

A community considers a Family Justice Center: perspectives of stakeholders during the early phases of development

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Abstract:

Purpose

– Family Justice Centers, or “one-stop shops” that enable domestic violence victims to access a range of services at one location, are becoming increasingly common. However, there is a limited body of research examining the outcomes and planning processes of these Centers. The early phases of planning Centers are critical to their initial and ongoing success. The purpose of this paper is to discuss these issues.

Design/methodology/approach

– In total, 15 stakeholders in a community in the early phases of planning a Center were interviewed.

Findings

– Content analysis procedures were used to identify themes related to participants’ ideas about what the Family Justice Center should look like (e.g. services to include and perceived benefits and challenges for the Center), the steps required for planning it (e.g. identifying the purpose of the Center, getting key people involved, and building collaborations), and desired technologies.

Originality/value

– This paper is the first known research effort to examine the early phases of development in constructing a Family Justice Center.

Keywords: Domestic violence | Family Justice Center

Article:

In 2003, US President George W. Bush put forth the President's Family Justice Center Initiative to provide \$20 million to 15 communities to help them to establish pilot Family Justice Centers in communities across the country ([10] Townsend *et al.*, 2005; [11] United States Department of Justice Office on Violence Against Women (USDOJ OVW), 2007). This initiative used the San Diego Family Justice Center, which is considered to be the foremost Family Justice Center in the USA, as its model ([11] USDOJ OVW, 2007). According to the [4] Family Justice Center Alliance (FJCA, 2009b), as of 2009 there were at least 70 functioning Centers in the USA and abroad, and more than 100 local communities were in the planning process.

However, despite the growing number of Family Justice Centers across the USA and the world, there has been minimal research that examines the development processes involved in creating Family Justice Centers. The authors were unable to locate any published studies examining stakeholders' perspectives of Family Justice Centers early in the planning process. Because the early stages of planning are so crucial, research is needed to learn about stakeholders' perspectives that could help or hinder progress toward developing this resource in local communities. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to document the experiences and challenges of stakeholders in the planning phase of creating a Family Justice Center. Currently, whether a Center actually will be established in this community is unknown, and this uncertain future offers a unique vantage point for considering stakeholders' perspectives. By documenting stakeholders' perspectives now, a future retrospective analysis will allow for researchers and practitioners to identify possible influences on the success or "failure" of the community to develop the Family Justice Center. In addition, the stakeholder interviews described in this study may serve as a model approach for other communities as they complete the community needs assessment process involved in planning a Family Justice Center ([5] Gwinn and Strack, 2006).

The Family Justice Center model

This section presents an overview of the Family Justice Center model, a review of existing research on the goals and outcomes of these Centers, and a discussion of the critical importance of the early stages of planning a Family Justice Center. A Family Justice Center is "the co-location of a multi-disciplinary team of professionals who work together, under one roof, to provide coordinated services to victims of family violence" ([3] Family Justice Center Alliance (FJCA), 2009a, para. 1). These Centers are often referred to as "one-stop shops" for domestic violence victims ([10] Townsend *et al.*, 2005, p. 1). Services that may be housed in Family

Justice Centers include law enforcement, prosecutors, victim advocacy, counseling, safety planning, legal assistance, social workers, case management, healthcare services, housing assistance, benefits assistance, transportation resources, child support offices, women's resource Centers, play spaces for children, elder abuse services, culture-specific family services, job training, and community education and prevention ([2] Boyd, 2006; [3] FJCA, 2009a; [6] Hocking, 2007; [8] Olson and Parekh, 2010; [10] Townsend *et al.*, 2005). The development of a Center does not necessitate the development of new services, but rather it may involve a reorganization of services already in place ([10] Townsend *et al.*, 2005). In many Centers, all employees are paid and managed by their home agencies (e.g. [6] Hocking, 2007). Beyond the mere co-location of services, the Family Justice Center approach is designed to strengthen collaborations and inter-organizational partnerships among involved community organizations.

Without a Family Justice Center, in many cases, victims need to "shuttl(e) between multiple locations and (cut) through a variety of administrative red tape at a time when a family is in crisis and the issue of safety is immediate" ([10] Townsend *et al.*, 2005). Therefore, a Center is designed to "wrap victims in support and services and end the frustrating journey for victims of having to go from agency to agency, telling their story over and over again in order to get the help they need" ([4] FJCA, 2009b, para. 1). The goal is more seamless service provision for victims and their children. For example, a victim who enters a Family Justice Center could meet with a victim advocate, file a police report, talk about his/her case with a prosecutor, receive practical assistance (e.g. shelter and transportation), and get information on other community-based support resources ([3] FJCA, 2009a).

