a researcher with expertise in DV/SA, you could bring a wealth of information and ideas to support the Board of Directors and the mission of the agency.

Working in the same content area as the staff of the agency, you likely possess knowledge and expertise regarding DV/SA that could be beneficial to share with the agency personnel. Offering an in-service or training for the staff is a wonderful method of giving something tangible and useful to the agency. This type of mutuality in the giving and taking of information, resources, and data, fosters collaboration and trust. As well, including members of your research team in such presentations and trainings provides the staff with a mechanism to meet these individuals who will likely be in their agency, working with their clients, as part of your investigations. This opportunity allows the staff to become familiar with and to develop trusting relationships with all the members of the research team. Likewise, occasions to conduct presentations are good learning experiences for students (and creates another chance for mutual benefit!). Similarly, you could contribute to the agency in many other ways including offering consultation, sharing pertinent research articles, and reviewing grant proposals (Hamberger and Ambuel 2000). As well, attending events that the agency organizes is a way to demonstrate your interest and support: look for events such as candlelight vigils, open houses, and fundraisers.

Finally, trust is also built by having clear expectations regarding the myriad aspects of working in partnership with one another. Scholars have noted that for a collaborative relationship to be sustained over time, the researcher's and the agency staff's roles need to be transparent and negotiated early in the process as do other procedures and policies (Chorpita and Mueller 2008; Sieber 2008). To illustrate, it is imperative to have explicit agreement regarding data collection and interpretation, ownership of data, maintenance of confidentiality, and report/manuscript writing and disseminating at the outset of any research endeavor with an agency (Edleson and Bible 2001; Garland et al. 2008; Sieber 2008). More often than not, these roles, responsibilities, and other expectations are *not* clearly articulated and agreed upon prior to the commencement of an investigation or collaborative effort. As an example, it would be helpful to discuss how data will be interpreted by the researcher and how the agency staff can provide helpful input regarding that interpretation (Hamberger and Ambuel 2000). When these issues are not appropriately discussed and negotiated, then trust cannot be built and ultimately, a project and emerging partnership dissolves (often with resulting feelings of anger, disappointment, and frustration).

Time Investment Sieber (2008) said it best when she emphasized that, "productive collaboration requires long-term commitment by the academic researcher despite all the conditions that make this difficult" (p. 137). Simply put, building a relationship and developing a collaborative partnership with an agency takes time (Giese-Davis 2008). This type of community-based research is completely different in every facet from the "old school" manner of research often conducted by academicians in which one-shot data collection from a sample of freshmen and sophomores enrolled in Psychology 101 was the norm. The effort required to build trust, demonstrate your interest and commitment to the agency, come to mutually agreed upon and beneficial goals, and work with clientele to recruit participants, is tremendous in terms of both persistence and time (Edleson and Bible 2001; Riger et al. 2002). As has been said repeatedly throughout this paper, it is imperative to recognize the time investment required for this type of work, and to honor the unfolding of the collaborative relationship. Similarly, it is also a long-term relationship for the community organization. The agency can demonstrate good will by aiding in the recruitment of study participants, making meeting space available, providing storage for data or project documents/materials, adjusting schedules to facilitate timeliness of data collection, and keeping staff apprised of the study. These gestures on the part of the agency should not be seen by the researcher as simple courtesies, but should be viewed as the organization's staff making a time investment and commitment to both the academician and the work being conducted.

Protecting the Population and the Agency

In any agency that serves clients directly, client confidentiality is a critical concern. However, when collaborating with a DV/SA agency, the importance of client confidentiality increases exponentially as it becomes a matter of keeping clients safe from harm. Staff of DV/SA agencies are seen as the ultimate trust-keepers and "safe space" for survivors of DV and SA. Thus, staff members are going to remain vigilant of client confidentiality and are going to have high expectations of researchers maintaining such levels of privacy and trust; if this need for confidentiality is not appreciated, then researchers will be denied access to clients and data (Sieber 2008). Relatedly, victim advocacy agencies are tenacious in their protection of client rights and welfare. Thus, it is important to understand that agency staff will be reluctant to refer trauma survivors to researchers if these clients are currently experiencing crisis or are unsafe. This may appear to be resistance to research on the part of the agency, but is actually rooted in staying true to the organization's mission when working with a population that has rapidly changing safety needs. The welfare and safety, broadly defined, of clientele will take precedence to research pursuits.

