

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF PRINCIPAL FINDINGS

The overall objective of the OVW Grant to Encourage Arrest Policies and Enforcement of Protection Orders (heretofore referred to as “Project”) was to provide better coordination of responses to domestic violence throughout the state of Idaho, specifically Judicial Districts Six and Seven. The broad goals of the Project were to reduce recidivism, increase victim safety, and improve inter-agency collaboration leading toward a model domestic violence court. The two primary initiatives of this Project were to establish a Domestic Violence Coordinator in each Judicial District and to create a “One Judge-One Family” model for domestic violence cases.

Fully examining the effect of the Project on the primary stakeholders required examination of all stakeholders’ involvement in the domestic violence courts who seek to assist victims of domestic violence. The stakeholders included in the evaluation were Judges, Probation Officers, Domestic Violence Coordinators (D.V.C.), Victim Witness Coordinators (V.W.C.), Trial Court Administrators, Family Court Services Coordinators, community service providers, and of course, the victims themselves. Five primary evaluation variables were identified and assessed, namely (1) Increase Collaboration Among Service Providers, (2) Increase Timeliness of Victim Access to Effective Social Services, (3) Increase Victims’ Understanding of the Legal Process, (4) Increase Victims’ Engagement and Follow Through in their Cases, and (5) Increase Defendant Compliance and Decrease Defendant Recidivism. Data was collected using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Our evaluations methods were firmly grounded in the value of seeking multiple perspectives and sources of information.

Qualitative Methods and Results

The qualitative methodology conducted for this evaluation was guided by *interpretive interactionism* because it is best suited to exploring relationships between personal issues and the public policies and institutions that are created to attend to these issues. Judges, Probation Officers, Domestic Violence Coordinators, Victim Witness Coordinators, Family Court Services Coordinators, Trial Court Administrators, and community service providers were interviewed in separate focus groups. One to one interviews took place with a total of nine victims to create a safer environment for sharing experiences of the Project.

Data from all the individual interviews and focus groups was analyzed using open, axial, and selective coding. Based on the qualitative analysis, four overall transcendent themes emerged that reflected the impact of the Project across stakeholder groups, namely *Centralization via Domestic Violence Coordinator*, *Facilitative Conditions of Domestic Violence Coordinator*, *Increasing Offender Accountability*, and *Increasing Court Expediency*. Interestingly, there was a lot of continuity among the perspectives of the stakeholders, thereby suggesting that the Project’s initiatives were being experienced in similar ways for victims, Judges, Probation Officers, Trial Court Administrators, Family Court Service Coordinators, Domestic Violence Coordinators, community service providers, and Victim Witness Coordinators.

Centralization via Domestic Violence Coordinator

The role of the Domestic Violence Coordinator is seen as the central cog or “hub” in the “wheel” of stakeholders involved in domestic violence cases within the framework of the judicial context. As the central hub, the Domestic Violence Coordinator provides valuable linkage between court personnel, service providers, and victims and defendants alike. Information is gathered and transmitted along the various spokes to the relevant stakeholders. All spokes of the wheel are equally supported by, and

dependent upon, the neutral role of the Domestic Violence Coordinator hub. Again, all of this is contextualized within the decision making function of district judges.

Increasing Offender Accountability

With the Domestic Violence Coordinator viewed as not only accessible but also a valuable resource, the larger impact of the role of the Domestic Violence Coordinator was experienced in both the Sixth and Seventh Judicial Districts. Across all stakeholders, victims included, discussion of the Domestic Violence Coordinator's impact focused on increased knowledge and understanding of all parties. A number of stakeholders directly related the impact on knowledge and understanding facilitated by the Domestic Violence Coordinator as increasing respondent/defendant accountability and the overall efficiency of the court. The Probation Officers especially addressed the increased level of accountability for offenders as they more efficiently through domestic violence evaluations and subsequent treatment.

