

SNAPSHOT

Using Data in Domestic Violence Work

Spotlight on the Ohio Domestic Violence Network



Professionals in the domestic violence field looking to build individual or organizational data and evaluation capacity are often interested in learning about how others have used data to inform their work. As part of an evidence-based pilot program, the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence: Child Protection and Custody (Resource Center) worked with two pilot sites that had programs or practices already in place that could benefit from enhanced data collection, evaluation, and general capacity building. This snapshot highlights the experiences of the Ohio Domestic Violence Network (ODVN) in using existing data to understand their clients' needs better and to help guide their future work in advocating for domestic violence survivors.

The Ohio Experience

Data and evaluation-related needs. The ODVN houses a Legal Assistance for Victims Program (Program) which provides legal help to financially eligible survivors of domestic violence, sexual violence, and stalking. When the Resource Center began working with the ODVN, there were no specific protocols or plans in place for collecting data that may help inform the legal assistance Program. However, data relevant to the program were in fact being collected and available from two main sources: a screening tool used by domestic violence advocates assigned to Program cases and a database provided by a primary funder, the U.S. Department of Justice, for reporting purposes. ODVN and Program staff were interested in utilizing the data that were already available to understand better the characteristics of their cases and the clients they serve and to obtain a baseline assessment of the outcomes of cases handled

by the Program. There also was a more general interest in how the existing data could be used to improve the Program and what other data should be collected.

The process. Resource Center research staff worked with the Program Director to identify existing sources of data and how these data could be used to help answer key Program questions. In addition to the screening tool and database information, custody case files also were identified as a source of relevant data, particularly pertaining to case outcomes. These were requested and obtained from the court after confidentiality agreements were signed. Program staff also expressed interest in learning more about Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) recommendations in their custody cases, specifically if and how GALs considered domestic violence in their custody evaluations and recommendations and if judges tended to follow GAL recommendations in litigated custody cases. Files from custody cases handled by the Program again helped provide some data to answer these questions. Resource Center staff visited Ohio to collect the data elements of interest from the data sources; however, such data elements might also have been collected by Program staff, volunteers, university partners, et al. Resource Center staff also assisted with data analysis.

Findings and lessons learned. This initial exploration of available data yielded many findings of interest to the program. Examples of some of these findings and lessons learned are included in the following table.

Finding	Lesson Learned
Overall, clients had lower income than expected.	Staff intend to use this information to secure more funding for the program.
More than half of survivors were respondents rather than petitioners in their custody case. Compared to cases in which survivors were the petitioners, respondent survivors were less likely to be awarded sole custody and more likely to be awarded joint custody with their abuser.	This has implications for training Program attorneys and for the strategies staff use in cases involving respondents who are survivors of domestic violence.
The level of violence that clients had experienced was more severe than expected. Cases involving more severe/higher risk violence were more likely to result in an order of sole custody to the survivor than other cases	This information indicated to staff that they need to dedicate more time to safety planning with clients and also that the disclosure and presentation of the scope of violence that has occurred may be critical to the outcome of the case.
As staff had expected, GALs often did not consider domestic violence appropriately in making custody recommendations, sometimes discounting the DV or ignoring the DV altogether.	Staff can leverage these findings to advocate for more training for GALs on domestic violence and how DV affects family dynamics.

The ODVN identified several pieces of data that were not currently being collected but that may help inform their programming (e.g., data regarding child maltreatment and involvement with the criminal justice system) and additional analyses they would like to pursue (e.g., the relationship between the time

program attorneys spend with clients and case outcomes). The ODVN and the Program staff plan to continue to enhance data collection and analysis efforts to determine: 1) the extent to which any implemented changes have been effective; and 2) how to improve Program effectiveness continually.



A project of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges



ABOUT THE RESOURCE CENTER

The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges houses The National Resource Center on Domestic Violence: Child Protection and Custody. The Resource Center is devoted to helping domestic violence survivors and professionals such as judges, attorneys, social workers, and domestic violence advocates who work with survivors in the child protection and custody systems. In addition to providing training and technical assistance, the Resource Center also conducts research and evaluation projects focused on the intersection of domestic violence and child protection or child custody. Contact us by telephone at (800) 527-3223 or by email at fvinfo@ncjfcj.org.