



SAMPLE SCHOLARLY ARTICLE SUMMARY

A short summary of a study, potentially useful for practitioners who do not have time to read an article in a journal.

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a part of



COMMUNITY BASED
PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

Domestic Violence Survivors' Empowerment and Mental Health: Exploring the Role of the Alliance with Advocates



Survivors come to DV programs with a range of strengths and needs seeking support.

In many DV programs, survivors work closely with an advocate to restore power, access support, and improve well-being.

Is the quality of this relationship related to empowerment?
Is it related to mental health outcomes for survivors?

Background: What Was This Study Based on?



Relationships matter in therapy...

- The “alliance”—that is, the quality of the relationship—has been used as a way to describe and measure therapeutic relationships, for example, between a client and therapist.
- Higher alliance ratings from the client have been associated with better treatment outcomes: improved depression & PTSD.
- The “alliance” doesn’t necessarily solve problems in its own, but it sets the foundation for healing.

...is this true for the advocacy relationships in DV programs?



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The advocacy alliance is considered key in DV programs...

- Strong, mutual relationships between survivors and advocates are foundational to DV services and supports.
- They underlie frameworks such as survivor-centered and trauma-informed approaches.
- Yet, we have little evidence about how the quality of the survivor-advocate relationship shapes survivors' wellbeing.
- Such knowledge is especially critical to improve supports for women of color and poor women, who have experienced racial, cultural, and social barriers to strong, safe relationships in DV programs.

...so how does the advocacy alliance work in DV programs?

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Empowerment might be a part the story...

- The quality of the advocacy relationship may be critical to restoring a survivor's sense of power.
- Restoring one's sense of power in the domain of safety, in turn, may contribute to improved mental health.

...could a sense of empowerment around safety represent the link between the advocacy alliance and improved mental health?



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In partnership with DV programs also interested in this topic, we set out to test two questions:

- Is the advocacy alliance linked to empowerment among DV survivors?
- Is empowerment linked to lower depression and PTSD symptoms?

...in other words:



Methods: What Did We Do?

How?

This study grew out of a larger community-driven research project developed with the Domestic Violence Program Evaluation and Research Collaborative (DVPERC). DVPERC is a collaboration between researchers and DV programs from across the northeast, committed to bridging DV practice and research through community-engaged research.

Procedures:

- Eight DVPERC programs participated in this study
- Program staff posted flyers and announced the study in Spanish and English
- Interested participants sent completed surveys (which took approx. 30 minutes) directly to the researchers using self-addressed, stamped envelopes
- All participants received \$20 TARGET gift card



Who?

Final sample of 370 woman-identified survivors.

- Mean age=36.4 yrs.; 87.7% heterosexual.
- 39.1% White, 24.4% Black 23.8% Latina, 7.8% Multiracial, 1.9% Asian; 74.9% born in U.S.
- 38.8% reported they attended at least some college or graduated college; 51.6% were unemployed
- 46.4% had participated in their program

What?

In addition to demographic characteristics, we measured the following, as reported by survivors:

- Alliance with advocate
- Empowerment
- PTSD and depressive symptoms

...Then we used a structural equation model to test how these were related to one another.

Findings and Interpretations: What Did We Learn?

1. Stronger alliance was related to greater empowerment; greater empowerment was related to improved PTSD and depression.
2. Race, poverty, & time mattered...
Survivors of color, except Latina women, had significantly lower alliance than White women; survivors with more financial strain reported lower levels of alliance; alliance was higher for those who'd been in the program longer.



Takeaways: What Does This Really Mean and Why Does it Matter?

Practice

- Findings offer a theory of change for domestic violence programs: A strong advocacy relationship is foundational for improving survivors' sense of empowerment in the domain of safety; and empowerment is critical to emotional wellbeing
- The study provides a potential model to "measure" and reflect on the quality of practice.
- Results underscore the critical need to address issues of social access and cultural competency to build strong advocacy relationships.

Research

- Preliminary evidence shows the ways in which the advocacy alliance is critical to empowerment and healing, but this study should be replicated using a longitudinal design.
- Study demonstrates research opportunities afforded when researchers and practitioners develop long-term CBPR collaborations.

Looking for a Short Summary?

Over the last 4 decades, domestic violence (DV) programs—both residential and nonresidential— have sprung up in communities across the country with the aim of helping survivors become safe. These programs place strong emphasis on the relationship between the advocate and survivor as critical to becoming safer and healing from the trauma of abuse. Yet little research has demonstrated the extent to which specific aspects of the advocate-survivor alliance are related to specific indicators of survivor well-being, nor shown what factors might mediate or help explain that relationship. This study explored in a sample of help-seeking survivors (N= 370) whether the strength of the alliance between survivors and their advocates is related to lower symptoms of depression and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and whether this association is at least partially explained by survivors' sense of empowerment in the domain of safety. The structural equation model we tested also controlled for variables that might influence these relationships, including race/ethnicity, financial strain, and length of stay in the program. As expected, stronger



Appendix F: Sample Scholarly Article Summary

alliance was associated with reduced symptoms of both depression and PTSD, through the mechanism of empowerment in the domain safety. Survivors of color, except Latina women, had significantly lower alliance than White women; survivors with more financial strain reported lower levels of alliance; alliance was higher for those who'd been in the program longer. These findings provide direction to programs seeking to establish a theory of change and a guide for measuring and reflecting on the quality of advocacy practice. It also underscores the need to address social access and cultural humility in order to build stronger advocacy relationships

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