Linking research and practice to address domestic and sexual violence: lessons learned from a statewide conference with researchers and practitioners

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Abstract:

Purpose - There is a growing emphasis on the need to integrate research and practice in the fields of domestic and sexual violence. However, additional research is needed to identify strategies for key stakeholders to use to bridge research and practice in these areas. The paper aims to discuss these issues.

Design/methodology/approach - The current study analyzed qualitative data collected during a statewide conference for researchers and practitioners whose work addresses domestic and/or sexual violence.

Findings - The findings provide information about building effective researcher-practitioner collaborations, developing methodologically sound studies that address practice-relevant research questions, and identifying steps that funders, state coalitions, researchers, and practitioners can take to advance the integration of research and practice.

Research limitations/implications - Additional research is needed to evaluate specific approaches to better integrating research and practice related to domestic and sexual violence.

Practical implications - Researcher-practitioner collaborations offer numerous benefits to advancing research and practice related to domestic and sexual violence. Additional guidance and tangible support is needed to foster these collaborations.

Originality/value - This study used data collected during an innovative conference that brought together researchers and practitioners. The data have implications for furthering the integration of research and practice related to domestic and sexual violence.

Article:

There is a growing emphasis on the need to integrate research and practice in the fields of domestic and sexual violence (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2014; Domestic Violence Evidence Project, 2014). This impetus comes from many sources. First, service agencies are increasingly required to demonstrate the true impact of their work and to use evidence-based programs when serving clients (Auchter and Moore, 2013; Domestic Violence Evidence Project, 2014; Feder et al., 2011). Second, many practitioners recognize the intrinsic value of understanding whether and how what they do works (Domestic Violence Evidence Project, 2014). Third, researchers often desire to conduct research that is relevant to practice and actively engage with the communities touched by the issues they study, especially in line with growing national trends for community-engaged, participatory research (Murray and Smith, 2009; Williams, 2004). Fourth, national funding agencies, such as the National Institute of Justice, are increasingly interested in supporting research that is relevant to practice and public policy (Auchter and Backes, 2013).

Despite these forces, the need for greater integration of research and practice remains clear (Auchter and Moore, 2013). The purpose of this study was to use content analysis procedures to compile information gathered during a statewide conference for researchers and practitioners to address advances in both research and practice related to domestic and sexual violence. Three main issues were addressed:

1. general strategies for bridging research and practice related to domestic and sexual violence;

2. researcher-practitioner collaborations; and

3. methodological issues and critical research questions for practice-relevant research.

The domestic and sexual violence research-practice gap

A significant gap exists between research and practice related to violence prevention (Guterman, 2004). Murray and Smith (2009) defined a research-practice gap as "a disconnection between existing research findings and common service delivery practices in a particular area" (p. 4). Some factors that contribute to the research-practice gap in the areas of domestic and sexual violence include a history of limited communication between researchers and practitioners, a lack of dissemination to make research findings accessible to practitioners, and researchers conducting research that does not reflect current needs or trends in the field (Murray et al., 2010). In addition, there is a history of tension between researchers and advocates, especially related to safety concerns for clients and the way research findings have been interpreted

(Auchter and Moore, 2013; Davidson and Bowen, 2011; Gondolf et al., 1997; Hamberger, 2001; Kilpatrick et al., 2001; Murray and Smith, 2009; National Violence Against Women Prevention Research Center (NVAWPRC), 2001; Sullivan et al., 2013; Williams, 2004). Although not unique to the fields of domestic and sexual violence (Murray and Welch, 2010), the research-practice gap hinders the advancement of both research and practice in these areas (Murray et al., 2010). Additional research is needed to identify strategies for further understanding and narrowing this gap (Murray and Smith, 2009).

