

Building Community Partnerships to End Interpersonal Violence: A Collaboration of the Schools of Social Work, Law, and Nursing

Violence Against Women

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Abstract

The article discusses the University of Texas at Austin's (UT Austin) Institute on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (IDVSA), an institution that was established in 2001. IDVSA is a collaboration of the Schools of Social Work, Law, and Nursing, and 150 community affiliates. Recognizing that interpersonal violence does not occur in a vacuum, the IDVSA operates within an ecological framework in which explanations for interpersonal violence acknowledge that individuals and families are nested in larger mezzo and macro systems, and factors such as gender, poverty, ethnicity, religion, disability, sexual orientation, and immigration status play influential roles in our understanding of these issues. The overarching goal is to advance knowledge and meaningful practice in the field through partnerships with survivors and community practitioners. Specifically, the mission is to advance the knowledge related to domestic violence and sexual assault in order to end interpersonal violence. IDVSA seeks to achieve its mission by focusing on three key areas: (1) rigorous research and scholarship on domestic violence and sexual assault; (2) comprehensive training, technical assistance, and information dissemination to the practitioner community and the community at large; and (3) substantial collaboration with our community partners. This article summarizes the authors' pursuit.

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History, Impetus, and Mission

The Institute on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (IDVSA) began in early 2001 by two researchers at the University of Texas at Austin's (UT Austin) School of Social Work, who had significant direct service and practice experience with survivors prior to joining the UT Austin. These founding leaders, with support from the School of Social Work administration, convened a meeting of other social work faculty members and staff whose research agendas also included research on violence against women and children. Many in this small group of eight were licensed social workers still involved in direct services to survivors through volunteer work.

The IDVSA founders asserted that there was a significant need for the development of a coordinated knowledge-building effort on domestic violence and sexual assault and for this capacity to be built in partnership with the practice community. Collaboration, community service, and dissemination of information would be the keys to the success of any effort of this kind. Based on their depth of professional experience, they assumed that a multidisciplinary, researcher-practitioner collaborative approach that used an ecological perspective would be the most effective strategy to further develop their knowledge and to develop competencies across the university community. This small group of eight met several times to brainstorm how to translate these ideas into action and to plan initial activities.

Existing professional relationships and contacts that stemmed from the researchers' direct service and academic experiences were used to identify potential allies, stakeholders, and other collaborators. In the late summer of 2001, a diverse group of domestic violence and sexual assault professionals and survivors were invited to participate in a large brainstorming meeting.

More than 20 participants attended this first meeting, many of whom were executive directors, staff, and survivors from local and statewide programs. This group became known as the "Advisory Council." At this meeting, members recognized that the academic community could meaningfully contribute to efforts to end interpersonal violence by advancing informed research and systematically training students. As a result, the IDVSA was born.

The IDVSA's emergence was well timed for three specific reasons. At the same time IDVSA was forming, a small group of faculty and staff members were working to develop an official university protocol to address intimate partner violence and, as a final result of their work, Voices Against Violence (VAV), a U.S. Department of Justice-funded program, also began. VAV provides direct services to students and allies experiencing intimate partner abuse, sexual assault, and stalking, as well as training and outreach including an interactive theatre dialogue by peer educators. Since their inception, the principal investigators, directors, and staff of each program have been involved in and supportive of

both efforts and throughout the years have collaborated on numerous complimentary projects.

The second event that contributed to the overwhelming support of IDVSA's development was the opening of the new shelter and expanded direct services for survivors and victims. SafePlace, Inc. opened a 100-person capacity shelter, child care center, charter school, and transitional housing facilities. The agency also expanded their outreach services such as their school-based programs, services for people with disabilities, response to sexual assault and other counseling services, and legal advocacy, to name a few. At the initial meeting of the advisory council, the then-director of SafePlace proposed that for the first time survivor and victim services were comprehensively addressed and agency staff had the luxury of contributing to the research agenda.

Finally, funders (federal and state governmental entities, local and state organizations such as the United Way, and private funders and foundations) began to require direct services and statewide advocacy agencies to further document the efficacy of their services through output and outcome evaluation. But perhaps more important, many administrators and practitioners began to critically explore whether their efforts and programs resulted in survivor and victim restoration and ultimately in their missions to end interpersonal violence. Further research was needed to answer these essential questions.

