



## SECTION 1: OVERVIEW OF CBPR AND ITS IMPORTANCE TO THE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FIELD

Within this first section of the toolkit, we provide foundational information about the definition and history of CBPR generally, and CBPR within domestic violence work specifically.



## What Is CBPR? Definition and Background

CBPR is one type of community-engaged research, an approach to research that involves community members in a meaningful way. Community-engaged research exists on a continuum, with wide variation in the strength and intensity of the community-academic collaboration. CBPR in particular represents the fullest expression of community-engaged research, with researchers and community members sharing power, resources, and decision-making at every step of the research process, from identifying questions to interpreting and applying results, to disseminating findings (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2010; Yuan, Gaines, Jones, Rodriguez, Hamilton, & Kinnish, 2015). The goal of CBPR is to enhance understanding of a given phenomenon by collaborating with those most affected by it, and integrating the knowledge gained with action to improve the health and well-being of community members (Green et al, 1995; Israel, Schulz, Parker & Becker, 1998).

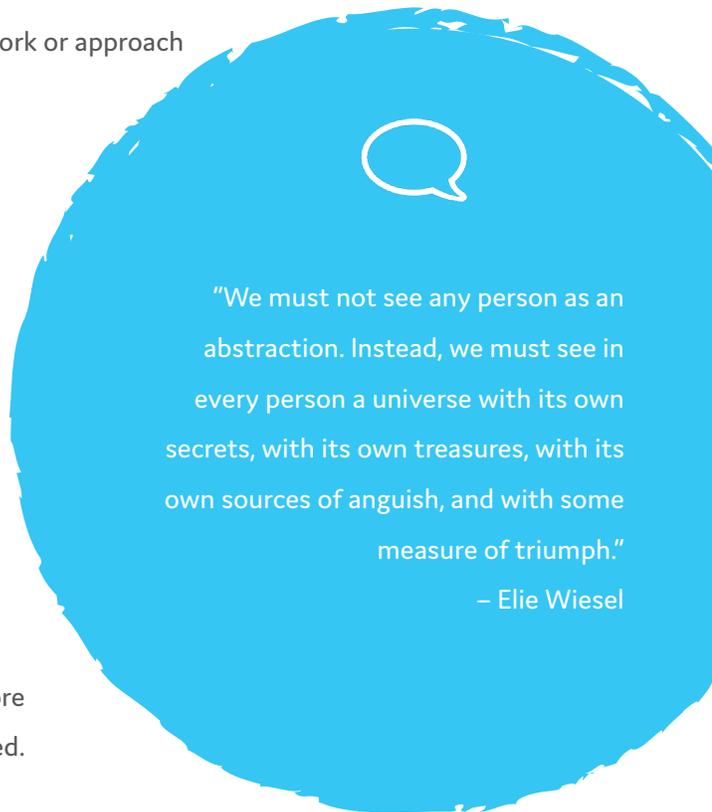
It is important to note that community-engaged research is a framework or approach for conducting research, not a methodology in and of itself.

### Why CBPR?

CBPR has the potential to transform our work, such that researchers are no longer gate-keepers of knowledge production. Instead, community members and researchers in partnership co-create opportunities to name what is to be researched, how it should be researched, and what should be done with the knowledge gained. Further, CBPR has the potential to produce research findings that could not be determined through the exclusive reliance on traditional approaches. When researchers work in partnership with those most affected by the issue at hand, the knowledge gained is more relevant to those communities, and more likely to be adopted and used.

Additional benefits of CBPR partnerships are that they can:

- Help to illuminate local knowledge and perceptions



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- Bring to the table varied skills, knowledge, and expertise necessary to address complex problems
- Bolster connections between academics and communities
- Increase community partner and researcher skills, and provide opportunities for mutual capacity-building
- Strengthen rigor and credibility of research
- Strengthen the utility and value of the findings for communities, practice and policy
- Support cultural sensitivity in the interpretation and application of research findings
- Help solve otherwise intractable problems
- Limit the possibility that research findings have unintended negative consequences

### The Historical Context of CBPR

CBPR has its roots in action research and participatory research, approaches that developed in the fields of social science and popular education, respectively (Ferreira & Gendron, 2011; Greenwood & Levin, 2007; Khanlou & Peter, 2005).

