RESEARCHER-PRACTITIONER PARTNERSHIPS TO IMPACT SEXUAL ASSAULT AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE POLICY

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Abstract
The Alaska Department of Public Safety and the UAA Justice Center conducted numerous research projects and published numerous articles on domestic violence, sexual assault, child sexual abuse, and stalking. These research projects were used to develop new multidisciplinary and multilevel initiatives to combat violence against women and children. These efforts reflect the building of a researcher-practitioner partnership and its impact on policy and practice. We worked together in pursuit of common goals. We learned from each other by bringing complementary skills. We understood the necessity of true partnerships to bring about social change.

Building Partnerships
Having local police paraprofessionals (e.g., VPSOs), conducting investigations to uncover multiple charges, collecting photographic evidence (injuries, scenes), conducting interviews and tape recording interviews, and securing victim cooperation with law enforcement.

Sample Results
Factors that Improved Case Processing:
- Having local police paraprofessionals (e.g., VPSOs)
- Conducting investigations to uncover multiple charges
- Collecting photographic evidence (injuries, scenes)
- Conducting interviews and tape recording interviews
- Securing victim cooperation with law enforcement

Importance of Data & Research
Data can correct misconceptions
Example: Cases from rural areas and cases with Alaska Native victims are NOT less likely to be prosecuted.

Using Data to Develop and Define Initiatives
Agency acknowledges and understands that research is critical to developing policies and informing practice.
Key stakeholders and administrators participate in research development and dissemination because:
- They understand the value of research.
- They are willing to be evaluated (and sometimes updated).
- They understand that true partnerships bring about social change.
- They value research for policy, practice advocacy at state and local governmental levels.

Dissemination
To achieve maximum impact on policy and practice, we emphasize joint dissemination in multiple formats.

Context
Law Enforcement in Alaska
The Alaska Department of Public Safety and the UAA Justice Center provide research support.

Law Enforcement in Alaska
U.S. - 68.9
Alaska - 26.2

UCR Forcible Rape Statistics: 1996-2008

Law Enforcement in Alaska

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Case Processing
Factors with no Impact on Case Processing:
- Geography and Race: Cases from rural Alaska and cases with Alaska Native victims were not less likely to be referred for prosecution, to be accepted for prosecution, or to result in a conviction.

The average UCR rate of forcible was:
- 139% higher in Alaska than in the U.S. (1996-2008).

Factors that Complicate Investigations:
- Age: 74% of sexual assault victims are under the age of 18.
- Alcohol use: 15-16 year-old sexual assault victims have highest intoxication rates.
- 55% of sexual assault victims were assaulted by a non-stronger.
- Most common suspect is a family member.

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From Research to Policy and Practice
Improving Training and Response
Governor Sean Parnell announced a new and bold 10-year initiative to combat the epidemic of sexual assault and domestic violence and make Alaska the national leader in fighting these threats.
1. A public education campaign for men to “Choose Respect.”
2. Increased in law enforcement presence in every community that desires it, with new VPSOs and Troopers.
3. Specialized domestic violence and sexual assault training across multiple disciplines.
4. Increased support for victims of abuse including funding for shelters and the availability of pro bono legal services.
5. Tougher penalties for sexual assault crimes and stronger shelters and the availability of pro bono legal services.
6. Increase the number of villages with local law enforcement presence. In 46%, AST is assisted by Village Public Safety Officers (VPSOs). AST includes five detachments.
7. An increase in law enforcement presence.

Enhancing Partnerships: Future Directions
New Collaborative Projects
Alaska Victimization Surveys
With joint dissemination, we recognize and rely upon each other’s strengths, overcoming our own substantive and research limitations.
- “The practitioner partner increases the acceptance and perceived usefulness of the content [and] the research itself.” (Wuestewald & Steinheider, forthcoming).

Formats include:
- Local and national press releases and conferences,
- Co-authored reports and publications in both academic and practitioner outlets: joint, video, web,
- Trainings; local and national presentations for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers.

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