

FOSTERING COLLABORATIONS TO PREVENT
VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN:

*Integrating
Findings
from Practitioner
and Researcher
Focus Groups*

A REPORT
OF THE
NATIONAL VIOLENCE AGAINST
WOMEN PREVENTION
RESEARCH CENTER



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INTRODUCTION

The National Violence Against Women Prevention Research Center (NVAWPRC) was established in 1998 by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The Center includes a consortium of researchers and practitioners concerned with violence against women from the Medical University of South Carolina, National Crime Victims Research and Treatment Center, Charleston, SC; Wellesley College, Wellesley Centers for Women, Wellesley, MA; and University of Missouri- St. Louis, Center for Trauma Recovery, St. Louis, MO.

One of the most important goals of the NVAWPRC is to identify and overcome barriers to collaboration among researchers, victim advocates, public health professionals, criminal and juvenile justice professionals, and violence against women practitioners. There are many challenges to successful collaboration, but there is ample evidence that such collaborations are important in the prevention of violence against women.

In 1999, 14 focus groups were conducted to obtain feedback from victim advocates and practitioners concerning how researchers, practitioners and advocates can work together more effectively to conduct research on violence against women.

The 14 practitioner focus groups were conducted in nine states and the District of Columbia. Over 130 women and men from over 30 states participated in these two-hour long groups. While Caucasians represented the majority of participants, African Americans, Latina/Latinos, and Native Americans comprised 22% of the practitioner participants. The participants perform a variety of service, administrative, community education and training tasks. Ninety percent of the focus group participants serve domestic violence survivors, 83% serve sexual assault survivors, 30% serve batterers and 16% serve sex offenders. A more detailed overview of the methodology for the practitioner focus groups can be found in Appendix A.

To supplement the findings from the practitioner groups, four focus groups comprised of 23 researchers who study violence against women were also conducted during 1999. These groups were held at four specialized national conferences that targeted trauma and violence research as key topics. The conferences where the focus groups were held were: the International Family Violence Research Conference, the American Society of Criminology Annual Meeting, the Association for the Advancement of Behavior Therapy, and the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies Annual Meeting. The majority of participants in the researcher focus groups were women (87%) and all but two held Ph.D's. Partner abuse and sexual abuse were the two most commonly cited topic areas studied by the researchers. More detailed information about the researcher focus group methodology and participants is provided in Appendix B.

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KEY FINDINGS

Practitioner and researcher focus group participants identified areas of common ground and shared vision as well as unique concerns and sources of tension experienced in their attempts to collaborate on violence against women prevention efforts. In this report the findings from the focus groups are organized into the following sections:

- I. Common Ground and Shared Vision
- II. Unique Concerns of Practitioners
- III. Unique Concerns of Researchers
- IV. Systemic Sources of Collaborative Tensions
- V. Suggestions for Improved Collaboration
- VI. Conclusions

I. COMMON GROUND/SHARED VISION

Despite the tensions and unique concerns expressed by each set of focus group participants, the potential value of research on violence against women emerged as a strong and unifying theme among both practitioners and researchers. This sentiment was best expressed by one of the practitioner participants: “Researchers and practitioners all share the mutual goal of reducing violence against women and children.” The significance of research to the work of practitioners and the pivotal role of practitioners in the research process emerged as a theme that conveyed mutual respect.

The remainder of this section highlights the many reasons practitioner and research focus group members gave for valuing collaborative research on violence against women and what they view as its potential for improving basic knowledge, policy design and implementation, and services.

A. Research Findings Can Be Helpful to Practitioners

The practitioner focus group participants reported that they utilize research findings to help identify “promising practices” related to prevention, intervention, and response to victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. Many different topics were identified, and the most consistently mentioned issues are reviewed below.

Practitioners said they consult research to identify models for prevention services that they can replicate in their own communities. They reported needing **concise** information that can help them in program planning, development and implementation. The focus group participants said research needs are not limited to victims. They want to understand “what works” for batterer intervention and treatment programs. Practitioners stated that they need research to validate what otherwise is often considered to be “only anecdotal evidence” about violence against women. Many practitioners reported that their experiences were not convincing enough to others, and that policy-makers, funders and decision-makers were more influenced by research-based statistics.