The mission of the IDVSA is to advance the knowledge related to domestic violence and sexual assault in order to end interpersonal violence. IDVSA seeks to achieve its mission by focusing on three key areas: (1) rigorous research and scholarship on domestic violence and sexual assault; (2) comprehensive training, technical assistance, and information dissemination to the practitioner community and the community at large; and (3) substantial collaboration with our community partners.

The strength and uniqueness of the IDVSA is due to its empirically based inquiry, multidisciplinary approach, and researcher-practitioner collaborative efforts. By supporting research on interpersonal violence, best practices can be identified. Applied research and the exchange of information between researchers and practitioners become the focus. This is achieved by supporting practitioners to conduct research themselves and funding the efforts of new and seasoned investigators. Also, infusing interpersonal violence across the university's curriculum has increased awareness and engendered a focus on prevention. IDVSA's curriculum writer worked with faculty members in English, statistics, psychology, business, and women's studies to accomplish this goal. This effort involved the selection of readings and development of homework, field trips, and other graded assignments as class requirements and the infusion of content on interpersonal violence in lectures. It also involved conversations with these faculty members about how to appropriately handle reactions to the materials and appropriate referral information. This multipronged approach allows students who would not normally be trained in interpersonal violence to incorporate this information into their personal and future professional lives.

Although Austin had a long history of collaboration among service providers when the IDVSA was formed, the University of Texas at Austin and its faculty were only sporadically involved with the greater Austin community. IDVSA was developed as a mechanism to formalize and strengthen such cooperation.

Organizational Structure

The University of Texas at Austin is a comprehensive Carnegie I research university with a broad mission that includes undergraduate and graduate education, research, and public service. The high quality of faculty research is reflected in scholarly contributions to science and US\$400 million in sponsored projects awarded annually. Ninety organized research units exist on campus. The School of Social Work at University of Texas at Austin, one of 15 colleges at UT, is the oldest state-supported school of social work in the Southwestern United States. Now in its sixth decade, the school maintains its responsiveness through outstanding educational programs, valuable research, and community partnership programs. According to *U.S. News and World Report* 2008, the UT School of Social Work is ranked sixth among all the Schools of Social Work with a graduate program in the country (The Consus Group, 2008).

The Institute of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault is housed in the UT School of Social Work. IDVSA is one of 10 institutes located within the UT School of Social Work. All of these institutes are under the research arm of the School of Social Work, the Center for Social and Behavioral Sciences (CSBR), formerly the Center for Social Work Research (CSWR). The Associate Dean for Research serves as the CSBR director.

The purpose of CSBR is to provide an environment that facilitates interdisciplinary, scientifically rigorous research endeavors. CSBR provides services to facilitate and support faculty research, including budget development, postaward management, research design and methods, statistics, computer utilization, data management, and the department review for the protection of human subjects. CSBR also disseminates information on research funding opportunities, holds research colloquia on a regular basis, maintains a research reference library, and produces a newsletter that highlights research activities in the School of Social Work. CSBR's administrative structure and support have been a critical element in IDVSA's many accomplishments and successes.

Dr. Noël Bridget Busch-Armendariz is one of IDVSA's two original founders and she serves as director. She is also an associate professor in social work. Early in its development and formal structuring, the multidisciplinary goals were initiated. Within the first year, clinical law professor Sarah Buel, who also cofounded the VAV, joined the team, and by the second year, a faculty member from the School of Nursing, Dr. Regina Jones Johnson, also became a codirector. Clinical law professor and director of the UT Law School's Domestic Violence Clinic, Jeana Lungwitz, has recently joined the IDVSA leadership team. (The role and significance of the UT Law School's Domestic Violence Clinic is discussed in more detail later in this article.) These partnerships helped to achieve the multidisciplinary agenda and are an important feature of the current structure.

IDVSA is staffed by an associate director of programs, an associate director for research, research staff, curriculum and grant writers, postdoctoral fellows, social work interns, and graduate research assistants. For the first time this year we will host an AMERICORPS VISTA volunteer in a collaborative effort with the UT Community Engagement Program, a Division of Diversity and Community Engagement. At its largest, IDVSA had a dozen staff members. The associate directors for programs and research and graduate assistants

are consistent IDVSA staff members. The number of additional research staff is dependent on the number of funded projects. IDVSA's director and codirectors (professors from social work, nursing, and law) provide their time and expertise pro bono.