The US Department of Justice views the Family Justice Center model to be a best practice approach in responding to domestic violence ([3] FJCA, 2009a). However, the resources and structures of these Centers vary across communities. The following list includes the best practice approaches for developing Family Justice Centers: multidisciplinary services for victims and children are co-located; law enforcement agencies have pro-arrest or mandatory arrest policies for offenders; offenders are not permitted on the site of the Center; the community should already have trained professionals who work with domestic violence issues; elected officials and other community policy makers support the Center; a thorough planning process should guide the development of the Center; and the Center should have widespread support from community members ([11] USDOJ OVW, 2007).

Goals and documented outcomes of Family Justice Centers

The ultimate goals of Family Justice Centers are to promote victim safety and hold offenders accountable ([10] Townsend *et al.*, 2005). Several key objectives are often the foundation of efforts to develop such centers locally. First, Family Justice Centers aim to coordinate services across agencies in order to make services more readily available to victims and their children ([10] Townsend *et al.*, 2005). Two challenges that Centers are designed to address are that it is often difficult for victims to move physically from one agency to another (e.g. due to safety or

transportation concerns) and that victims are typically forced to recount their experiences multiple times in the process of seeking help ([3] FJCA, 2009a). Ideally, the increased accessibility of services should lead to greater usage of available services ([10] Townsend *et al.*, 2005), streamlined case management ([2] Boyd, 2006), and improved inter-agency communication due to the proximity of their co-located services ([6] Hocking, 2007). The creation of integrated community databases associated with a Family Justice Center may help to further increase interagency collaboration and communication ([3] FJCA, 2009a). In addition, the more integrated service model may contribute to increased rates of domestic violence reported ([10] Townsend *et al.*, 2005).

A second goal is to provide improved criminal justice responses, including more integrated investigation and prosecution and increased effectiveness of mandatory arrest policies ([2] Boyd, 2006). Third, Family Justice Centers may strive to increase awareness of domestic violence in the local community ([10] Townsend *et al.*, 2005) through education and public outreach ([2] Boyd, 2006). These educational efforts may target specific populations of the community and/or involved professionals (e.g. judges, [2] Boyd, 2006). Beyond these broader goals, Family Justice Centers should be designed to meet the unique needs of the local community ([3] FJCA, 2009a).

The evaluation of Family Justice Centers is complex, and it can take a lot of time before the outcomes of the Center really can be evaluated ([10] Townsend *et al.*, 2005). Some challenges associated with data collection for the evaluation of Family Justice Centers include the different types and combinations of services that can be provided, the safety of data, and data sharing concerns ([10] Townsend *et al.*, 2005). In light of these challenges, the research on Family Justice Centers is very minimal to date, and very few research studies have been published that examine the outcomes of these Centers and/or the processes that are used to develop them. According to the [3] FJCA (2009a), some of the outcomes that Family Justice Center evaluations have identified include fewer domestic violence fatalities, greater collaboration and coordination across and within agencies, less frequent recanting of domestic violence reports by victims, and various benefits for victims and their children, including more safety and empowerment and less fear and anxiety. In a study of one specific Center that served a very diverse client population (i.e. participants spoke English, Spanish, and Arabic), [8] Olson and Parekh (2010) held four focus groups with women who had visited the Center. The participants reported that after they sought services, they felt more empowered and informed.

The most detailed evaluation that our research team was able to locate ([1] Bostaph, 2010) examined the outcomes of the Nampa Family Justice Center (NFJC) in Idaho. The researchers tracked the cases of 66 clients who sought services through the NFJC between April and May 2008. The outcome data they used were drawn from the files from the NFJC, the local police and prosecutor, state records, and a local crisis Center. Among the 66 clients, 92 percent were female, 92 percent were Latino/a, 36 percent were divorced or separated, 35 percent were currently married to their perpetrators, and 93 percent of their offenders were male. The specific services that the clients sought included counseling (39 percent), filing for a protective order (20

percent), and shelter (3 percent). During the time-frame of the study, 52 percent of clients of the NFJC reported domestic violence to the police, with most of these (76 percent) being self-reported to the police. Among the 85 percent of the reported cases that were referred to be prosecuted, 93 percent involved actual charges being brought against the perpetrator. This latter statistic represented an increase from the previous evaluation in 2008. In total, 81 percent of the cases that were sentenced had resolutions by a guilty plea, a trial by jury or court, or a plea bargain. Overall, the results demonstrated an improved response to domestic violence since the previous evaluation two years earlier. A key finding was that more cases were being reported to the police than the previous evaluation. Other areas in which improvements were made include referrals, prosecution, and sentencing. A key challenge the evaluators identified was the need within Family Justice Centers to improve data sharing across agencies to facilitate a better evaluation. In the future, additional efforts are needed to conduct multi-faceted evaluations that consider the unique targeted outcomes of the various services and goals encompassed within the broader Family Justice Center ([10] Townsend *et al.* , 2005).