In addition to intentional and unintentional breaches of client rights to anonymity and confidentiality, there are also potential negative threats to agency funding and agency relationships with other community organizations. To illustrate, reports and/or papers generated from the research may contain numerical errors or misrepresentations as services rendered at a DV/SA agency can be complicated and multi-layered. The nuances of repeated service delivery to the same client over multiple years, for example, may pose difficulty for the researcher to accurately reflect, thus the potential for inaccuracies or misrepresentation increases. If such mistakes are reported, this information could jeopardize future funding as needs might not be accurately determined. Furthermore, publications that result from the research may contain statements that misrepresent the actual philosophy, services, or client population and this can affect funding decisions made by community sources. Agency funding can be very tenuous and political, and can be easily threatened by misrepresentation of agency statistics or client needs. For example, in reporting information about clients served at the DV/SA agency, a researcher may interpret the discrepancy in the percentage of women served (e.g., 98%) compared to the percentage of men (e.g., 2%) as an unwillingness to serve men. This misinterpretation would put the agency at risk to lose funding as it would appear that the agency is engaging in discriminatory practices.

Finally, revealing agency documents and in-house statistics to a researcher is risky for the agency in several ways. For example, agency policies and procedures for enhancing client safety are made available to abusers, stalkers, and sociopaths if and when that information is made public. This concern harkens back to the ultimate priority of client safety and confidentiality. Similarly, although evaluation research that examines the efficacy of a specific program, the staff, and/or the agency as a whole, may generate the most helpful information to the organization, it is considered the most risky. The agency is "at risk" because the research may demonstrate that various programs are ineffective and/or that staff is not working optimally (Sieber 2008; Thomas 2002). Although this knowledge would be critical for the agency to address and rectify, it puts the organization in a vulnerable position with funders and other members of the community should this information be made public.

Method and Underlying Beliefs

Research conducted on university campuses and with college student populations has a particular nature, method, and protocol for analyzing that often conforms with "standard" research methods and data analyses. Incentives such as extra credit points for a class or raffles for gift cards are often implemented to strongly encourage people to participate, and data is considered to represent a random sample of the population (at least a random selection of university undergraduates!). As well, researchers often delegate to graduate students and other research assistants the often difficult task of meeting with participants and collecting the data. However, research methods and underlying factors when working with community populations, particularly survivors of DV/SA, are often quite different (Hamberger and Ambuel 2000).

Although DV/SA does not discriminate across race, socioeconomic, and other types of demographic lines, the survivors that utilize services at a DV/SA agency may not necessarily represent the complete spectrum of survivors. Additionally, the clients served at a DV/SA agency are not random across data collection intervals for research participants. For example, clients who utilize daytime services may over-represent women who are unemployed or work shift-work, whereas those who come to the agency after 5pm may over-represent women who work traditional 9 to 5 jobs. Likewise, support group clients may under-represent women who are racial or ethnic minorities.

Other factors influence characteristics of the population served by DV/SA agencies. These features change as funding or other events drive an agency to place emphasis on specific groups of underserved people or to offer new services. An example of a non-funding event would be the occurrence of a high-profile criminal case in a community that triggers greater focus on a specific aspect of DV/SA; the far-reaching community and national reaction to a judge disallowing the word "rape" to be used by a victim of sexual assault in her court testimony (Massey 2007) resulted in more individuals seeking services and advocacy from the local DV/SA agency. Additionally, funding events can highlight a need for services for a specific population. For example, a bilingual services grant was secured by the agency of the second author due to the community being recognized as having a fast-growing Latina population and refugee resettlement community, and there being a need for bilingual advocates. Such funding promotes development of partnerships between DV/SA agencies, culture centers, and immigration services. On a national level, funding from the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) of 1994 brought together law enforcement, prosecutors, and non-governmental DV agencies to create coordinated response teams that have significantly influenced the scope and immediacy of 24-hour services to victims. More specifically, VAWA funding made it possible to provide 24-hour immediate response of DV/SA advocates to hospital emergency room and law enforcement interventions. Another activity that turns the tide of client population characteristics occurs when the agency implements an awareness or educational campaign that focuses on a specific segment of the community. All of these potential impacts on client usage need to be considered by researchers who often use statistical analyses that assume a random population of participants.