In summer 2010, IDVSA moved into permanent space at UT SSW and CSBR. This pronouncement by the dean, given the serious lack of space at UT and in the School of Social Work and the number of institutes housed in the School of Social Work, indicates IDVSA's important contributions to the university, collaborative schools, and our community. These contributions may well include the success of securing external funding for research and infrastructure projects, a strong interdisciplinary collaboration across campus and with the broad community, and the recruitment and engagement of doctoral students and postdoctoral positions.

IDVSA Communication Strategies

IDVSA communicates with its stakeholders, affiliates, and other allies about what is happening in the violence community in many distinct ways. A few of these communication mechanisms are highlighted. IDVSA's newsletter, *The Voice*, is published 3 times a year. The publication focuses on innovative interventions by affiliates, emerging research, and the dissemination of other valuable information. Second, IDVSA also administers a listserv for its Austin affiliates and a listserv for members of the Council on Social Work Education's (CSWE) Violence Against Women and Their Children Symposium. The CSWE group consists of social work educators and researchers whose primary focus is domestic violence and sexual assault. These listservs are designed for the members to make announcements about events, employment, training, and other advocacy opportunities. Third, IDVSA also maintains a Web-based Learning Community for those individuals engaged in our projects and research. This resource provides a venue for dialogue, discourse, and technical assistance on topics related to interpersonal violence. Fourth, housed at the UT School of Social Work, IDVSA retains an extensive library of resources on interpersonal violence including books, manuscripts, and DVDs.

The National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence gifted this collection of more 9,000 items to UT SSW and IDVSA. To increase its accessibility to students, faculty, and advocates from UT and around the country, an implementation plan has been established for the contemporary pieces in the collection to become a part of the larger UT library system and the historical items to be archived at the University of Houston. The UT library catalog is available to anyone across the country online and to anyone in person. There is also a provision for access to books, videos, and other resources as a guest of the university. However, the university research databases can only be accessed by university-affiliated faculty or students. Therefore, IDVSA staff regularly access materials on behalf of our affiliates. Fifth, IDVSA staff are members of more than a dozen local and statewide task forces, such as the Office of the Attorney General's Sexual Assault Advisory Committee, the Texas Council on Family Violence's Public Policy Committee, and the Central Texas Coalition Against Human Trafficking, to name a few. Sixth, IDVSA also holds a series of lectures and trainings with the opportunity for attendees to earn low-cost continuing education units.

Seventh, we recently began a writing group in which researchers and practitioners provide support to each other in the development and provision of individual and collective writing projects. The support includes brainstorming or refinement of ideas, peer review, and assistance with data analysis and the development of findings. Finally, IDVSA holds a monthly organizational meeting for its affiliates at the School of Social Work. These monthly meetings serve an important organizational function for IDVSA and its affiliates to give agency updates, discuss important current events relevant to our work (e.g., the Eldorado Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints alleged child abuse case), and provide ongoing feedback and input toward our direction.

Financial Operations and Sustainability

Four major original funding sources helped the IDVSA establish itself: the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health, the Shield-Ayres Foundation, the RGK Foundation, and the Dean of the School of Social Work. The first infrastructure grant was given by the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health. This 3-year grant totaled approximately US\$120,000 and provided for the partial salary of one full-time staff member and several seed funding grants to researchers and practitioners to facilitate innovative and collaborative projects on interpersonal violence. As a result of this award, in November 2003, IDVSA hired a full-time project manager (now the associate director for program position) to provide consistent, quality administrative guidance as well as programmatic and fund development.

In 2003, the Shield-Ayres Foundation awarded US\$40,000 in funding over 2 years for infrastructure and program development and since that time has awarded another US\$20,000 to IDVSA. Also in 2003, Dean Barbara White of the UT School of Social Work awarded US\$10,000 to support our mission. In 2004, 2007, and again in 2010, the RGK Foundation made infrastructure awards to the IDVSA totaling US\$435,000. IDVSA's strength is due in large part to these foundations for their infrastructure grants as this funding has been critical for IDVSA's development, maturity, and steady growth toward our mission.

Additional income is generated through conferences and trainings and research grants and contracts for services (see discussion below). Finally, as a part of our strategic plan for sustainability, efforts were made to be included as a reoccurring expenditure in the Texas State budget. In 2007, with support from the Texas Association Against Sexual Assault (TAASA), IDVSA was named the recipient of US\$250,000 over the biennium of state funding to conduct research on sexual assault. However, the state law that passed (having to do with funds generated from the implementation of a US\$5 fee for everyone entering a sexual-oriented business in Texas, and not specifically about IDVSA) is being held up by an injunction, so these funds have not been distributed. Attorneys made arguments before the Texas Supreme Court in spring 2010, and a ruling is anticipated in 2011. However, many experts in Texas believe that the U.S. Supreme Court will be asked to consider this case, so it is unlikely to be resolved in the near future.