Practitioner focus groups provided other important ideas about how VAW research could help victim service practitioners and advocates including that it could be used to:

- Identify and meet the needs of traditionally under-served populations— primarily victims who are culturally diverse or who live in rural or remote areas.
- Provide tools to enhance funding opportunities.
- Improve victim outreach and community education efforts.
- Determine what is best for client services.



- Identify new problems, new directions and new solutions in efforts to eliminate violence against women.
- Improve school programs designed to educate children about domestic violence and sexual assault.
- Evaluate clients and programs.
- Support prevention initiatives.

B. Practitioners Would Like Research Addressing the Following Topics:

- The cycle of violence.
- The effects of witnessing violence on children.
- Violence across the life-cycle.
- The inter-relationship of violence, substance abuse, and societal norms, values and beliefs.

“Study things that are important. Don’t tell me that domestic violence is bad, but how to stop it! Some studies have been done to death. We need to break new ground!”

Practitioner participants suggested that research should address questions designed to help define and meet their clients’ needs. They underscored that it is critical that researchers obtain victims’ input about what needs are most important.

For example, practitioners suggested that many victims, but few researchers, were concerned about victim satisfaction with participation in the criminal justice system.

The practitioner focus group participants gave considerable attention to the question of why victims of color were less likely to access victim services. While there was a consensus that minority victims’ perceive a “cultural stigma” associated with seeking victim assistance, there was less knowledge as to why this might be true.

In addition, a significant number of practitioners requested research designed to identify and assess why some criminal justice practitioners seemed to resist training about violence against women. For example, judges and law enforcement were cited as less-than-enthusiastic audiences for training programs about domestic violence and sexual assault.

“So much research is based on little snapshots. Research is needed that incorporates the impact of the system on a woman’s trajectory, and that puts her in the larger picture.”

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C. Research Can Help Practitioners Reach their Goals in Many Different Ways

Overwhelmingly, focus group participants indicated that the answers to their questions about violence against women would help them in:

- Organizational management
- Improving client services
- Meeting victims' needs

Specifically, research could help with:

- Program planning
- Developing agency goals and objectives

Most evident was a strong emphasis on the need for research that will determine “what works” to prevent and combat violence against women.

Practitioner participants felt that answers to their specific questions would not only help them improve victim services, but also improve their credibility as service providers.

D. Examples of Research That Has Been Helpful to Practitioners

The value of violence against women research to practitioners was expressed not always in terms of its quality, but rather in how well the findings were presented. Specifically, focus group participants appreciate and like research that is:

- Easy to read and understand
- “User-friendly” (a term used often in different focus groups)
- Timely
- Concise
- Easy to access

Rape in America: A Report to the Nation was frequently cited by focus group participants as “helpful” and “user-friendly.” Published in 1992 by the National Crime Victims Research and Treatment Center at the Medical University of South Carolina and the National Center for Victims of Crime, the release of *Rape in America*, included sub-headings for quick reference and many tables and charts. The report was accompanied by a national media blitz that was conducted in concert with thousands of victim service organizations nationwide. Focus group participants called for more such user-friendly reports of research findings.

“...we’re out there reinventing the wheel all over the place with hardly any resources.”

E. VAW Research Can Strengthen the Capacities of Victim Assistance Practitioners.

Advocates and practitioners wear myriad hats in addition to their primary roles as direct service providers. They are responsible for organizational management, victim outreach, community education, fund-raising, coalition building, and professional and allied professional training and education. Many participants viewed research as a critical tool in helping them to make the best use of their limited time, and to improve their personal and professional abilities to provide quality services to victims. Other capacity-strengthening outcomes include:



- Enhancing community education and public awareness, particularly in the area of media relations.
- Strengthening victim services by targeting populations who are in the greatest need of intervention and support.
- Strengthening efforts to educate allied professionals about violence against women.
- Enhancing personal career development.
- Strengthening efforts to raise critically needed funding, and providing a significant tool for grant writing.

F. Researchers Value the Input of Practitioners to the Research Process

- Researchers identified a variety of intellectual, methodological, and practical contributions practitioners make to the research process.
- One researcher stated: “Practitioners expand theory by explaining the results that the theory may not be equipped to deal with, I turn to practitioners to get help in thinking outside the box.”
- Researchers credited practitioners with offering them insight and ideas about how to incorporate issues related to safety and diversity into the methodologies of their research projects.
- “Real world experience” of practitioners was highly valued by researchers as a source of generating research ideas, designing projects, and interpreting unexpected research findings.
- Researchers appreciated receiving feedback from practitioners about practical issues for conducting research.