The importance of the early stages of planning a Family Justice Center

Also missing from the current literature on Family Justice Centers is a research-based examination of the developmental processes that occur during the planning and creation of a Center. The literature reviewed in this section demonstrates that the early planning stages are critical for the later success of the establishment of a Family Justice Center. More research is needed to conduct process evaluations of the development of Family Justice Centers, in order to document successes and barriers along the way ([10] Townsend *et al.* , 2005). As a precursor to this research, several scholars and practitioners have proposed practical strategies for this planning and development process, and all underscore the significance of the early stages as critical to the development and sustainability of these Centers.

First, the community's readiness for a Family Justice Center must be considered. Not all communities are ready and suitable for a Family Justice Center ([5] Gwinn and Strack, 2006). As [5] Gwinn and Strack (2006) stated, "No community can wake up one day and decide to build a Center" (p. 62). Therefore, the process of developing a Family Justice Center can take a good deal of time and energy that involves various segments of the community. For example, the model is not appropriate when there is no history of collaboration among agencies related to domestic violence, nor is it appropriate when the local criminal justice agency does not make domestic violence a priority ([11] USDOJ OVW, 2007). Second, communities considering a Family Justice Center often visit other communities with already existing Centers to learn how they function ([5] Gwinn and Strack, 2006). Third, buy-in from community organizations is critical to the early stages of the planning process ([5] Gwinn and Strack, 2006). Often, a champion, or key supporter, needs to emerge to catapult the planning process forward ([5] Gwinn and Strack, 2006). The vision for the Center should be clearly identified through a community-based process incorporating the perspectives of key stakeholders locally ([5] Gwinn and Strack, 2006). Establishing and/or building upon strong relationships among the various

involved organizations should be given special consideration. Family Justice Centers are more likely to be successful if they are built upon relationships among community agencies that are already strong ([5] Gwinn and Strack, 2006). Forced collaborations that are not given adequate time to develop naturally are rarely effective ([5] Gwinn and Strack, 2006). As such, a challenge that Family Justice Centers face is addressing possible turf issues and competition, especially when there are limited financial resources available ([6] Hocking, 2007).

Fourth, in order to be sustainable, a Center should have funding and fundraising plans, as well as support from key leadership and stakeholders ([3] FJCA, 2009a). Some Centers are supported initially by federal grants ([2] Boyd, 2006), while other communities begin with start-up funding from local or private sources ([3] FJCA, 2009a). Fifth, it is important for information-sharing policies to be established. Some issues that need to be addressed in the process of planning a Center include how to protect client data, client confidentiality, how data will be shared among agencies, and how to establish agreement about the roles of various involved agencies ([10] Townsend *et al.*, 2005). [10] Townsend *et al.* (2005) suggested several possible strategies for addressing concerns about information sharing. These included using a thorough informed consent document for clients that makes clear the information sharing policies, ensuring the safe storage of electronic files, and providing de-identified data to program evaluators. Child protection laws, such as mandatory reporting of suspected child maltreatment, also need to be addressed in information-sharing policies ([6] Hocking, 2007).

Sixth, a possible drawback of Family Justice Centers is that, due to having a more formal organizational structure, services may seem less accessible to women of color, who may prefer more informal social and helping networks ([7] Montoya *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, efforts should be made during the planning process to address the accessibility of the Center to various cultural groups that live in the local community. Overall, getting a Family Justice Center off the ground can be difficult, and many challenges may be faced in the early stages of this process ([6] Hocking, 2007). Each of these stages requires significant buy-in from various segments of the community, especially stakeholders in leadership positions within involved public and private organizations (e.g. law enforcement, domestic violence agencies, and political leaders). Therefore, developing a greater understanding of key stakeholders' perspectives of this process remains a need for further research.

Method

This study was part of a larger study addressing domestic violence service providers' perspectives toward technology and a proposed Family Justice Center in a county in a southeastern state in the USA. This paper addressed only the data that related specifically to the proposed development of a Family Justice Center, and the results of the larger study on domestic violence service providers' needs and usage of technology are reported elsewhere. This study used qualitative methodology due to the exploratory nature of this research. In addition, the

qualitative inquiry provided the opportunity to gain an in-depth understanding of the perspectives of key stakeholders.

Community context and participants

This study included service providers and other key professional stakeholders in the target community. A decision was made to conduct a separate study to examine the perspectives of another key group of stakeholders, survivors of domestic violence. That study is ongoing and the results will be reported elsewhere. The focus of this study on professional stakeholders was intended to focus on the professional service provision aspect of the proposed Family Justice Center, and the follow-up study with survivors will focus on the perspectives of the potential client population to be served by the Center. Participants were service providers and administrators working in agencies that serve clients impacted by domestic violence. Participants were drawn from one county, and this county includes both urban (including one mid-size city and one smaller-size city) and rural areas. The county was located in the central part of a southeastern state. In the county from which participants were drawn, the consideration of a Family Justice Center had been ongoing since a committee was formed by the county commissions in 2009 that recommended the creation of a Family Justice Center in 2010 ([12] Wise, 2012). Following that recommendation, a federal earmark request was made for funds to support the creation of the Family Justice Center, but this earmark request was not funded. Nonetheless, interested community members continued to hold conversations and meetings to identify alternative pathways to moving the Family Justice Center initiative forward. At the time the interviews were conducted, the Family Justice Center initiative continued to have the support of at least two key county commissioners.