As part of a larger university and School of Social Work capital campaign and a strategy for sustainability, IDVSA staff recently set a fundraising goal of US\$2.25 million. Our financial goals are twofold: initiatives related to research and education, and collaboration.

The fundraising goals related to research and education include the establishment of an endowed chair, an endowed professorship, fellowships for doctoral and postdoctoral work, and a learning center. Goals related to collaboration include a virtual learning community, international programs, certificate programs, and a research-to-practice symposium. Our fundraising target date is 2013. One of our persistent discussions is for UT to commit at least two FTEs to support IDVSA's infrastructure and staff positions. However, this specific goal is unlikely given our shrinking state allocations to higher education and sobering university budget cuts. Nonetheless, this issue will continue to be discussed during our strategic planning sessions.

Research Initiatives and Research Agenda

Similar to other scholars (Campbell, Dienemann, Kub, Wurmser, & Loy, 1999; Jordan, 2004a, 2004b; Riger, 1999), IDVSA staff and affiliates collaborated to establish a research agenda on interpersonal violence to guide our work. In IDVSA's first 8 years, staff has conducted nearly three-dozen research studies and other projects with approximately US\$3 million of external funding. Our research has varied from statewide prevalence studies of representative samples of Texans on sexual assault (funded by the Office of the Attorney General and the Texas Association Against Sexual Assault) and intimate partner violence (the former study is currently underway and is funded by the Texas Council on Family Violence), a statewide study on human trafficking (Busch-Armendariz, Heffron et al., 2008) and other topics, such as substance abuse (Busch-Armendariz, Bell, DiNitto, & Bohman, 2010), battering during pregnancy (Bell, Busch, Sanchez, & Tekippe, 2008), perpetration of sexual assault (DiNitto et al., 2008), typologies of human traffickers (Busch-Armendariz, Nsonwu, Heffron, Garza, & Hernandez, 2009), sexually oriented businesses (Kellison, Busch-Armendariz, & Jarrett, 2009), and publications that explore methodological considerations and concerns (Bell, Busch, & DiNitto, 2006; DiNitto et al., 2008), to name a few. We have used both quantitative and qualitative methods of inquiry.

The IDVSA principal investigators recognized the power imbalances inherent in the research process (Bell et al., 2004), and as a result wanted to develop a strategy for minimizing those imbalances and to establish a research agenda that would be useful and thoughtful for our community. The inherent power imbalances are complex but include a researcher's ability to make decisions about what questions to ask, how to ask those questions, and how to interpret the findings with little or no input from practitioners or others in the field. Of course, not all researchers are shortsighted, but many practitioners (rightfully so) criticize some researchers as misguided and out of touch and their findings as irrelevant and perhaps damaging to their clients.

At a 2001 meeting of the Advisory Council, names and contact information were gathered representing a diverse group, including representatives from survivors and people who had utilized services, health care, faith communities, law enforcement and courts, and other vital sectors. In November of 2001, 38 people attended two half-day meetings to brainstorm a research agenda on domestic violence and sexual assault for the greater Austin community. The focus of the first meeting was to identify current challenges and research

needs, and during the second meeting those ideas were prioritized (for a description of the research agenda, see Bell et al., 2004). In addition to establishing the research agenda, IDVSA researchers became recognized as an accessible university entity and as critical community stakeholders in the efforts to end interpersonal violence.

Since 2001, interested university researchers and members of the practice community continued to meet regularly to more fully develop the parameters and vision for IDVSA; create a more diverse group of affiliates; refine a strategic plan for activities, programs, and goals; and facilitate collaborations for in-kind donations from within the university. Today, the IDVSA has more than 150 affiliates. Our affiliates are engaged with IDVSA's activities through the use of its listservs, monthly meetings, offering of continuing education hours, and research projects. Most of the IDVSA activities to date have been informed by communication with its affiliates. For example, the sexual assault prevalence study, "A Health Study of Texans: A Focus on Sexual Assault," (Busch, Bell, DiNitto, & Neff, 2003), the first and only study of its kind in the State of Texas, was initiated through these connections. A statewide needs assessment on sexual assault and a statewide study about unreported sexual assault are underway. Similarly, the broadcast of a nationally produced videoconference on the prostitution of children in December of 2003 was requested by an affiliate. UT, given its technological capacities, was the most logical venue for this event.