Researcher-practitioner collaborations

Researcher-practitioner collaborations are one of the main suggested strategies for better integrating research and practice related to domestic and sexual violence (Auchter and Backes, 2013; Auchter and Moore, 2013; Davidson and Bowen, 2011; Edleson and Bible, 2001; Gondolf et al., 1997; Murray et al., 2010; Sullivan et al., 2013). Many funding agencies even require such collaborations (Gondolf et al., 1997). A collaboration is "a partnership in which academics and service providers join together as equals, in their specialized roles, to develop and implement projects in a long-term relationship" (Campbell et al., 1999, p. 1141). Collaborations offer many potential benefits for both researchers and practitioners (Davidson and Bowen, 2011). For example, with input from practitioners, researchers can develop more practically relevant research questions (Davidson and Bowen, 2011; Edleson and Bible, 2001; Kilpatrick et al., 2001). Partnerships also help researchers gain access to participant populations (Davidson and Bowen, 2011). Practitioners also can benefit from research-based information they can use to enhance their services (Davidson and Bowen, 2011).

However, many potential challenges also may arise through researcher-practitioner collaborations. One major challenge is the time and resources required to create strong partnerships (Campbell et al., 1999; Davidson and Bowen, 2011; Edleson and Bible, 2001; Gondolf et al., 1997; Kilpatrick et al., 2001; NVAWPRC, 2001; Sullivan et al., 2013). Differential resources and salary levels also can contribute to power imbalances between collaborators (Davidson and Bowen, 2011; Williams, 2004). Researchers and practitioners often have different work roles, skill sets, training backgrounds (Campbell et al., 1999; Davidson and Bowen, 2011), and sources of motivation and rewards for their work (Kilpatrick et al., 2001). Furthermore, most researchers lack training in how to build successful collaborations with practitioners (Davidson and Bowen, 2011), while practitioners may not be familiar with research methodologies (Edleson and Bible, 2001). Conflicts may arise over several aspects of the collaboration, including decisions about the research process (Davidson and Bowen, 2011), trust issues (Davidson and Bowen, 2011; Edleson and Bible, 2001; Kilpatrick et al., 2001; Williams, 2004), ethical concerns (Davidson and Bowen, 2011), and how to handle negative findings that do not support practitioners' intervention approaches (Davidson and Bowen, 2011; Gondolf et al., 1997).

In light of these potential challenges, several strategies have been recommended for building effective researcher-practitioner collaborations. These include building strong partnerships (Kilpatrick et al., 2001; Sullivan et al., 2013), working to ensure that all partners remain open to learning from one another and about each other's organizational cultures (Davidson and Bowen, 2011), maintaining effective communication (Edleson and Bible, 2001; Kilpatrick et al., 2001;

Mouradian et al., 2001; NVAWPRC, 2001), involving practitioners in all phases of the project (Edleson and Bible, 2001; Hamberger, 2001; Kilpatrick et al., 2001; Mouradian et al., 2001; Sullivan et al., 2013), and ensuring that partnerships produce mutual benefits for all partners (Davidson and Bowen, 2011).

Methodological issues

Methodological decisions also can contribute to a greater integration of research and practice, which are addressed in this section.

Using an empowerment approach to research

Researchers and practitioners have stressed the importance of conducting research that is empowering to survivors (Cattaneo and Goodman, 2014). Cattaneo and Goodman suggested that an empowerment approach to research can be put in practice in the following ways. First, researchers should consider survivors' own goals and definitions of successful outcomes for interventions. Second, it is important to understand if these intervention outcomes translate into meaningful change in clients' lives. Finally, researchers can study the experiences of survivors broadly so that they capture as much of the full range of their experiences as possible.

Involving practitioners in all phases of the research process

Researchers should consider service providers' input as they plan studies and ensure that their studies address practice-relevant topics (Murray and Welch, 2010; NVAWPRC, 2001). Practitioners involved in the research process should be trained to understand the data collection, storage, and analysis procedures (Feder et al., 2011; Murray et al., 2010; Sullivan et al., 2013).

Measuring outcomes using multiple approaches

There is often an inverse relationship between the methodological rigor of an outcome study and the applicability of the study's findings to practice (Gondolf et al., 1997). Due to the importance of the contextual influences on domestic and sexual violence, diverse research methodologies should be used, including measuring multiple outcomes and using mixed-method approaches (Gondolf et al., 1997; Williams, 2004).