“Practitioners have assisted researchers by letting them know when it is not a good time to conduct research with a particular population, either because they are in acute distress or because there may not be enough time to process trauma-related information that is revealed through an intervention; thus it may do more harm than good.”

Interdisciplinary collaboration was reported as a positive aspect of collaboration with practitioners who were viewed as having a more “holistic perspective” on violence against women, compared to researchers.

Because of their close work with victims on a daily basis, researchers reported that practitioners have up-to-date information about the current issues facing victims that can forge new research agendas.

Some researchers believed that through their experience working with practitioners, they themselves became advocates and made better contributions to ending violence against women.

Researchers stated that a substantial amount of the research that has been completed on violence against women could not have been conducted without the help of practitioners who provided access to participants and/or existing records.

II. UNIQUE CONCERNS: PRACTITIONER'S EXPERIENCE WITH RESEARCH

Approximately one-half of the practitioner focus group participants had participated in research projects relevant to violence against women, and all of the participants indicated that at one time or another they had been required to provide data on services related to violence against women. Practitioner focus group participants had a wide range of research experiences. Many had collected pre- and post-test data from clients or participants in training and educational programs. Most participants had experience with basic data collection for case management and funding purposes.

There was nearly unanimous dislike of the processes of ongoing data collection for funding agencies. They agreed that such tasks take time away from direct services and do not seem to provide useful data for making policy decisions or persuading others of the need for more funding.

Many participants reported **frequent requests from students and academic researchers for access to their data and clients.** One victim advocate described her agency's coordinated approach to violence against women research, which involved the creation of a research committee within her agency. As she explained, "...the research committee was established because we were frequently being approached by people who wanted to do research with our victims. We are a referral service for them. That has been our role in the past a lot, so that women can participate if they are interested."

"Because the research was a team effort, we were able to be informed as we went along, which was very helpful."

A. Practitioners' positive experiences resulted when they participated in research projects that:

- Developed clear, mutually established goals that gave paramount consideration to victim safety and possible reactions.
- Kept victim service providers informed and involved throughout the process.

B. Many negative experiences with research were described by practitioner focus group participants

These negative experiences resulted primarily from what practitioners perceived as a degree of remoteness, or even arrogance, on the part of the researchers. They reported that often:

- Researchers paid insufficient attention to the effect of research on its participants (i.e., victims of violence).
- Collaboration was non-existent.
- Practitioners' ideas and opinions were neither solicited nor respected.

C. Research That Has Not Been Helpful to Practitioners

The three greatest frustrations expressed by victim service practitioners who participated in research projects were:

- A lack of feedback regarding the results of the project(s) in which they participated.
- The provision of results in a manner that is not timely.
- Findings that could be detrimental to victim-serving agencies.



As one practitioner noted: "When we are considering participating in a research project, we weigh possible negative outcomes and the chance that our participation could result in our being stabbed in the back."

Focus group participants emphasized the:

- "Inconvenience" of participating in research projects.
- Limited time they have available that might be better spent on the provision of direct services.

It was reported that the requirements for research participation often were too time-consuming, too demanding, and not understandable to the potential study participants.

III. UNIQUE CONCERNS: RESEARCHERS' EXPERIENCES WITH COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH

Participants in the researcher focus groups had collaborated with practitioners on many projects on violence against women. Researchers had collaborated with battered women's shelters, advocacy groups, law enforcement, courts, clinics and hospitals. Some of the researchers were also practitioners themselves. Others had gone through advocacy or shelter training.

A. Positive Experiences with Collaboration

Researchers noted that collaborations with practitioners are most likely to contribute to the mutually shared goal of reducing violence against women and children. Many of the researchers stated that they could not have done their work without collaboration with a broad range of practitioners. Several had experienced being invited by practitioners to do work and having had genuine collaborations.

- Researchers reported that collaborations sensitized them to important issues, problems and pitfalls in their research plans.
- Practitioners helped greatly with addressing safety issues.

"You can't do this work in a vacuum."

