

PROPOSAL

What Resources Do Victims of

Assault/ Abuse Use, and What Obstacles Do They

Encounter?

Research By

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Methods of Social Research

INTRODUCTION

As a Sexual Assault Counselor and Rape Prevention Educator, I'm concerned with how the public perceives issues that victims of assault and abuse face. Because I'm confronted each day with cases of assault, I know what each client faces can be different. Each victim can experience psychological, verbal, physical and sexual abuse, or any combination thereof. There's also the challenge of seeking assistance from multiagencies designed to support victims of abuse or assault. Anyone who has ever participated in a multiagency forum will be familiar with the tensions arising from a disparate group of people trying to work together.

However, I believe understanding the problem is the first step towards solving it. As a professional interest I would like to address: What resources do victims of assault/abuse use, and what obstacles do they encounter?

LITERATURE REVIEW

For my Literature Review, I chose five articles concerning the challenges victims of abuse or assault face when trying to seek assistance from multiagencies. These articles consider the complexities that the victims might face when trying to get help. It may be crucial to the victims success in escaping violence (or surviving it) that the local social service department, police, health services, and other agencies from whom the victim seek support work together effectively.

Focus of Previous Research

Gondolf and Heckert (2000) studied the effect of "specific" deterrence on batterer program outcomes. Lemmey, Malecha, Mcfarlane and Wilson (2001) examined the frequency and severity of violence as well as the danger of homicide before and after women sought police help and filed assault charges. Brush (2000) looked at battering and how its consequences

may thwart welfare recipients' transition from welfare to work. Bybee, Fleury and Sullivan (2000) focused on the prevalence of and response to abuse that occurs after women have ended abusive relationship. Avakame and Fyfe (2001) hypothesized that police are less aggressive in arresting wife assaulters.

Methods and Measurement

The methods used for the five articles relied largely on interviews and collaborative studies. Gondolf and Heckart (2000) used a multisite database of batterers, and measured three principle variables: program dropout, reassaults, and perceptions of sanctions. Lemmey, Malecha, McFarlane and Wilson (2001) interviewed 90 abused women. This research was part of a larger collaborative study. They also relied upon three interview instruments: Demographic Data Form (DDF), Danger Assessment (DA), and the Severity of Violence Against Women Scale's (SVAWS). Brush (2000), interviewed enrollees who were from the smallest county welfare-to-work program (4 weeks or 20 program days), and measured constructed sets of potential obstacles (Battering, Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD), Character and Human Capital Deficit, and Gendered Caring Responsibilities) to welfare-to-work transition. Bybee, Fleury and Sullivan (2000) study presented data from a larger longitudinal research project. This data examined the effects of providing paraprofessional advocacy services to women with abusive partners and ex-partners. They examined his physical violence, threat, sexual suspicion, alcohol and drug use and proximity to survivor. Along with the number of times police were contacted, the number of prior separations, whether the women was involved in a new relationship, and help seeking efforts. Avakame and Fyfe (2000) research involved measuring the police response to legally eligible wife assault suspects.

Findings

Gondolf and Heckert (2000) found that swift and certain punishment for program dropout or reassault may not in itself be enough to reduce spousal assault by men. Lemmey, Malecha, McFarlane, and Wilson (2001) found that the threat of abuse, actual abuse, and danger of homicide was significantly lower at three months after reporting their abuse to the police. Brush's (2000) study concluded that the options for employment for battered women on welfare are slim. Bybee, Fleury, and Sullivan (2000) found that the majority of the initial assaults by an ex-partner took place soon after the relationship ended. Avakame and Fyfe (2001) discovered that police decisions to arrest may be affected by legal and extra legal variables, and that police are less likely to arrest if the victim of male-on-female spousal assault is young, black, poor, and residing in a central city.

Limitations

Lemmey, Malecha, McFarlane, and Wilson (2001) study was limited to English speaking women only. This study was completed in an urban area. Furthermore, the study relies totally on self-reports, which may underreport or overreport due to inadequate recall and/or lack of voluntary disclosure. No attempt was made to independently confirm any of the information. Randomized control group studies are required to determine if seeking police assistance reduces violence.

METHODS

What I Did

1. Conducted an experiment, where the experimental group; assault victims who use DSS, Shelter, etc. (services needed), was compared to the control group; victims who didn't use

any services. A potential problem was identified: Women who have been assaulted might not admit it. Could bias the number of Assault/Abuse victims.