Facilitative Conditions of Domestic Violence Coordinators

Beyond the mere existence of the Domestic Violence Coordinators, the knowledge brought to the domestic violence court services, and activities provided by the Domestic Violence Coordinators clearly places their role as serving as the central "cog" or "hub." During interviews, a variety of stakeholders identified what will be called "facilitative conditions." Facilitative conditions can metaphorically be viewed as the lubricant for participants' progression through the array of services. The facilitative conditions address the human qualities and human relations skills that the Domestic Violence Coordinator embodied which clearly allowed successful progression through court activities for victims. These facilitative conditions expressed by the Domestic Violence Coordinators contributed to victims feeling more empowered and safe. They experienced the Domestic Violence Coordinator's non-judgmental approach as broadening their perception of choices and personal rights. The Judges highlighted the neutrality facilitative condition as well, and they framed it as an integral component to the effectiveness of the Domestic Violence Coordinators' roles.

Increasing Court Expediency

A final qualitative theme that played a significant role in increasing the court's efficiency was the court's "One Judge-One Family" principle (heretofore, "One Judge"). This principle assists in organizing all court related events for an individual to be seen by the same judge. There may be a no-contact order, but also a divorce case, along with a misdemeanor battery charge. If so, the same judge would preside over each case. The primary benefit of One Judge is increased efficiency. Having all the information available to a Judge allows for better decision making. For the victim witness coordinator, operating with the One Judge principles saves him/her time from going to court multiple times per week. With greater efficiency also comes greater consistency. Having access to all relevant court case information, judges are able to make decisions in each case that are congruent with each other. This, in turn, enhances the timeliness and expedient use of court resources. An added benefit of One Judge, not necessarily identified as a primary reason for developing the system, is defendant comfort with and familiarity with the judge. Given the fact that one judge handles all court cases, defendants develop trust along with the familiarity gained by facing the same judge. This familiarity, coupled with increased trust, can potentially influence defendants' agreement with a judges' decision and follow through with treatment requirements.

Quantitative Methods and Results

Quantitative methods involved survey analysis of victims' and service providers' perceptions. A survey assessing victims' perceptions functioned as an Exit Survey exploring the victims' level of perceived benefit and effectiveness of the Project, while the focus of the Service Provider Survey was to assess service providers' perspectives on collaboration among service providers, accessibility of the Domestic Violence Coordinators, victim and perpetrator access to services, efficiency of court system, offender accountability, impact of "One Judge-One Family," and overall quality of services.

In the Sixth and Seventh Districts, eighty victims (51 from the Sixth District and 29 from the Seventh District) provided informed consent to participate in the evaluation process since September 2007. Due to some of the addresses being undeliverable, we had a usable pool of 76 participants. Of the 76 victims who were contacted by the evaluators, 31 victims (40.8% response rate) have provided quantitative data regarding their experiences with the court. The overall average score for all respondents was $M = 97.10$ with a standard deviation of 14.02 (Sixth District: $M = 95.08$, $sd = 16.46$; Seventh District: $M = 100.04$, $sd = 8.52$). These scores suggest an overall high level of satisfaction with the role of the Domestic Violence Coordinator in terms of access to information and resources, the degree of respect and trust experienced with the DVC, consistency of the court system, and perceived usefulness of court services.

For more description of the data, the items were explored in terms of the highest quartile scores and the lowest quartile scores. Overall, victims in this evaluation reported being most satisfied with the relational support from the Domestic Violence Coordinator. The high levels of satisfaction with the level of comfort with the DVC in both districts could potentially explain the overall high scores of satisfaction with the overall court system.

The items in the lowest quartile indicated the issues with which victims felt the least satisfied. It is important to note that the lowest average score for an item in this quartile analysis was 3.36 which still indicates an average level of satisfaction as described by the Likert scale. Overall, the areas of least satisfaction related to timeliness of the court process, access to relevant community services, confusion about the legal process, and lack of access to information about partner's behavior and court case.