During the 1940s, social psychologist Kurt Lewin described action research as a means to overcoming social inequalities. He argued that in order for evidence to be relevant, researchers must engage in a process of active and participatory data gathering about problems and interventions (McKernan, 1991). He rejected the notion that in order for researchers to be objective they needed to remove themselves from the community of interest and instead sought to involve community members in the research process (Wallerstein & Duran, 2003), repositioning them as participants, not subjects or objects under investigation. This is known as the Northern Tradition.

Participatory research, known as the Southern Tradition, arose in the 1970's within Latin America, Asia, and Africa largely in response to the work of Brazilian philosopher, educator, and activist Paulo Freire (1970). Freire was a critic of authoritarian paradigms in which education was unidirectional, objective, and decontextualized, creating a "culture of silence" in which those without power simply lost the means to critically respond to the dominant culture that was forced upon them (Wallerstein & Duran, 2003). Freire's influential method of popular education centered the analysis of personal lives in relation to the structures that might control them. His goal was not only to produce or disseminate knowledge, but to engage in an emancipatory process that would result in critical consciousness (*conscientização*), the capacity to perceive social, political, and economic oppression and take action against it (Ferreira & Gendron, 2011).



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Participatory action research (PAR) a term coined by Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda, brought together the imperatives of “community action” and the “decolonization of social sciences” (Fals-Borda, 2013, p.157). His goal was to transform “Eurocentric academic superiority” into “authentic participation” (p.160). Specifically, PAR involved an iterative and cyclical process of research, action, and reflection with communities in service of understanding the world through trying to change it.

Freire, Fals Borda, and many other scholars and indigenous thinkers called on researchers to transform the research relationship from one in which communities were objects of study to one in which community members participated centrally in the inquiry itself (Wallerstein & Duran, 2003). In this context, research and education could be understood as relational, culturally-bound, and community-centered.

Both of these schools of thought - action research and participatory research - shared the goal of challenging the concept of the objectivity of science. Each approach used its particular lens to explore the various ways in which power differences influence the research process (Ponic, Reid & Frisby, 2010). Both approaches called for research designs that are interactive, contextualized, and humanly compelling because they involve joint participation between community members and researchers in the exploration of research issues (Lather, 1986). Both approaches also highlighted strategies to help community members to gain the necessary critical consciousness and research tools to engage in research and challenge mainstream approaches.

### Variation within CBPR Approaches

CBPR is a framework for conducting research, rather than a specific methodology. It is characterized by the nature of the partnership between researchers and community partners, with the aim of full partnership and equal control. Although it is essential for any CBPR project to adhere to a core set of values or principles that support full partnership and equal control (delineated in section 4), partnerships can vary widely based on participants’ needs, goals, skills, and access to resources (D’Alonzo, 2010). Despite variation, however, there are some bright lines that distinguish CBPR from other types of research, as described in this table.



## Differences Between CBPR and Other Types of Research

### CBPR Is...

A process or approach

Research that is conducted in the community, in partnership with community members

High quality, rigorous research that reflects the value and goals of community partners

Guided by a set of core values that are clearly articulated

Flexible, dynamic and responsive

Conceptualized and manifested differently, depending on the strengths & needs of the collaborating partners

An approach that creates opportunities for bi-directional learning between researchers and community members

### CBPR Is Not...

A specific research design or method

Any kind of research that is done in a community setting

Activist research that seeks to support a specific practice or policy by any means necessary

Value-free or "objective"

Pre-determined and rigid in its design & implementation

Always done the same way, according to a set formula

An approach that uses a uni-directional learning model that features researchers learning from communities





**Nathan Q. Brewer, Ph.D. Student at Simmons College School of Social Work, describes the way that he came to CBPR through his work in domestic violence**

*For me, like many others who have practiced in the field of domestic violence, the motivation to do the work was rooted in my value of social justice and a feeling of responsibility to survivors. This same value and sense of responsibility have led me to seek a Ph.D., so that I can further advocate for survivors in a different way: through social justice-focused research. Although I now have a passion for research, I struggle to remain confident in my ability to speak up and ask tough questions. I think for many practitioners this is the case. We struggle to feel adequate when speaking the truths we have seen while doing clinical and domestic violence advocacy work in the community. So for me, actively moving towards the researcher role means taking up that responsibility to our clients. Those of us rooted in the direct work need to find the confidence that what we have to offer is important and necessary for the clients we serve.*