Conferences, Programs, and Projects

Since its inception, the IDVSA has sponsored dozens of programs, projects, and events. Given the space limitations of this article, we have chosen to highlight six projects that illustrate our work with our community and as a response to community needs.

Establishing expertise as an ethical expert witness conference. In response to the increasing need for expert witnesses in intimate partner violence cases, IDVSA organized a small local expert witness training in 2003. The training originally evolved because of the large and growing number of requests that the IDVSA's director received for expert testimony. By 2005, the need for trained expert witnesses was apparent nationwide. IDVSA cosponsored its first national expert witness conference in 2005, and because of its resounding success cosponsored it again in 2007 and 2009 and will do so again in 2011. The UT Law School cosponsors the conference and provides free space and covers the cost of all meals and snacks and training materials. The National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence also cosponsors this event. This national training has evolved and currently teaches law enforcement officers, attorneys, advocates, and other participants about the use of expert witnesses in civil and criminal intimate partner abuse cases (such as homicide, child custody, and immigration cases) with the aim that attendees will develop their skills as expert witnesses. Curriculum topics include relevant state and federal laws, rules of evidence, discovery rules, ethical considerations for lawyers and experts, case preparation and trial tips, writing expert reports, and typical challenges. The conference boasts a stellar faculty of researchers, lawyers and judges, psychologists, advocates, prosecutors, and experienced experts, all who speak on a pro bono basis in order to keep the conference fee to a minimum. Participants hear from IDVSA partners and UT Austin professors in an interactive

format, along with mock expert direct and cross-examinations, and an opportunity to practice what they have observed.

Trapped by Poverty, Trapped by Abuse conference. In 2003, IDVSA partnered with the School of Social Work at the University of Michigan, the Center for Impact Research (Chicago), and the Schiller, DuCanto and Fleck Family Law Center at DePaul University College of Law (Chicago) to cosponsor the national *Trapped by Poverty* conference in Austin. The focus of this conference was to address the intersectionality of poverty, race, and abuse. Dr. Jody Raphael with the Center for Impact Research and DePaul University College of Law and Dr. Rich Tolman with University of Michigan School of Social Work continued to take the lead on the overall coordination of the conference agenda, and IDVSA staff and UT faculty members and students served in creative and administrative support roles. Conference participants examined the matrix of federal and state laws and policies affecting the economic empowerment efforts of many abuse victims. A second conference was scheduled in 2005 but was cancelled because of the devastating impact of Hurricane Katrina and the need for domestic violence and sexual assault program staff and universities to lend their support and resources toward recovery.

Women in prison subcommittee. Several social work and law faculty had previous substantial work with battered women in prison, and there was a growing need to broker the criminal justice system on their behalf. Initiated at the UT Law Domestic Violence Clinic, students were recruited to respond to battered victim-inmates convicted of a variety of crimes, who asked for help in preparing their parole cases. Law students gathered trial transcripts; interviewed family members and witnesses; assembled the parole packets, including 8- to 10-page life summaries; and arranged for employment and housing for post-prison release. The IDVSA's PIs and affiliates contributed written expert witness analyses for the parole packets, including a contextual analysis of battering and its effects with an explanation of why a victim might stay with an abuser, the coercion and coopting by batterers that involve victims in their crimes, substance abuse, and other myths and misconceptions about intimate partner violence that would assist the parole board in making their decisions. In addition, social work faculty facilitated weekly therapeutic and psychoeducational support groups for survivors at one of the women's prisons located about 2 hr outside of Austin.

Immigration and domestic violence clinic cases. The UT Law School Immigration Clinic and several other organizations in Austin (also IDVSA affiliates) advocate on behalf of undocumented immigrant survivors and victims. Under the direction of immigration attorneys, IDVSA staff and affiliates have written reports and testified in federal immigration court. The proceedings are usually related to the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) policy that provides for immigration relief for battered immigrants. Nearly one dozen women have been granted immigrant relief through this project. The UT Law School's Domestic Violence Clinic also provides a variety of legal services to survivors and victims. In the same way that IDVSA assisted immigration attorneys, IDVSA staff and affiliates have worked on the advocacy teams with these lawyers and law students from the UT Law School's Domestic Violence Clinic.