Attending to survivors' confidentiality and safety

Researchers need to demonstrate appropriate concern for the wellbeing of survivors impacted by their research (Campbell et al., 2009). Campbell et al. interviewed 92 rape survivors to learn their suggestions for how researchers should interview survivors. Their responses underscored the importance of researchers understanding the diversity of the population and the long recovery process they often face.

Disseminating research to practitioners

Research often is presented in ways that are not accessible or understandable to practitioners with minimal training in research (Auchter and Moore, 2013). However, findings must be communicated in user-friendly ways to practitioners and policymakers in order for them to be able to effect change (Hamberger, 2001; Kilpatrick et al., 2001; Sullivan et al., 2013). In particular, when targeting practitioners and policymakers, research reports should be brief and focus on the study's implications (Auchter and Backes, 2013; Edleson and Bible, 2001).

Overall, a growing body of literature provides useful directions for integrating research and practice related to domestic and sexual violence. However, more information is needed to understand researchers' and practitioners' perspectives on how the research-practice gap can be bridged to more effectively advance research and practice. To that end, this study analyzed qualitative data collected at a statewide conference for domestic and sexual violence researchers and practitioners.

Method

This study involved a content analysis of data collected during a two-day conference that brought together researchers and practitioners from across a southeastern state in the USA to address strategies for advancing research and practice related to various aspects of domestic and sexual violence.

About the conference

Data were collected during the first Innovations in Domestic and Sexual Violence Research and Practice Conference (hereafter referred to as the "Innovations Conference"), which was held in April 2013 in Greensboro, North Carolina. The conference offered a two-day program featuring keynote speakers, panel discussions, and research-based poster sessions. In addition, the conference program included three Roundtable Discussion sections, during which the data used for this study were collected.

About the conference participants

According to conference registration materials, the target audience for the Innovations Conference is professionals from all disciplines whose work addresses domestic and/or sexual violence. Participants included researchers in public and private institutions; practitioners in domestic violence and sexual assault agencies; mental health and healthcare professionals; and criminal justice and legal professionals. In 2013, 125 professionals were registered for the conference. At registration, participants provided the names of the organizations they represented and their job title. We classified participants into the following job categories, with the frequencies and percentages for each category: first, researchers (n= 35; 28 percent); second, practitioners (n= 60; 48 percent); third, law enforcement officials (n= 12; 9.6 percent); fourth, representatives of state-level government agencies (n= 9; 7.2 percent); and fifth, representatives of statewide advocacy organizations and coalitions (n= 9; 7.2 percent). These figures demonstrate the professional diversity of the conference attendees. No additional demographic

data were collected from conference attendees. Most participants attended the full conference, although some attended only one day or some other portion of the conference. Attendance was taken only in the form of checking in participants when they arrived for the conference, so the exact number of participants attending each specific session was not tracked.

Data collection procedures

The conference included three interactive Roundtable Discussion sessions. Participants were randomly assigned to tables with eight chairs each during these sessions to ensure that participants had the opportunity to engage in dialogue with different people throughout the conference. Each Roundtable Discussion lasted for 60-75 minutes, and they were guided by one or two facilitators. These sessions opened with an introduction by the facilitators, followed by approximately 30 minutes of small group discussion, and then concluded with a large-group discussion in which selected participants shared what they discussed in smaller groups. For each session, participants completed a worksheet, either individually or in small groups, with guided questions related to the session's topic. Participants submitted their completed worksheets at the end of each session so that the research team could compile the findings for the current study. A description of each session's topic and worksheet contents is as follows:

Roundtable No. 1: collaborations. The title for this session was "Building solutions to common challenges in creating practitioner and researcher collaborations." This session followed a panel discussion on the topic of researcher-practitioner collaborations, and in their worksheets, participants were asked to identify three challenges that were mentioned during that panel discussion or that they have experienced in their own work. For each challenge, participants were asked to do the following: describe the challenge; describe some of the factors contributing to this challenge; write some barriers that make it difficult to overcome this challenge; and write at least three potential solutions to this challenge.

