Protection orders and their perceived effectiveness – A domestic violence and sexual assault crisis center program evaluation

Shelby Connett

Grace Abbott School of Social Work

Community Partner: The Spouse Abuse Sexual Assault Crisis Center (SASA), Hastings, NE

Background and Purpose

SASA views their legal advocacy program as a way for them to inform, guide, and assist their clients in obtaining a protection order. They also view this program as a way to advocate for system changes regarding how and why protection orders are or are not awarded. SASA's legal advocacy program strives to be an agent of cultural, community, and system change.

Community Partner

- ✓ SASA's mission statement: *"To be a source of help, hope, safety, and inspiration to survivors of domestic and sexual violence. We embrace and focus on the story of each individual with deep concern and care in order to understand, facilitate, advocate, and support."*[1]
- ✓ SASA has been in existence for 40 years serving individuals and families in many important ways. SASA's serving population includes the Nebraska counties of Adams, Clay, Nuckolls, and Webster. Clients receiving services from SASA's legal advocacy program receive assistance in writing an affidavit for protection or harassment orders. SASA advocates also attend court upon the client's request and connect survivors to other legal resources they may need.[1]
- ✓ SASA has seven full-time and five part-time staff members. Of these staff members, one is fully dedicated to the legal advocacy program and four are partially dedicated.

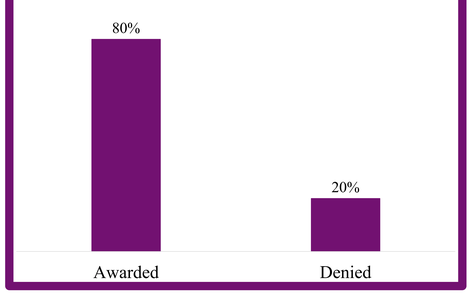
Methodology

- ✓ **Quantitative**: The research design utilized was a post-test only design. The sampling design was a nonprobability convenience sample. The sampling frame was 01/31/2017 to 03/20/2018. Data was collected through the analysis of protection order affidavits of SASA's legal advocacy program's clients.
- ✓ **Qualitative**: Qualitative data was collected and analyzed utilizing grounded theory. Two interviews occurred via Skype and one via telephone. Guided by questions presented by the researcher, participants were invited to speak about their experiences. Data was analyzed using open coding and deriving categories and overall themes from these codes in a Microsoft Excel document.

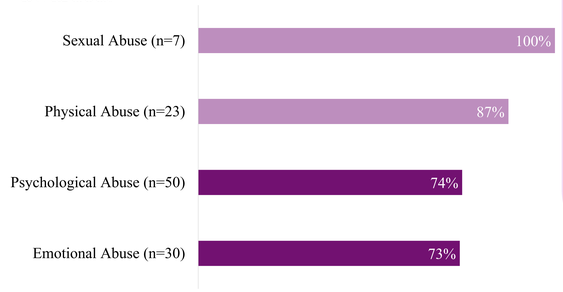
Results/Outcomes

- ✓ Overall, protection order affidavits were awarded at a rate of 80%. Petitioners were most represented in both the quantitative and qualitative sections as English-speaking females between the ages of 18-38 years old.
- ✓ Participants experienced emotional and psychological abuse more frequently than physical or sexual abuse, including things such as playing games, name-calling, lying, and stalking, among others. However, protection orders were awarded more often to individuals who experienced physical and sexual abuse.
- ✓ Participants were in somewhat disagreement on whether they felt that law enforcement involvement was helpful. Where participants did find agreement was the importance of safety for themselves and their children. Creating a new environment with less fear and risk of abuse were important aspects for all participants. All participants also expressed primarily negative emotions when describing their experience in trying to obtain a protection order.
- ✓ Overall, participants felt a strong connection to SASA, its employees, and the services and support they have provided them through these difficult times. Participants in the interviews were repeatedly grateful for SASA.

Petitioners were more likely to have their protection order affidavit awarded than denied.



Petitioners who experienced sexual and/or physical abuse were somewhat more likely to have their protection order affidavit awarded.



Program Recommendations

- ✓ A focus on older individuals (38+ years old).
- ✓ A focus on petitioners with respondents who are of African American or White ethnicities.
- ✓ Outreach to Spanish-Speaking individuals is recommended
- ✓ Proactive approaches, such as assessments and trauma-informed trainings, should be adopted to focus on individuals contemplating getting a protection order and supporting them in the best possible ways.
- ✓ Trainings for staff on understanding client experiences, therefore creating affidavits with clients that are as explicit as possible.

Limitations

Limitations for the quantitative piece included a small sample size (n=64). Lack generalizability is another limitation. Qualitative data was limited by the questions asked of the participants and what they chose to disclose. Researcher bias may be another limitation.

References

1. Spouse Abuse Sexual Assault Crisis Center (SASA). (n.d.). Retrieved from www.sasacenter.org
2. U.S. Census Bureau. (2016). ACS demographic and housing estimates 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-year estimates.

*For a full list of references, please contact sconnett@unomaha.edu

Acknowledgements

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