B. Negative Experiences with Collaboration

Researchers reported that the most negative aspect of collaboration with practitioners is what they termed "lack of open-mindedness" to some research findings on the part of practitioners. Concern was expressed that practitioners (including those in law enforcement, health, and grass roots organizations) are more likely to embrace findings that support "what they already know," and resist findings that are inconsistent with their beliefs or that reflect negatively upon them, their organizations or current practices. While this phenomenon is not unique to practitioners, it has nonetheless served as an impediment to successful collaboration between researchers and practitioners.

"There are problems when you come up with findings practitioners don't want to hear and that can impact on their program."

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The next most frequent problem researchers mentioned involved disagreement with practitioners about how research funds should be spent, with practitioners favoring the allocation of resources to direct victim services over the costs of research.

In terms of substance, researchers had the impression that practitioners favored research that had a treatment component over more basic research on violence against women that is not explicitly therapeutic.

“Funders don’t like it when you say part of the research is bringing researchers and practitioners together to develop the survey; they like to see the survey beforehand.”

The researchers also noted that (ironically) collaborative research is difficult to get funded, and that often funding agencies want the design and measures of a project worked out in advance rather than supporting the collaborative efforts that will lead to cooperation in developing measures and methodologies.

Finally, researchers commented that true collaboration is very time-consuming and expensive. Collaborations can result in expanded networks of so many groups that it is difficult to hold the project together.

“How to get all of the players to the same table at the same time is a serious logistical problem.”

IV. SYSTEMIC SOURCES OF COLLABORATIVE TENSION

“We are underpaid, overworked, and under-funded. We’re stretched too thin to take valuable time that we don’t have to then participate in research....”

A. Practitioners’ Perceptions of Barriers to VAW Research

Practitioner focus group participants consistently identified 9 general barriers to VAW research:

- Lack of resources (e.g., time and money).
- Participation is too time consuming.
- Lack of diversity in research topics and participants.
- Difficulty identifying victims who are willing to participate in research projects.
- Lack of trust between victims/service providers and the research community.
- Individual researchers with whom practitioners had bad experiences.
- Need for greater collaboration among researchers so that efforts are not duplicated.
- Need for practitioners to be actively involved in the conceptualization of research.
- Varying “measurements” utilized by researchers that result in statistics that are “suspect.”



B. Researchers’ Perceptions of Barriers to VAW Research

The researchers noted some fundamental differences between researchers and practitioners concerning attitudes toward research and data. Some researchers feel that there are times when practitioners do not understand the research process, and that many practitioners simply don’t want to get involved in any research. Researchers experience this mistrust as negative, and report that it is often exaggerated by communication problems and by lack of funding. Researchers report that at times they need to sacrifice rigor to meet the needs of practitioners and in some cases they experience this as a negative aspect of collaboration.

- The number one barrier that was identified by the researchers is money. Specifically, sufficient funding is not available to support and compensate practitioners for the time they spend on research.
- Researchers expressed concern that because of the heavy demands on practitioners, they usually do not have time available to collaborate with researchers on joint projects.
- In spite of the reality that researchers can rarely provide financial support to practitioners, some researchers have unrealistically high expectations for practitioner participation in and contribution to research.
- Space and equipment in agencies was also identified as a resource allocation concern.
- Researchers have a difficult time identifying (and communicating) to practitioners exactly how their research findings will be helpful to practitioners in their work with victims.

“Trust can be destroyed with a single mistake, a lie, being too hurried. Other people’s lives and careers are at stake.”

C. Ethical Issues Related to Conducting VAW Research

By far, the most significant ethical issues that practitioner focus group participants identified were related to victim safety. Many practitioners declared that without strict guarantees of consideration to victim safety before, during and after participation in any research project, they would refuse to facilitate victim involvement. Several groups also identified the “timing” of victim participation in research. If a client was currently in a violent environment, participants stated that special attention should be paid to protecting her privacy and promoting her sense of security.

Many practitioner focus group participants echoed one service provider’s frustration with “researchers treating clients like lab rats.” Similar underlying themes resonated through all the focus groups, based primarily on participants’ feelings that many researchers lack understanding of, and empathy for, the plight of the victims involved in their research projects.

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Three general recommendations emerged for researchers to minimize the risk of harming victims, service providers, and victim assistance organizations:

- Utilize practitioners to provide liaison services between researchers and their clients, and pay attention to victims' personal needs and provide support, as needed.
- Assure that victims feel safe and comfortable at all times in the research environment.
- Use instruments and measures with language that is understandable to participants.