One of these county commissioners worked with the research team to identify a list of prospective study participants, with the goal of inviting key stakeholders in the development of the Family Justice Center to participate. Of the 15 participants, nine were female, and six were male. Participants were key stakeholders in the community, representing such entities as nonprofit organizations, judicial officials, law enforcement agencies, governmental departments, community advocates, and mental health and substance abuse facilities. Additional details about the participants are withheld to protect their confidentiality.

Interview procedures

Participant interviews lasted approximately one hour. Each interview was conducted by a team of two undergraduate or graduate students in either Psychology or Information Technology at a mid-sized public university in the Southeastern USA. All involved student interviewers were members of a research team and were involved in this project for at least one semester, with some students having been involved in the project across multiple academic years. During multiple regularly scheduled meetings of the research team, the students were trained by the involved faculty members in the interview guide and interview procedures.

For each interview, one student was the lead interviewer, and the other student was on hand to assist as needed. The interviews followed a semi-structured interview guide that began with an introduction to the study, the participant's completion of the informed consent document, and an opportunity for participants to ask questions. The first set of interview questions addressed participants' general professional backgrounds. The second set of interview questions asked about their work related to domestic violence, sexual assault, and/or child abuse, including the participants' perspectives about barriers faced by the clients they serve (e.g. "What kind of work do you do regarding domestic violence, sexual assault, or child abuse?" and "What is the most difficult aspect of the work you do?"). The third set of questions asked participants to describe their opinions and suggestions related to the prospect of a Family Justice Center in the local community. These questions were as follows:

1.] We are interested in collaborating with the County Commissioners in creating a Family Crisis Justice Center - basically it would serve as a one-stop-shop for victims of violence and other crisis issues in (this) County. How do you think (this) County would benefit from such a centralization of services?

- What should such a Center look like?

- Who would benefit most from such a Center?

2.] Several organizations are likely to be involved in this program, including (the university). What agencies do you believe should be included?

3.] We are specifically working to develop the virtual presence of the Justice Center - that is, some sort of web site that will house not only information, but also helpful technology for people who would be a part of the Justice Center - in an effort to improve services for victims and reduce violence in this community.

- What do you think could be done to reduce violence in this community?

- What would be most beneficial?

4.] What are the strengths of this community that could be helpful in reducing violence?

- Weaknesses?

- What obstacles might there be?

- What preventative measures would you suggest taking?

5.] In your experience working with other organizations in the county, do you feel that there is any overlap of services for victims of violence and other crises?

- If so, in what specific ways?

The final group of questions addressed participants' technology use and experience. At the end of the interviews, participants were provided with contact information for the faculty researchers should they have additional questions or input following the interview. All interviews were digitally recorded and subsequently transcribed.

Data analyses

The transcribed interviews served as the data that were analyzed for this study. The content analysis procedures outlined by [9] Stemler (2001) were used to analyze the transcripts. The coding unit was defined as each complete statement by each participant within the transcripts. Therefore, most statements began with the first word spoken by a participant in response to a particular question and ended with his/her final word before the facilitator spoke again. However, prior to coding the data, two graduate students identified the start and stop of each statement. Some statements were bound by other markers, especially if the participant was in the midst of a statement when the facilitator interjected with a brief, clarifying statement (e.g. "Oh, I see") during the participant's statements. Demarcating each statement prior to the coding of the data ensured that all coders were coding the same exact statements.

The authors used an a priori coding strategy for the data related to the Family Justice Center. According to [9] Stemler (2001), an a priori coding strategy uses coding categories that are developed before the analyses begin. The codes and categories are developed based on existing research and theory, and they are refined once the coding begins to ensure that the codes are mutually exclusive and comprehensive. The first draft of the coding system was developed based on a review of the interview guide, which was developed based on the researchers' review of existing scholarly literature, combined with the pragmatic questions this study was designed to address regarding the development of a Family Justice Center locally. The categories that related to Family Justice Centers were ideas about what the Family Justice Center could be like, steps needed to make the Family Justice Center a reality, and technology needs and ideas for the Family Justice Center. Our research team conducted a pilot test of the coding system before applying the codes to the full dataset to ensure adequate inter-rater agreement.