UT Community Sabbatical Program. In 2005, UT established the Community Sabbatical Research Leave Program. This program, administered by the UT Humanities Institute, provides financial support for staff members of a nonprofit agency to pursue a question or problem related to their organization and its constituency. In addition to supporting a paid leave for the community recipient, the program also provides access to UT resources, such as the library and its database, program staff support, and an honorarium to a faculty consultant to guide the recipient to answer his or her query. IDVSA's director advertised this grant to all its affiliates and assisted two community members in their independent applications. Applicants were granted this very competitive award for the years in which they applied. During the program's first year, an award was made to Torie Camp of the Texas Association Against Sexual Assault (TAASA). Ms. Camp used her sabbatical to determine the economic impact of sexual assault on the state of Texas. Ms. Camp worked with the IDVSA director and a faculty expert in economics to answer her question. Those calculations have been used to inform legislators and other policy makers about the cost of sexual assault in our community. A year later, a second project was awarded to Gail Rice of SafePlace, Inc., the agency that provides direct services to survivors and victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. In collaboration with IDVSA's director and a faculty member expert in restorative justice, Ms. Rice explored the efficacy of implementing restorative justice principles as an innovative response to domestic violence. This project's findings are applied in current discussions for an implementation of a new program by SafePlace. This program is ongoing and we anticipate initiating and supporting another application in the near future.

Direct assistance to survivors. The IDVSA helps coordinate massive donations by UT faculty, staff, and students to survivors. Whether organizing with local supermarkets to donate Thanksgiving baskets of groceries or with students to donate clothing, computers, housewares, and miscellaneous items, IDVSA staff assist in providing many survivors with much-needed aid. The UT Law School's Survivor Support Network, a student organization on campus, and IDVSA helped garner faculty, student, and staff support for a variety of financial empowerment programs to help impoverished victims in the university and Austin communities. Students hold an annual fundraising event for this program, and survivors' requests for assistance are reviewed and decided by students. Business students also assist survivors with a variety of employment-seeking skills, such as resume writing and role playing for interviews. Many computers have been donated to ensure that victims and their children increase their educational options.

Concluding Thoughts

The benefits, strengths, and challenges of a multidisciplinary partnership are many. First, the collaboration between the disciplines of social work, law, and nursing provides a unique combination of intellect and theoretical frameworks. There have been vast accomplishments as a result of this university-based collaboration. Specific to the university setting, given the prevalence of domestic violence and sexual assault it is clear that

survivors are enrolled as students in our classes and that our graduates will work with survivors in their educational and professional settings. For this reason, it is crucial to integrate knowledge about interpersonal violence and related issues into the educational processes and to enhance the competencies of university faculty, staff, and students for service provision. This integration is taking place because of the collaboration between social work, law, and nursing.

Perhaps more important is the recognition that academia does not and should not operate in a vacuum, particularly when it comes to addressing these issues. A thoughtful, comprehensive research agenda on interpersonal violence must include strong, active university–community and practitioner alliances. Therefore, many of our resources have been dedicated to the establishment of trusting, working relationships with our affiliates with *real* dialogue and discourse and *useable* outcomes. Consequently, the research process is not solely for the sake of curiosity. In the context of this collaborative effort, research becomes a means toward active change still required to eliminate the pervasive crimes of domestic violence and sexual assault. Our goal is to advance knowledge and meaningful practice in this field. Research generated by IDVSA utilizes an ecological framework (Gitterman & Germain, 2008) to address interpersonal violence in which explanations for domestic violence and sexual assault consider that individuals and families are nested in larger mezzo and macro systems and factors such as gender, poverty, ethnicity, religion, disability, sexual orientation, and immigration status (Lockhart & Danis, 2010) and that these factors are significant mediators or moderators of the issue.

These underpinnings are not without their challenges. IDVSA serves as a resource for community members, including survivors, practitioners, advocates, academicians, and other citizens. Our contributions are centered on goals to provide research, education, and collaboration. Although we do not directly service survivors, IDVSA staff serve as expert witnesses, many are volunteers in local programs, and we indirectly serve survivors by providing referrals to our partners in direct service university organizations and community agencies. A consensus-building model takes considerable time and resources. Practitioners who are meeting the immediate and long-term needs of victims, offenders, and their communities often deem this process unreasonable. Although we have had the support of our individual deans and indirect support from the university, we have had to build and sustain ourselves without direct financial support from the university. At times, the fundraising for infrastructure has been daunting. Nonetheless, the advances in our field credited to IDVSA and other similar centers and institutes are critical. We will continue to forge ahead with our eye toward ending interpersonal violence.

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Bios

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