Another important factor to consider in terms of method is *how* and *who* will collect the data from clients of the agency or from agency paperwork/documentation. It cannot be emphasized enough that researchers seeking collaboration with a DV/SA agency need to minimize the investment, burden, and extra work of individual staff in their research endeavors (Thomas 2002). Advocates and counselors have neither the time nor the inclination to collect data during sessions with clients. As it is, agency staff have *limited* opportunity to conduct the essentials of their work with clients such as safety planning, crisis intervention, providing referrals, and listening to women's voices. Thus, seeking assistance from staff to collect your data from clients during sessions will not be met with success. Some agencies have agreed to data collection that occurs *before or after* counseling sessions, however, these data collections are most successful if they can be completed independently from the counselor's active involvement and if they are conducted by the researcher herself. We would be remiss in not sharing that we have found providers themselves to be very cooperative in serving as participants for research investigations, thus, academicians are encouraged to include DV/SA advocates and counselors in their pursuits. Our overarching advice in this area is that researchers *themselves* should be responsible for the administration of surveys and collection of data. Above all, avoid communicating an assumption of entitlement to have staff perform data collection on your behalf and avoid being an additional stress for the counselors, advocates, and other staff at the agency (Hamberger and Ambuel 2000; Thomas 2002).

An additional type of research for which agencies find themselves being contacted is graduate student dissertations, master's theses, and honor's theses. From past experiences, agency staff have found that students, particularly those from social science programs, do come with an understanding of confidentiality and client vulnerability. However, their enthusiasm for their research project can manifest itself as greed regarding the amount of data (i.e., survey packets) they want to collect. This "more is better" mentality from the student researcher (and the faculty member, too) can exhaust clients when asked to complete mammoth packets of instruments. Students also tend to vastly underestimate the time it will take for clients to read and complete the questionnaires. Thus, we find that the best student projects are those proposed by individuals who have garnered some volunteer experience at the agency and use this applied experience to design practical projects. Rarely do students have the time to form their own long-term relationships with agencies unless they pave the way with volunteer service. Therefore, we strongly encourage students wanting to collaborate with a DV/SA agency for their dissertation or thesis to "get involved now!"

Finally, a note about DV/SA clients and their willingness to participate in research projects. Although clients appreciate having the value of their time and expertise acknowledged by incentives such as money or gift cards, it is important to understand they do not agree to become research participants because of compensation. Most clients participate in research because they believe the results will be used to help other women. They are hopeful that they can contribute in some way to systemic improvements for their own children and for other women. Participating in research is also a step toward becoming a vocal activist and allows them to fulfill desires to literally "speak out" on behalf of victims.

Tying It Together

When the study (which we hope is the first of many) is completed, it is imperative for the researcher to provide staff with the results. The agency staff are now invested in you as a researcher and invested in your project that they have assisted in developing and implementing. The staff want to know what you found, and what parts of your results and interpretations are useful to them as providers. As well, agency staff and clients can offer their perspectives on the results found and provide meaningful interpretations (Riger et al. 2002). We strongly encourage you to conduct a presentation for the agency staff to share your research findings and implications, and communicate information regarding how the agency might use this newly acquired knowledge. Additionally, consider writing a summary of the results that will be applicable for advocates and practitioners, as well as for policy-makers and grant-writers (Gondolf et al. 1997). When you prepare a manuscript for publication, share a copy with the agency. And finally, thank the agency for all they have done to help with your investigation.

Conclusion

As Garland et al. (2008) articulated, conducting research in collaboration with community agencies can be a daunting task, yet it provides substantial opportunities. We firmly believe that research can assist the services that agencies provide to survivors of DV/SA, and that information and feedback regarding such services from clients and providers in turn enhances subsequent research endeavors. Indeed, this type of collaborative investigation offers a real world approach to increasing our knowledge while directly impacting clients in a positive way (Campbell 2009). Frazier et al. (2008) agree and further iterated that efforts to close the "research to practice gap" requires collaboration between researchers and community settings. Additionally, research collaborations form bridges between academicians and community agencies that provide opportunities for new sources for volunteers, referrals, sites for career development activities, professional consultation, and access to research expertise.

It is hoped that readers of this manuscript are inspired and equipped to seek out academic-community collaborative partnerships to enhance DV/SA work. As such collaborators ourselves, we have found the partnership to be rewarding on both professional and personal levels. We have developed a relationship with one another, as well as established relationships between the DV/SA agency staff and the academic research team. In addition to working on an intervention for women survivors of DV, this paper was born out of our collaborative efforts. We also have grown to know one another in larger contexts that include our outside interests and lives. Our experience is articulated well by Hamberger and Ambuel (2000) who stated, "relationships are the medium through which collaborative work is accomplished. Every collaborative effort therefore involves these two dimensions, the work to be done…, and the human relationships which develop and sustain the collaboration" (p. 259). We hope you find similarly sustaining and mutually beneficial relationships in your collaborative clinical and research pursuits.

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