The coding was divided such that each transcript was coded by three research team members. The background of the four coders was as follows: a faculty researcher with a professional background in counseling, a faculty researcher with a professional background in library and information sciences, a doctoral student in a counseling program, and a masters student in a counseling program. Including three coders for each transcript provided a built-in validity process, which allowed us to identify a final consensus code for each statement. When all three coders agreed, the consensus code was the agreed-upon code. Disagreements among coders were handled as follows. For statements on which two out of three coders agreed, the consensus code was the code rated by the two coders. For statements on which all three coders listed different codes, the item was designated into the "no code" category and were excluded from further data

analyses, based on the assumption that the coding scheme could not be validly applied to these statements.

Once all codes were complete, they were compiled so that all statements within each code were organized together to facilitate reporting and interpretation of the findings. The current paper describes only the analyses of the data that were coded with the Family Justice Center categories of codes.

Results

There were three categories of codes: ideas about what the Family Justice Center could be like, including potential services and functions and expected advantages and challenges associated with having a Family Justice Center in the community; the steps needed to make the Family Justice Center become a reality, including resources to consult during the development process and steps needed to overcome potential barriers; and technology needs and ideas for the Family Justice Center.

Ideas for the Family Justice Center

Services to include

Perhaps due to the early stage of planning the Family Justice Center in this community, several participants raised questions regarding what services should be included. One participant suggested considering what services a client would need if s/he was leaving an abusive relationship, and identifying what essential services would be needed to address various related needs (e.g. shelter, financial support).

Participants offered many suggestions as to the specific agencies, service, and resources that could be included, and these included the following: Child Protective Services and other services for children impacted by domestic violence; the court system (e.g. protective orders); legal assistance; counseling and crisis counseling; law enforcement; local nonprofit organizations whose work relates to domestic violence; emergency assistance resources; prevention agencies; the local school system; transportation services; assistance with basic needs, such as clothing and shelter; child support administration; Verizon Wireless HopeLine® phones; various other government services that could be relevant to domestic violence victims and child witnesses; and possible collaborations with relevant national organizations. Regarding the inclusion of nonprofits, one participant mentioned that there would be a need for clarity as to which nonprofits should be included. Finally, participants mentioned that the Family Justice Center also can serve as a primary referral agency that becomes an entry point to other services not housed in the Center.

The need for a unified identity for the Family Justice Center

With such a broad array of potential services to include, participants emphasized the importance of reducing redundancy across the various services. If the Center is established as a clearinghouse for clients to access a wide range of services, it should have a unified identity so that clients have a clear sense that services are coordinated and available through the Center. However, the co-location of services and increased inter-organizational collaboration involved in the Family Justice Center may require shifts in terms of defining who is a client (e.g. is someone a client if they are seeking services at the Center but not through my specific agency?). To address this issue, participants emphasized the importance of taking a customer service approach to meeting clients' needs.

Perceived benefits of the Family Justice Center

Participants held generally favorable impressions of the idea of the Family Justice Center. The following representative statements illustrate this overall general positive impression: "I'm glad that this project is under way [...] I think this is a great idea"; "I think when you talk about a family violence crises center I think it would be beneficial to the community if it's done the right way"; and "If we could put people together and get them to work collaboratively and continuously then I think that it will make services better for the consumers and families that we serve in the community."

One of the primary benefits mentioned by participants is the potential for the Family Justice Center to overcome barriers to service provision for clients. Participants noted that clients often face the challenge of traveling all over town from place to place to try to obtain needed services, and this process can be very frustrating for clients and can eventually lead to clients not following-up on seeking these services. As one participant stated, "(This county) fortunately has a plethora of resources and [...] the problem is it's not coordinated very well." Another participant noted that, without such a centralized resource as a Family Justice Center, a client's ability to learn about and access resources may depend on what specific staff member they encounter at the individual agency from which they are seeking services. In particular, clients with multiple challenges (e.g. mental health disorders or substance abuse) may be especially likely to be "lost" in the process of transitioning from one agency to another and therefore may especially benefit from the creation of the Family Justice Center.

Perceived challenges

Responses to the idea of a local Family Justice Center were not all favorable, however. Some participants felt that they did not know enough to have a strong opinion. Others perceived challenges that may arise through its creation, such as a history of competition among agencies that may surface as they are brought together under one roof. Some participants who had a generally favorable opinion also expressed hesitations and acknowledged the model's limitations. For example, one participant said, "I've been a supporter of this project [...] and I think it's absolutely essential. But, I don't think it's the be all and end all." Other participants noted the

significant undertaking achieving the Family Justice Center would require. Overall, then, although there were generally favorable opinions of the idea of a Family Justice Center among the stakeholders interviewed for this study, some participants noted potential challenges and limitations.