Out of the 20 potential service providers across both districts, ten service providers completed the survey. The mean score on the Service Provider Survey was 65.78 with a standard deviation 9.79 and a range from 41 to 74. The potential range of scores on the survey was 16 to 77. This suggests that the mean score for the participating service providers indicates high levels of satisfaction with the court services, role of the Domestic Violence Coordinator, and "One Judge-One Family" model. From a case coordination perspective, the service provider respondents identified increased linkages between resources and services, more streamlining in court services, increased efficiency, and attention to "loose ends" as positive aspects of the Domestic Violence Coordinators' impact. One comment related to the case-by-case approach suggests that continued efforts to systematically integrate these changes are necessary. Key recommendations from service providers focus on maintaining the Domestic Violence Coordinator positions, increasing neutrality regarding referral to service providers, increasing the level of monitoring of service providers, and developing legislative policies for custody issues in domestic violence cases. It is noteworthy that the service providers themselves are requesting more accountability and monitoring of their service provision quality.

Another source of quantitative data was the review of N.C.O. and C.P.O. violations from July 2006 to June 2008. This timeframe captures violations before the inception of the Project as well as violations since the Project has been implemented. In Bonneville, Bannock, and Jefferson Counties, the

number of N.C.O. and C.P.O. violations for July 2006 to December 2006 was 181, while the number of violations from January 2007 to June 2007 was 164. From the time period of July 2007 to December 2007, the number of N.C.O. and C.P.O. violations decreased to 126. They arrived at an even lower number for the period of January 2008 to June 2008 ($N = 120$). Based on the feedback by stakeholders, it is possible that as offenders/respondents gain more understanding about the legal process and develop an expectation of what the Judge will do in response to certain behavior, there is an increased likelihood to be accountable and follow through on the Judges' orders. As the Domestic Violence Coordinator shares more information with offenders/respondents and as the Judges increase their consistency through the "One Judge-One Family" model, there is more motivation for the offender/respondent to comply with court orders.

Recommendations

1. The Domestic Violence Coordinators are perceived as vital to the various stakeholders in the court system. They have proven to be invaluable to judges, victims, and service providers. The benefits of their efforts to increase collaboration, case coordination, and expediency of the courts have been clearly articulated across stakeholders. We recommend that the Domestic Violence Coordinator positions be maintained in the Sixth and Seventh Judicial Districts. The neutrality of the Domestic Violence Coordinators needs to be continually cultivated, so that victims and perpetrators perceive the Domestic Violence Coordinators as a resource. Overall, victims in this evaluation reported being most satisfied with the relational support from the Domestic Violence Coordinator. Thus, it is critical that the Domestic Violence Coordinator's schedule be protected to ensure that personalized meetings and engagement with victims remains a priority.
2. Due to the evolving nature of the role of the Domestic Violence Coordinator, it is paramount that feedback is requested from all stakeholders as future tasks and roles are identified. Clear communication to the various stakeholders about any future changes to the Domestic Violence Coordinator role will also decrease any issues of role ambiguity among all stakeholders. This will ensure that the high level of case coordination and communication is maintained and enhanced. It is a testament to the commitment of the Domestic Violence Coordinators and all stakeholders to increasing the level and quality of court services that any initial negative reactions or doubts have been transformed into an appreciation of the current function of the Domestic Violence Coordinator.
3. Another method for increasing case coordination and ongoing collaboration is to create and maintain interdisciplinary teams. Several stakeholders reported that this was initially in place but the meetings dissolved due to scheduling conflicts. The service providers and probation officers also connected the existence of multidisciplinary teams to increased offender accountability.
4. The court system needs to continue with its efforts to facilitate relationships with community based service providers. At times, some service providers expressed dissatisfaction with the level of communication and collaboration.
5. The inception of the neutral Domestic Evaluation process in the Seventh Judicial District has been welcomed and is considered to be increasing the fairness and efficiency of the court system. Maintaining this program in the Seventh Judicial District is suggested, and the feasibility of instituting a similar protocol in the Sixth Judicial District needs to be assessed.
6. In regards to offenders, stakeholders identified the need for increased monitoring of offenders by probation officers. This of course is connected to available resources and current case loads of probation officers. Another area was to increase the monitoring of offender-based treatment programs in the community to ensure a minimum level of quality.