2. Face-to-Face Interviews were conducted in a survey of 25 clients. Clients were interviewed privately, one on one. Clients signed a confidentiality statement to protect their privacy. After stating to the clients how the data would be used, and how important the survey was, clients were interviewed. Clients were requested to fill out a contact sheet which contained basic information about their age, race, usage of substances (alcohol, drugs), and type of abuse they experienced, and by whom. As well as information about the services they could request a referral too (law enforcement, DSS, mental health, women's shelter, hospital, legal aid, etc.). Clients were given the opportunity to discuss any previous association with any of the services they were referred too. Requests were made to the clients for a follow-up interview. This was used to determine any obstacles the client might have encountered, and how to improve/dissolve them. Client's responses were documented and data compiled. Thanked clients for their participation. Reviewed results of data.

3. Researcher in a participant observation study. Observed assault victim's application process for services at the Department of Social Services (DSS). Presence unobtrusive, provided transportation, and client advocacy. Transported client from women's shelter to DSS. Client a victim of multiple rape by six perpetrators. Client's history: childhood molestation, abuser of alcohol, (drinking since age seven) prescription drugs, crack cocaine, and suffers from manic depression. Client has been legally deaf since childhood. However, no problems communicating with client, speech very articulate, and client reads lips extremely well. Observed client in positive mood, friendly, talkative, and cooperative initially. Tearful, concerned only when conversation turns to shelter stay. Client mentions one resident with a problem with her at shelter. Due to client becoming intoxicated at initial admission to women's shelter, one resident doubts client's ability to stay sober. Resident's son was just removed from

environment where alcohol was a contributing factor to his abuse. Resident concerned client will repeat behavior and jeopardize son's safety. Client stated another incident and staff would discharge her immediately. Client doesn't want to be discharged, there's no where else for her to go. Warm reception at DSS from staff. Interview progressed, client available to receive food stamps, medicaid, some furniture and household items upon discharge from shelter (to set up house keeping). However, social worker informed client, there would be no cash benefit award, because none of the children reside with client (client has three children). Client somewhat irritable at social worker's determination, she offered an explanation for not having custody of her children, even though she had not been asked to justify her decision. At that point, observed DSS worker mildly agitated, and short. Interview continued, tension increased while discussing transportation. Client disappointed in the arrangement of social system. Client required to keep future appointments with DSS, as well as other agencies, with no allowance for transportation services. Social worker offers all the assistance that's available and other suggestions, but the ultimate responsibility is the client's. This concludes the interview. Observe client's quiet, somber mood during transport back to shelter. Compiled data and notes of observation taken at DSS interview.

EVALUATION

Conclusion

The goal of my research was to determine if victims of assault/abuse encountered problems when trying to receive assistance. The subject matter is difficult to address, because of the personal nature, and sensitive issues that surround acts of violence. The data collected from the survey and observation proved to be very helpful in determining this goal. Both methods allowed for a great deal of privacy, which is paramount when analyzing a subject this personal. The survey proved that when victims choose to seek assistance from multiagencies there is help

available. All areas addressing social needs have some type of assistance available for victims who have assaulted or abused. Also, the staff at most of the agencies are sensitive to the special issues surrounding providing assistance to someone who has been mentally, verbally, or sexually violated. As for the obstacles that a victim could encounter, sometimes the person's circumstances proved to be the greatest challenge. The observation proved that even though some services the client needed were available and provided, others were not. Though no agency can provide permanent, long term transportation to a client, this obstacle could not be directly attributed to any agency. This would be attributed to the client directly not having a personal vehicle, or to demographics, living in a rural area, where public transportation is not provided.

Personal Reflection

After spending time compiling research for this project, I am able to take my product of this assignment and use it at my workplace. As a counselor and educator to the community on the issues surrounding assault and rape, I am always interested in how to better serve the public and victims of violent crime. The feedback provided by the client's about the attitudes, perceptions, and public concern about these issues can provide valuable information on where to improve and focus attention to help better educate citizens and assist victims. Also, identify obstacles and problems that make a difficult situation, more difficult, and allow multiagencies that we provide (as tax payers) for social assistance to the public, to address these problems and make positive improvements.

References

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