Steps needed to make the Family Justice Center a reality

Identify the purpose of the center

One participant said that answering the question of "Why are we doing it?" is critical to gaining community and stakeholder support. Another participant said, "I think you just have to be really clear about what your mission is and [...] what is your philosophy, who are you - who is it that you are planning to serve. Remember, we can't be all things to all people." Having a clear purpose will be essential for communicating to others what the Center will be. This step was viewed by multiple participants as essential to the planning process. By identifying current services, the foundation of the Center can be established, as noted in the following participant statement: "I think for the Justice Center to be able to incorporate the best of what we already offer would be great." Finally, a participant suggested considering how the Family Justice Center may relate to other Centers designed to consolidate services for other populations (e.g. children and the elderly). In particular, addressing these intersections is critical because there often is overlap among the issues they address, such as co-occurring child maltreatment, intimate partner violence, and/or elder abuse.

Get key people involved

A precursor to the planning process will be to ensure that key personnel from various agencies and organizations are included in conversations about the Center. One participant said, "You gotta have the people on the main committee to be committed 110%." Another participant said, "You've got to have the right people at the top. If you don't have the right people at the top making sure - following it up all the way down - it won't work." Organizers should consider what incentives may be needed to get key people and organizations involved. This may involve financial benefits (e.g. cost reductions) or training benefits. In addition, participants noted that face-to-face meetings with key people are critical.

Build collaborations

The need to build strong collaborations among the involved professionals was emphasized frequently. With so many specialized agencies in place already, it may be difficult for the different groups to shift their ways of working to develop a cohesive Family Justice Center approach. One participant viewed this as a significant potential challenge in this particular community and stated, "That's a major challenge in our community, is the fact that people don't like to work with other agencies which is probably why you have so many agencies in the

community doing the same things." Some participants mentioned that this community has a history of people working in "silos," particular due to funding sources.

Participants mentioned how crucial it would be to get "everybody on board" and get "the people to buy in and work together." Strong inter-agency communication and collaboration were viewed as important at all stages of the development and implementation of the Center. One participant suggested that the ultimate goal of this collaborative process should be as follows:

The thing you have to look at and the thing that we try to do here is what's best for those that we serve. Everything we do has to answer that question first because it's not about me or anybody else here. It's about what's best for those we are here to serve.

Thus, as the plans move forward, it will be essential to foster collaborative dialogue and address any potential conflicts and/or inter-agency differences that arrive.

Develop an action plan and time-line

Participants emphasized the importance of an intentional planning process. One participant viewed the planning process as "a concept that's simple at first thought (but) will probably be much more complicated one you try to start to make it work." Therefore, the importance of planners doing "their homework" in the planning process was viewed as critical. One participant suggested that planners "start with the end in sight and then figure out how all the details work and then make sure you've talked to everybody." Another participant suggested that the planning should be "a slow, deliberate process" that involves "really open conversations [...] so that people don't feel like anybody is [...] manipulating the system." A detailed time-line should be created as part of the planning process as well. Specific activities that should be considered in the action plan included learning from other models, developing a plan for co-locating services, determining the location of the Center, naming the Center, and seeking funding.

Learn from other models

Several participants suggested that an essential part of the planning process should be to visit other Family Justice Centers in other communities and learn from professionals who have been involved with them. Examples from other communities can be very helpful in educating the community about the proposed Center. A participant said, "Maybe show some pictures of other agencies and list out what their center did well for their community, show the pluses and really educate the community about it."

Develop a plan for co-locating services

Planning for how the co-location of services will be done was mentioned by several participants as a critical step in planning the Center. In this particular county, participants noted that there would be a unique need to determine whether two Family Justice Centers are needed, one in each

of the major cities in the county. Transportation issues may need to be addressed here as well, especially if certain relevant services are not located at the Family Justice Center.

Determine the location

Securing an appropriate location was perceived as another critical step. Perhaps because of the local emphasis that had been placed on the technological aspects of the Center, one participant asked, "Are you talking about a center that's a physical building, or something on the Internet?" Another participant suggested it should be located at the courthouse or that transportation to and from the courthouse would be essential if it is not at that location. Participants emphasized the importance of a "centralized location."

Give the Center a name

One participant raised the point that the Center's name could impact how it is perceived in the community. This person said:

When you say justice, it's just like immediately people that don't have to be involved with that. And I don't know if Justice Center is a bad name, but people are not too receptive sometimes to building things that they feel that are helping criminals, they are just going to be pretty much not welcoming that so I think there needs to be a softer, more therapeutic type of place that we are calling it versus it's just a Justice Center

Seek funding

The need for funding was mentioned by several participants as a key step to making the Family Justice Center a reality. Funding was one area in which having two cities within the county could pose a unique challenge. As one participant said, "For this county, I wonder how we are going to afford a Family Justice Center to serve our two big cities [...] . I am not sure how that is going to work." The sustainability of funding over time also must be considered. A nearby Family Justice Center was mentioned as a cautionary tale due to its beginning to "deteriorat(e) simply because they don't have the funding to continue." Participant suggestions to address the funding issue included diversifying funding sources so that the Center was not reliant on a single source of funding, doing private fundraising, seeking grants, tracking outcomes in order to support the case for ongoing funding over time, and being certain that adequate funds are in place to achieve the planned goals of the Center.