D. The Core Elements of Collaboration on VAW Research

Some participants in both practitioner and researcher groups viewed the concept of “collaboration” between violence against women researchers and practitioners skeptically, often based upon their personal, unfavorable experiences. Yet any past negative experiences did not appear to preclude participants from viewing future collaboration not only as a possibility, but as a necessity.

The three general themes of collaboration that emerged across all focus group discussions were the need for:

- Open communication.
- Mutual trust.
- Mutual respect.

There was general agreement that collaboration was needed to conduct research effectively and to apply research methods to problems of practical benefit to female victims of violence. There was also an acknowledgment that researchers and practitioners shared “common ground” that provides a strong foundation for collaboration.

Similarly, participants expressed the need to share information to solve problems related to violence against women. Emphasis was placed on having “the right players at the table,” with several focus groups noting the importance and, indeed, the necessity of having the ultimate “consumer”, that is, victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, involved in the problem-solving process.

Some victim service providers acknowledged being intimidated by researchers. Practitioners reported they were made to feel like second-class citizens when they were involved in research projects, not “equal partners.” Researchers also admitted that practitioners are not always treated with respect by researchers, and their ideas and input are not always valued.

Mutual lack of trust and understanding are barriers that were identified by researchers as important concerns. Researchers often do not understand the staff hierarchy in agencies, and offend practitioners when they violate protocol or make other mistakes.

E. The Paradigm Problem

It was evident that some of the frustrations experienced by practitioners were due to fundamental differences and misunderstandings between people trained and working as researchers and those trained and working as practitioners. In order to achieve successful collaboration, we must acknowledge the differences in day-to-day experience, world view, and training and determine which of these differences pose barriers to mutual respect, trust, and open communication.



This sentiment was also expressed among the researchers. Researchers and practitioners often have conflicting interests and agendas. The kinds of research products that are of interest to VAW practitioners may not be the kinds of research products that are valued by the larger academic community. Particularly, early in a VAW researcher's career, this creates important dilemmas including the need to balance career advancement and advancement of knowledge in the field, while providing practical applied findings that can help prevent violence against women.

“We need to be able to publish work that’s accessible to the community but these aren’t things that will get you tenure.”

V. SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVED COLLABORATION

A. Researchers Need to Demonstrate Respect for Practitioners

Although a researcher may respect a particular practitioner or all practitioners in theory, actions do speak louder than words. Many researchers have not followed through with behavior to indicate that they value the knowledge, skills, and experience of practitioners. The practitioner focus groups revealed many specific ways in which researchers could and should show their respect for practitioners, including:

- Approach practitioners as partners, valuing the knowledge they have about the needs and experiences of the women they serve.
- Understand that practitioners already have responsibilities in their work environment (i.e., becoming involved in a research project will involve added responsibility for them).
- Arrange to compensate the practitioners or make the involvement in research rewarding to them prior to contacting them.
- Involve practitioners as collaborators in setting up the approach to research participants that will best serve the research, the agency, and the victims.
- Involve practitioners in the design of the study, the interpretation of results, and the presentation or dissemination of findings.
- Offer monetary compensation to the practitioners and/or victims.
- Communicate findings using a format and style that is useful to practitioners.
- Be receptive to feedback from practitioners about the research and the research process.

B. Enhancing Mutual Trust

Mutual trust can only be achieved via positive interactions over time. Practitioners need to believe that researchers respect them and the victims they serve. They also need to believe that they are working together toward a common goal with the research community. Trust is undermined when practitioners experience the research process as exploitative, as if they or the victims they serve are simply “data points” researchers need to fill their resumes with new publications.

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Particular ways in which mutual trust can be fostered include:

- Establish a shared vision and goals, with specific research-to-practice goals clearly stated and understood by all key participants.
- Ensure that victims, practitioners, agencies, and communities benefit from the research process, and that all live up to their commitments to provide such benefits.
- Pay attention to victim needs and rights during the research process by addressing the issues of victim retraumatization, safety, and cultural sensitivity of measures.
- Find ways to anticipate and respond to negative findings.
- Share in the preparation of reports.
- Create products that will be useful in applied settings.
- Share credit for the research products.