*I am also acutely aware of the damage that has been done and continues to be done, in the name of research. This is particularly of true of researchers like myself, who identify as white men. Far too many participants have worked with white male researchers, only to feel used and thrown away when the researcher obtains the data they want. Similarly, as someone who identifies as queer, all too often I see researchers excluding queer people from their studies and theories. As a queer researcher, I feel compelled to speak up for these survivors, demanding they be considered and included. I want my work to be something substantial, that doesn't compromise my values and responsibilities to my clients. I want my work to resist the trend of making clients and clinicians feel used and thrown away. I want them to be seen as the experts they are. Although it is not a panacea, CBPR appears to fulfill these goals. some bright lines that distinguish CBPR from other research traditions, as described in this table.*



## **CBPR in the Domestic Violence Context**

A CBPR approach to domestic violence research balances four essential questions: 1) What are the critical questions for survivors and practitioners in this community? 2) How can we best explore such questions using strategies that are clear, consistent, and replicable; that is, scientifically rigorous? 3) How can we ensure that these strategies are sensitive to the backgrounds, cultural practices, and life contexts of community stakeholders (Palinkas, He, Choy-Brown, & Hertel, 2017, Tribal Evaluation Workgroup, 2011)? 4) How can we interpret and disseminate our findings in ways that benefit survivors, practitioners, and communities?

CBPR has powerful advantages over traditional research approaches to domestic violence for all involved. The historical, cultural, economic, and political contexts in which partner violence occurs vary enormously, calling for response strategies that are rooted in deep knowledge of specific communities (Gillum 2008; Nicolaidis et al., 2013; Sullivan, Bhuyan, Senturia, Shui-Thornton, & Ciske, 2005). In one focus group study with practitioners in a Latina domestic violence organization, for example, participants noted that CBPR was their “gold standard” for rigorous research because it ensured that Latina ways of knowing were reflected throughout the research process, including in the nature, interpretation, and application of results obtained. The knowledge that their own perspectives were foundational to the focus and process of the research gave these practitioners the confidence to use the research to improve their own work with survivors (Serrata, Macias, Rosales, Hernandez, & Perilla, 2017). Ultimately, if research is not centrally relevant to the very people who can make use of it, its utility is limited at best.

A number of contextual factors are particularly relevant to CBPR in the domestic violence context.

These are described next.

### **Privacy and Trust**

Privacy and trust are especially significant considerations for CBPR in the domestic violence arena given that survivors’ safety may well depend upon maintaining their privacy and ensuring confidentiality when they seek help. Any research activities conducted with survivors, their families, and the programs they turn to for support should always forefront survivors’ confidentiality, safety, and well-being.

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Accordingly, CBPR researchers should ensure that:

- Advocates, service providers, survivors and their family members are fully informed during the research consent process about all potential benefits and risks of research participation.
- Participants understand that involvement is voluntary and that they may discontinue participation at any time.
- Participants give permission to use the information collected for research. (See Appendix C for a sample consent form).
- Research and ethics procedures for maintaining confidentiality are made clear, including how data will be aggregated.
- Participants are informed about any reporting mandates that researchers must follow to ensure the safety of survivors, their family members, and others.
- Consider research ethics training for all community partners. Note that standard trainings may need to be adapted, enhanced, and supplemented so they are of interest and relevance to community members.

### Trauma Experiences of Survivors and Program Staff

CBPR researchers working in the domestic violence arena should have a trauma informed lens that takes into account that survivors, their family members, and program staff may be experiencing current trauma, or consequences of past trauma (Edleson & Bible, 2001; World Health Organization, 2001; Slattery & Goodman, 2009; Sullivan Price, McParland, Hunter, & Fisher, 2016) and that these experiences can enter the work in various ways.

Accordingly, CBPR researchers should:

- Understand types of trauma specific to both individuals and the community (e.g., violent victimization, historical trauma, collective trauma, racism/bigotry).
- Be informed about how to reduce and respond to distress related to experiencing and disclosing one's own or others' trauma history
- Build relationships with appropriate local services and sources of support to be able to make referrals for research participants.
- Make referrals to support services readily available during and after contact with survivors and staff.



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- Create handouts and wallet sized cards with referral information for research participants to take with them if they are comfortable doing so following study completion.
- Prepare for managing staff turnover, which may be high due to secondary and vicarious trauma combined with the historically low wages of domestic violence and human services work.
- Be flexible and ready to change research methods and strategies in response to events that may result in or exacerbate trauma (e.g., a homicide in the local community, political event that amplifies racism, bigotry directed against community members).