Address political challenges that arise, and educate the community

Local political issues were mentioned as a possible challenge to making the Center a reality. In particular, in this county, the formation of the Center could involve collaboration among two city councils, the county commission, and various other segments of the community that involve elected positions (e.g. judges). Educating the local community about the proposed Center also is necessary. Participants noted several possible benefits of educating the community about the

Family Justice Center and giving residents an opportunity to provide input on it, including that the community would feel more invested in it, residents could come to view it as beneficial to the community, community input could help increase the Center's responsiveness to community needs, and this provides an opportunity to educate the public about the services available and how to access them. A community needs assessment was suggested as a way to identify the most critical needs and solicit community residents' input. Media channels were suggested as another potential avenue for educating the community about the Center as it moves forward.

Address information sharing and privacy issues

By bringing together multiple agencies within one Center, challenges may arise related to protecting client confidentiality and establishing appropriate procedures for sharing information about clients across agencies. One participant said that agencies that must abide by HIPAA will have an added set of regulations to account for in information sharing and privacy policies. The privacy issues are extremely complex with regard to sharing information across interdisciplinary professionals and agencies.

Technology needs and ideas

Generally, participants supported the integration of technology into the Center. As one participant said, the Center should use "whatever is available" with regard to technology. One participant described technology as "an absolute must." Some specific technologies that participants mentioned could be integrated into the Family Justice Center include ankle bracelets for tracking offenders, videoconferencing (e.g. Skype), computer access for clients (e.g. for seeking job opportunities), and common technologies, such as fax, e-mail, the internet, and text messaging. Another specific use of technology could be to link professionals and groups who cannot be on-site at the Family Justice Center. For example, a participant mentioned a nearby county that uses closed circuit televisions to link the Family Justice Center with judges at the courthouse. Participants suggested that the Family Justice Center should have a "very simple web-site" and a "very simple phone number to remember." Simplicity is beneficial because "not everybody is computer literate" or "technology savvy." Technologies also must be accessible for the users, whether they are the professionals or clients. A participant said, "If it's hard to access, they will not use it."

Several participants noted the potential value of a database that could allow agencies to share information about clients to better coordinate services. In fact, such "computer networking among agencies to better serve people and coordinate services" could be developed as a precursor to or even in the absence of the establishment of an actual Center. However, if some sort of shared database is created, then privacy issues for sharing the data across agencies will be critical to address. For example, a participant said, "Type in Mary Smith's name, and know that Mary Smith is going here, here, and here, but you have to have releases and memorandums of agreements there." (Note: "Mary Smith" was a hypothetical name used by this participant.)

Technologies also offer promise for more efficiently connecting potential clients to services in the community.

Safety issues must be considered for all technology-related aspects of the Center. For example, if a Center web site is established, one participant said, "I think some women might be a little bit concerned about the abusive partner tracking them somehow on the web-site." In addition, as more technologies are integrated into the Center, the need will increase to ensure that these technologies are updated and kept current over time. As one participant said, "If you don't keep it up-to-date, you are going to lose."

Discussion

There is a limited body of previous research on Family Justice Centers, including their outcomes and the processes used to develop them. As such, this study represents one of the first known formal attempts to document the early processes involved in developing a Family Justice Center. However, these early processes are critical to the initial development and the long-term sustainability of these Centers ([5] Gwinn and Strack, 2006; [10] Townsend *et al.*, 2005). The themes that emerged in this study are remarkably similar to the practical guidelines that have been proposed and were reviewed in the literature review section above. Therefore, this section explores how the perspectives of the stakeholders in the current study map onto current guidelines for planning Family Justice Centers, as well as identifies areas where more community-specific concerns may emerge.

First, participants perceived the potential local benefits of establishing a Family Justice Center to be very similar to those mentioned elsewhere. These benefits including making it easier for clients to access services, overcoming barriers (e.g. transportation) to service access within communities, and fostering greater collaboration and communication among the various involved agencies ([2] Boyd, 2006; [3] FJCA, 2009a; [5] Gwinn and Strack, 2006; [6] Hocking, 2007; [10] Townsend *et al.*, 2005). Second, participants were aware of the challenges that others have noted can arise during the process of establishing a Family Justice Center (e.g. [2] Boyd, 2006; [3] FJCA, 2009a; [5] Gwinn and Strack, 2006; [10] Townsend *et al.*, 2005). For example, participants in this study noted the challenges associated with securing funding, the need for key stakeholders to be involved, and the potential for conflict among organizations as they begin to work together so closely.

