Community Advocacy Project: A Psychosocial Empowerment Intervention for Women with Abusive Partners

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What We Know

- Intimate partner violence against women is pervasive and severe
  - Intentionally involves isolating and disempowering women through tactics of power and control
  - Is traumatic
  - Is often condoned or supported by societal structures and systems
- Survivors are active helpseekers, who report needing a variety of help from their communities to keep themselves and their children safe
- Psychosocial interventions must remember the SOCIAL – move beyond the individual
The Community Advocacy Project

- Created in collaboration with IPV survivors in 1986, implemented 1986–present
- Advocates worked one-on-one with women, 6–8 hr per week, for 10 weeks
- Advocates were extensively trained paraprofessionals who worked with women in the women’s communities
- The participants guided the intervention
- Empowerment model
How Change Was Sustained:

- Advocate’s role was to “put herself out of a job”
- Advocate reminded woman of time frame
- Advocate involved woman in all aspects of the intervention
- Advocate was proactive, transferred skills, focused on woman’s strengths, and focused on creating positive changes
Primary Study Design

- True experimental design (N=278), with women randomly assigned to condition when they exited shelter
- Women in control group received “services as usual”
- Longitudinal design with six time points: pre-intervention, post-intervention, and 6, 12, 18, and 24-month followup
Women who worked with advocates would be more effective in obtaining desired community resources and social support.

These “protective changes” would result in higher quality of life, decreased depression, and reduced re-abuse.

For women wanting to end the relationship, working with an advocate would significantly help them accomplish this.
Major Constructs Measured

- Physical abuse
- Psychological abuse
- Quality of life
- Depression
- Social support
- Effectiveness in obtaining resources
- Difficulty in obtaining resources
Participant Retention

- 95% post interview
- 94% six month followup interview
- 94% twelve month followup interview
- 95% eighteen month followup interview
- 95% twenty four month followup interview

Participant Characteristics

- 45% African American, 42% Non-Hispanic White, 7% Latina, 2% Asian American
- Ages ranged from 17 – 61, mean of 29 years
- 74% had at least one child living with them
- 27% married to assailant, 42% living with but not married to assailant, 7% involved with but not living together, 20% no longer involved with assailant at time of abuse
- 75% had ended or intended to end the relationship at shelter exit (pre-intervention)
Women in the Experimental Condition:

- reported being satisfied or very satisfied with the intervention (98%)
- were more likely to work on obtaining education, employment, resources for their children, financial aid, childcare, and social support than were women in the control group who had mentioned wanting to work in these areas
Short-term Impact of the Advocacy Intervention

- At post-intervention, women in E group:
  - were more effective getting resources they needed
  - experienced less physical violence
  - were less depressed
  - were higher on social support and quality of life
Long-term Impact of the Advocacy Intervention

- Followup repeated measures MANOVA’s were then done on each dependent variable:
- Women in E group experienced less physical abuse at post and 24 month followup
- Significant time effect on psych abuse, with declines in both groups across time
- Kaplan–Meier event history analysis: More than twice as many women receiving intervention experienced no violence across 2 yrs compared to women in Control group (24% v 11%)
Quality of Life: Experimental group had significantly higher scores at post, 18- and 24-month followup; trends ($p < .10$) at all other times

Social Support: Experimental group was consistently higher across time, although within-time difference only significant at post

Depression: No effect
Difficulty in Obtaining Resources Over Time

- Repeated measures MANOVA at 6- through 24-month followup
- Difficulty declined over time for both groups, with more steep decline for Exp. Group (significantly different at 24-month)

Involvement with Assailant Over Time

- 75% reported at pre (shelter exit) that they had ended or wanted to end their relationships
- Of these women, 92% were successful by 24-month followup
- Women who worked with advocates were more successful (96% vs 87%; p < .03)
- Of the 25% women who had wanted to maintain the relationship, 55% had left by 24-months
How Positive Change Occurred

- Longitudinal latent structural equation modeling was used to test the mediation effects of the intervention on outcomes over time.
- The intervention first resulted in women successfully obtaining desired resources and increasing their social support, which enhanced their quality of life.
- Improved quality of life completely mediated the impact of CAP on later reabuse.

Were Some Interventions More Effective than Others?

- Advocacy interventions were unique to the individual needs of the women participating.

- No cluster differences for the major outcome variables of social support, quality of life, abuse, depression, or access to resources.

What Else Accounted for Differences Over Time?

- No psychological factors within survivors contributed to further increased or decreased risk of abuse.
- Women least likely to experience reabuse over time were the women intending to leave the relationship who also received the advocacy services.
- Working with advocates reduced risk of abuse for women remaining in the relationship as well (after 6mo followup).
What Predicts Assault by an Ex–Partner?

- For more than a third of the women, ending the relationship did not mean an end to the violence.
- Violence by an ex–partner was predicted by: frequency of assaults at prior time point, his sexual jealousy, the length of the relationship prior to breakup, his physical proximity, and her relationship with someone else.

Overall Conclusions

- A short-term, strengths-based, woman-centered advocacy intervention can set into motion a trajectory of positive change in the lives of women with abusive partners.
- Immediate access to resources, coupled with social support, resulted in higher “quality of life” over time, which reduced risk of re-abuse.
- Society’s treatment of women impacts their risk of intimate partner violence; must be addressed in psychosocial interventions.
Overall Conclusions

- The Community Advocacy Project being replicated with adolescent girls, being tested in a DV program. Future plans to work with survivors upon release from jail.
- Short-term, inexpensive, reflects work being done across a number of countries now.
- Relies on: resources being available in communities; having policies and laws in place that can support women.