### Feminist and Justice Lens

Many individuals and organizations in the domestic violence field approach partner violence using a framework that emphasizes social justice, anti-oppression, and feminism, often with a particular focus on intersectionality (Blitz & Illidge, 2008; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005).

Accordingly, CBPR researchers should:

- Be familiar with these theories and the extent to which they shape community partners' thinking.
- Attend to the ways these theories might inform the research focus and processes.
- Consider how these ideas may influence collaborating programs' perspectives on the research process. For example, some program staff may be concerned about using quantitative research designs in which participants have to fit their experience into researcher-derived categories. Others, however, may choose quantitative research with the idea that this will produce the most persuasive evidence needed to advocate for socially just policies.

### Power Concerns

Coercion and control lie at the very heart of domestic violence, undergirded by broader systems of oppression such as sexism, classism, heterosexism, racism, and xenophobia (Dutton & Goodman, 2005; Gillum, 2008; Stark, 2012; Fuschel, Linares, Abugattas, Padilla, & Hartenberg, 2015). As a result, domestic violence survivors and providers are often highly attuned to power dynamics in relationships, including those with researchers.





"Contributions of CBPR to the DV field" by Cris Sullivan, PhD,  
Michigan State University

Accordingly, CBPR researchers should:

- Think about and assess how interpersonal and structural forms of power may influence the project.
- Commit to openly and constructively navigating power dynamics with community partners. (See Section 4 for further discussion and examples.)

### **A Brief History of CBPR in the Domestic Violence Context:**

CBPR is certainly not new to the field of domestic violence. In fact, some researchers have been collaborating with community members ever since domestic violence emerged as a topic of scholarly inquiry (e.g., Perilla, 1999; Schechter 2016; Sullivan & Bybee, 1999). Although the use of CBPR to explore questions related to domestic violence has been relatively consistent over the years, interest in understanding CBPR as a research approach has ebbed and flowed. Two periods in particular – the late 1990s and early 2000s and the past few years – appear to be ones of especially high

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interest and activity. For example, in 1998 the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention established The National Violence Against Women Prevention Research Center (NVAWPRC), a diverse consortium of researchers and practitioners whose task was to “identify and overcome barriers to collaborations” in the field of violence against women (NVAWPRC, 2001). In 2001, NVAWPRC conducted 14 focus groups with 130 domestic violence practitioners and four focus groups with 23 domestic violence researchers that resulted in a set of practical recommendations for improved collaboration. Concurrent with the founding of NVAWPRC and its study, domestic violence scholars began to write about the lessons they had learned conducting CBPR (e.g., Block, Engel, Naureckas, & Riordan, 1999; Edleson & Bible, 2001; Gondolf, Yllo, & Campbell, 1997; Sullivan, 2003; Williams, 2004).

In the past few years, interest in CBPR has increased on the part of federal funders. For example, in 2009, American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funding went to a project designed to cultivate academic-community partnerships. As part of this project, researchers conducted workshops at Johns Hopkins’ Center for Injury Research and Policy (CIRP) and the House of Ruth Maryland, a large domestic violence program serving Baltimore City, to brainstorm strategies for how to translate CBPR principles into real-world practices (Burke et al., 2013). In 2012, the national domestic violence culturally specific resource centers – e.g., Casa de Esperanza’s National Latin@ Network for Healthy Families and Communities and the Asian Pacific Institute Against Gender Based Violence – received funding from the Family Violence Prevention Services Program, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, to build the evidence base of cultural specific strategies. This work has produced new knowledge about culturally relevant and community based research methodologies, including CBPR in cultural-specific domestic violence organizations (Serrata et al., 2017). Recently, the National Institute of Justice funded a study that investigated researcher-practitioner partnerships in the criminal justice system through a series of focus groups and individual interviews (Sullivan, Willie, & Fisher, 2013). See *Appendix E* for two examples of CBPR partnerships, one large (the Domestic Violence Program Evaluation and Research Collaborative) and one small (one researcher and one program), that informed the development of this toolkit.

The work to date on CBPR in the domestic violence context – including studies about CBPR and studies using CBPR – has advanced the field by providing both a deeper understanding of partner violence and a wealth of best practices for effective CBPR with domestic violence programs. This toolkit is very much informed by this body of scholarship, but is by no means intended to be a comprehensive review of it. Rather, this toolkit is a targeted compilation of wisdom and lessons learned that we, the authors, wished we had known when we were embarking on our own careers as CBPR researchers.



# POWER THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

## A CBPR TOOLKIT FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RESEARCHERS