C. Establishing Open Communication

Open communication is needed to develop mutual respect and trust. Achieving open communication between individuals and agencies takes time and attention, a willingness to be open to disagreements, and a commitment to work through problems over time. Some suggestions for achieving open communication included:

- Setting up long-term partnerships between agencies and researchers/research centers.

“We need a place for practitioners to come see our work; a national forum for people to make presentations that is a practitioner/activist forum.”

- Holding regular meetings for information sharing or collaborative learning. Sponsoring events that bring researchers and practitioners together may be one way to improve communication and resolve differences.
- Working together on grant writing and collaborative planning efforts.

“Familiarity can breed mutual respect. Collaborating more would help foster mutual respect. This will take time.”

D. Develop a Method for Reducing Negative Experiences with Research

Because of their negative experiences with researchers, a few practitioners had decided never to participate in research again. Focus group results, however, suggest that most practitioners want to participate in research, but lack a method for evaluating whether to participate in a particular research effort. Such a method would help practitioners assess the skills and abilities of a particular researcher, identify the goals of the research project, and determine the impact of participation on the victims and the agency in terms of time, effort, and potential benefits. A standardized method of evaluation should be developed by a researcher-practitioner team and be made available to victim services agencies.



Researchers bear the burden of training students and colleagues (and policing themselves) in the aspects of respectful collaboration that are never taught in the graduate school “research design” course. The development of a set of “collaboration guidelines” for researchers interested in working in the area of violence against women prevention would be a useful tool to achieve this aim.

E. Time and Money: What Funding Agencies Can Do Differently

The focus groups generated many positive practices for increasing researcher-practitioner collaboration. Many of the practitioners noted, however, that often these suggestions involve two things that are scarce in both communities: time and financial resources. Additional funds to promote researcher-practitioner collaborations are needed.

Considerable effort is needed on the part of researchers and practitioners to work through the tensions arising between these two groups. While individual efforts will make specific successful collaborations possible, those working to end violence against women cannot do this work without considerable support from funders. Agency and research funding are not adequate for promoting successful collaboration. Some things funding agencies can do differently include:

- Providing small grants to fund collaborative planning meetings and/or support ongoing dialogue between particular researchers and practitioners.
- Funding collaboration, not just research projects.
- Providing funds for researcher/practitioner cross-training efforts.
- Giving priority to research projects that include paid practitioner involvement at every stage of the research process.
- Giving priority to research projects that include dissemination efforts that are specifically tailored to meet practitioner needs.

The findings from this NVAWPRC series of focus groups offer researchers and practitioners valuable insights into what is perceived by both groups (practitioners AND researchers) to be the benefits of and barriers to collaborative research efforts to end violence against women. The community of practitioners, advocates, policy makers and scholars concerned with this effort must examine these issues and create innovative methods to minimize barriers, maximize mutual benefits, and achieve successful collaboration.

VI. CONCLUSION

Participants in the practitioner and research focus groups hold a strong, collective vision about the pressing need to prevent violence against women and share common ground in their belief that research is a vital part of that process. Yet, the achievement of shared aims is often thwarted by mistrust, lack of mutual respect, communication difficulties, conflicting professional agendas, and funding mechanisms that fail to promote the development of researcher-practitioner partnerships. Participants generated an array of creative and proactive recommendations that researcher and practitioner communities could implement to foster successful collaborative partnerships that seek to prevent violence against women. These suggestions hold promise not only for developing long-term relationships between researchers and practitioners, but also for shaping the policies and practices of funding agencies in ways that could enhance and promote the development of successful researcher-practitioner collaboration.

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Appendix A

Overview of Practitioner Focus Group Methodology

The goal of this exploratory research was to gather information about barriers to more effective collaboration between researchers and practitioners from a diverse group of violence against women (VAW) practitioners. Therefore, our recruitment strategy did not require a probability sampling plan. Instead, we attempted to recruit a large group of VAW practitioners who were demographically, geographically, and vocationally diverse. Given the exploratory nature of our research, we decided that use of focus group methodology was more appropriate than a formal survey of individual VAW practitioners. Focus group methodology is particularly useful when the objective is to generate information about attitudes, opinions, and suggestions concerning topics about which limited information exists.