Third, many of the steps that this study's participants identified as key to the planning process also have been delineated elsewhere, such as learning from other communities with existing Family Justice Centers ([5] Gwinn and Strack, 2006) and conducting a community needs assessment ([3] FJCA, 2009a). Fourth, some of the considerations for addressing technology within a Family Justice Center that were identified by participants in this study have been addressed elsewhere. In particular, the need to establish appropriate information-sharing policies

becomes especially pronounced when databases are established for sharing information across agencies ([6] Hocking, 2007; [10] Townsend *et al.* , 2005).

In addition to the common themes between this study and the existing literature, these findings highlight the importance of considering each unique community's context when establishing a Center ([5] Gwinn and Strack, 2006). For example, the unique context of having two major cities exists within the county from which these participants were drawn. As such, a unique question facing stakeholders in this community is how to ensure that a Family Justice Center meets the needs of the entire county, and this may mean having two locations for the Center. Furthermore, although it was not a prominent theme in this study's participant interviews, stakeholders also will need to consider how to ensure the Center meets the needs of residents in more rural issues in the county. Therefore, in this particular community, the ability for the Center to meet the needs of all county residents must be considered. This unique dynamic of having two major cities, plus rural areas, within the county in which the Center is being considered is an example of the importance of understanding and addressing unique community variables during the process of planning a Family Justice Center.

Limitations

The findings of this study must be considered within the context of its three major limitations. First, only 15 stakeholders were included as study participants, and this involved only one representative of each of the various involved organizations. As such, the input of other key stakeholders was omitted from this study. Even within the same organization, different professionals may hold unique opinions regarding the potential for a local Family Justice Center. As the goal of this study was to identify common themes in the participants' responses, individual variations in responses were not able to be addressed through the data analysis procedures, so future research is needed to examine how unique individual characteristics may impact stakeholders' perspectives of Family Justice Centers. Second, and also related to the sample, this study only included the perspectives of professionals, thereby omitting other important perspectives. In particular, survivors of domestic violence were not included in this study (unless they also work as professionals, but participants were not asked to disclose any personal histories of domestic violence). Including input from survivors, as well as other community residents, is essential for ensuring that the proposed Center is responsive to the needs of prospective clients ([4] FJCA, 2009b). Third, a limitation of this study is that the interviews were conducted by primarily undergraduate students. These students were involved in an ongoing research team and therefore consistently part of conversations about the study and Family Justice Centers more broadly. However, as undergraduate students, they likely lacked extensive, practice-based knowledge of the unique work contexts of domestic violence service providers. As such, they may have missed opportunities to ask follow-up questions to participants' responses based on their somewhat limited knowledge of these job demands and the overall community systems in place to address domestic violence.

Directions for future research and practice

A need remains for further research examining the processes involved in establishing a Family Justice Center ([10] Townsend *et al.* , 2005). In particular, future research should address the planning processes that contribute to the later success or failure to actually establish a Center. For example, a longitudinal study that tracks a community's planning process over time would help to identify critical incidents that either enhance or derail this process. In addition, another fruitful area for future research will be to examine some of the key elements in the planning process, including identifying characteristics of the key "champions" or successful advocates for Family Justice Centers, strategies for seeking start-up and sustainable funding, and approaches to fostering effective inter-organizational collaborations.

As noted in the literature review section, currently there is limited outcome evaluation data documenting the effectiveness of Family Justice Centers. The extensive developmental process that is involved in establishing these Centers suggests that a new approach to outcome evaluation may be warranted that involves identifying key outcomes that occur throughout the process of planning, establishing, and sustaining these Centers. Such a comprehensive approach could replace a more traditional model of outcome evaluation that focusses more on final outcomes, such as a reduction of domestic violence arrests, increased reporting of domestic violence, and more effective prosecution of domestic violence offenders. Certainly, these are valuable outcomes to achieve. However, it is likely that the entire developmental process offers other beneficial outcomes that could be measured along the way, such as awareness of the issue of domestic violence in the community, victims' and survivors' perceptions that the community takes the issue of domestic violence seriously, and the effectiveness of collaborations across organizations in the community. The authors propose that these potential outcomes may be a byproduct of the dialogue and planning processes that are involved with the planning processes involved in the early phases of establishing a Family Justice Center.

There is a growing number of Family Justice Centers nationally and internationally, and at the same time, there is a lack of an extensive body of research on these Centers. As such, there is a critical need to advance practice in this area by continuing to develop practice-oriented resources on which communities can draw when they begin considering and planning a local Family Justice Center. The FJCA has begun to establish such resources, and with a greater quantity and more readily accessible resources, communities will have more clear guidance to help them move through this planning process at a local level.

List of recommendations

- Further research is needed to determine the strategies involved in the early planning phases of developing a Family Justice Center.
- Understanding key stakeholders' perspectives within a local community is an essential part of the Family Justice Center planning process.

- The planning of a Family Justice Center should include strategies for evaluating the effectiveness of the Center once it is established. Additional outcome research to determine the outcomes of these Centers is needed.

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Appendix

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