Our sample consisted of approximately 130 practitioners, 120 of whom provided data about their demographic characteristics and vocational experience. Our recruitment strategy was to identify states where we could arrange focus group meetings. This included the three states where the Center consortium of institutions are located (Massachusetts, Missouri and South Carolina). We also identified collaborators who could assist in hosting meetings in New York and Washington. Finally we identified state, regional, and national meetings likely to be attended by diverse groups of VAW practitioners (see complete list of states, below). Although specific arrangements varied from site to site, we generally sought participants via letters, announcements at the meetings and through our state contacts. We sought participants who were demographically and geographically diverse (i.e., participants who were diverse with respect to race, ethnicity, and gender and who were from different regions). Also, participants were recruited to insure vocational diversity (i.e., participants worked in nonprofit as well as state agencies and had experience working with victims and survivors of major types of VAW). Two-thirds of the focus groups combined representatives of a variety of services, while one-third of the focus groups were occupationally homogeneous (i.e., all participants were law enforcement, from shelters, or from rape crisis centers, etc.)

Ninety-one percent of participants were women, and 9% were men. On average, participants said they spent about 35% of their time in administrative or supervisory duties, 30% of their time providing direct services related to domestic violence, 10% of their time on sexual assault services, 15% of their time on training/community education activities. On average only 2% of their time was spent on research activities. Most focus group participants said they served victims/survivors of domestic violence (90%) and sexual assault (83%), but a substantial minority said they worked with batterers (30%) and sex offenders (16%).

The 14 focus groups were conducted in 9 states (California, Florida, Kansas, Massachusetts, Missouri, New York, South Carolina, Texas, and Washington) and the District of Columbia. Over 30 states were represented because one third of the focus groups were conducted at meetings that were attended by participants from different states and regions. Given the breadth of demographic, geographic, and vocational coverage achieved, we believe that this group of participants provides a good cross-section of the practitioner field.

The groups were conducted during the spring and summer of 1999. Focus groups averaged between 1.5 and 2 hours in length. Participants were not paid but were provided with refreshments. There were variations in the format of the focus groups, but all were either audio taped or had a recorder who took detailed notes. In some, but not all, of the focus groups, participants were given worksheets that contained key questions, and they were asked to write their answers prior to the group discussion. In all groups, discussion in response to questions was recorded. Several members of the project team listened to audio recordings, reviewed notes, and reviewed worksheets prior to a project team meeting in August, 1999. Prior to that meeting, each project team member was asked to identify key themes and responses from the focus groups based on their review of these materials. At the meeting, these individual impressions were consolidated into the list of themes and recommendations presented in this report. It should be noted that we attempted to let the VAW practitioners speak for themselves, and the report includes many verbatim comments from participants.



Appendix B

Overview of Researcher Focus Group Methodology

Four focus groups were conducted with researchers at conference meetings in New Hampshire, Toronto (2 groups), and Miami. The conferences where the focus groups were held were: the International Family Violence Research Conference, the American Society of Criminology Annual Meeting, the Association for the Advancement of Behavior Therapy, and the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies Annual Meeting. The groups were conducted during the summer and late fall of 1999. Demographic and background data are available on 23 of the participants.

Almost all (87%) of the participants were women. Thirteen had Ph.D.s and two had MPH degrees. The majority (65%) were psychologists, 22% sociologists, and the remaining disciplines included public policy, victimization, and criminal justice. Most (78%) held positions in universities, and others were employed in hospitals, in research institutions, nonprofit corporations, or as independent consultants. The following is a summary of the topics of their research in the last 3-5 years:

TOPIC	% who had conducted research on this topic
PARTNER ABUSE	44%
SEXUAL ABUSE	44%
OTHER VAW	9%
WOMEN/ ANY TYPE OF VIOLENCE	35%
PERPETRATORS/PHYSICAL VIOLENCE	4%
PERPETRATORS/ SEXUAL VIOLENCE	4%
VAW MINORITY POPULATIONS	17%
ELDER WOMEN	4%
CHILD SEXUAL/PHYSICAL	22%

The participants had been involved in collaborative research on a wide variety of topics such as: research on batterers; surveys of all kinds; program evaluations; trauma and PTSD studies; cognitive and behavioral studies; health related research; research conducted in schools; and child sexual abuse studies.

There were four major topics that were discussed by the groups:

- 1) Positive contributions that collaboration could make or has made to the researchers' own work
- 2) Problems that have been encountered in attempting to do collaborative work
- 3) General barriers to collaboration
- 4) How collaborative efforts can be improved

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