Roundtable No. 2: research questions. This session's title was, "What is a good research question?" The questions included on this worksheet addressed the following topics: first, critical issues for researchers to address (prompted by the following questions: what do you need to know to do your job better?; what information, if you had it, would help you to more effectively do your work?; and what are the big questions that you wonder about domestic and/or sexual violence?); second, focusing on one particular issue written in response to the first question: additional details about this issue; ethical and safety concerns related to studying that issue; possible approaches to studying this issue; the relevance of that issue for practitioners; and strategies for disseminating research findings related to this issue to practitioners.

Roundtable No. 3: future directions. The title of the final Roundtable Discussion was, "Developing a plan for North Carolina to better integrate research and practice related to domestic and sexual violence." On the worksheet, participants were asked first to reflect on all the topics discussed during the conference and summarize their reflections. Participants were then asked to translate the summary of their reflections into actionable strategies to advance research and practice for researchers, practitioners, state coalitions, policymakers, and others.

Data analysis procedures

A research assistant entered participants' worksheet responses into a consolidated database such that each statement was entered into a separate row on the spreadsheet. The final database that was used for the analyses included 700 statements. Content analysis procedures were used to analyze the data (Stemler, 2001). We used an emergent coding strategy (Stemler, 2001) to develop the coding system, in that we did not begin with a predetermined set of codes, beyond the three original categories (i.e. collaborations, research questions, and future directions). A research assistant first went through the full set of statements to generate an initial, comprehensive list of themes identified in participants' statements. This original list contained 398 themes, although there was substantial overlap in the themes, and no efforts were made to eliminate duplicate items in creating that original list. From there, the lead researcher began the iterative process of consolidating all of the themes into a coding system. The coding system was organized based on the three main issues (i.e. categories) addressed across the three roundtable sessions. Within each category, main themes and sub-categories were identified (see Table I).

Table I
Content analysis frequencies of codes in each category, theme, and sub-theme

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Category 1: researcher-practitioner collaborations	303
Collaborations: relationship issues	159
Communication: communication-related issues	43
Partner: the need for building trust, understanding, and partnerships	32
Sustain: the need to consider the sustainability and/or positive termination of partnerships	22
Roles: the need to clearly define roles	17
Connect: the need for networking/opportunities to connect among researchers and practitioners	12
Other: relationship issues that do not fit in the above categories	33
Collaborations: challenges	76
Resources: challenges of limited resources for collaborations	40
Differences: different needs, goals, organizational structures, and agendas of researchers and practitioners	28
Other: challenges in researcher-practitioner collaborations but do not fit in the above categories	8
Collaborations: ethical, legal, and safety considerations: attending to ethical, IRB, legal, cultural, and safety issues	45
Collaborations: research process issues	22
Findings: how research findings are or should be handled	6
Training: training needs for researchers and/or practitioners	3
Other: research process issues that do not fit in the above categories	13
Collaborations: other: researcher-practitioner collaboration issues that do not fit in the above categories	1
Category 2: what is a good research question?	122
Methods: methodological issues	39
Populations: populations of interest to study	18
Interventions: the study of specific types of interventions	15
Evidence: research questions addressing evidence from research and practice	11
Staffing: research questions addressing staffing issues	1
Other: other topics/research questions of interest not addressed in any other categories	38
Category 3: next steps for bridging research and practice	130
Next steps for funders and coalitions	47
Dissemination: coalitions and funders facilitating research dissemination to practitioners	7

Build: coalitions and funders helping to build connections, collaborations, and partnerships	19
Assist: coalitions and funders assisting with research development and implementation	3
More: the need for more funding	6
Other: other coalition steps but do not fit in the above categories	12
Next steps for researchers	46
Connections: making more intentional connections	11
Disseminate: disseminating findings in a way that practitioners can digest	8
Understand: the need for researchers to understand agencies	7
Involve: involving agencies from the first steps of the research	8
Other: other researcher steps that do not fit in the above categories	12
Next steps for practitioners	24
Initiate: practitioners initiating contact with universities/researchers	6
Value: the need for practitioners to recognize the value of scholarly research	6
Share: practitioners sharing research findings	5
Logistics: managing the logistics of research within agency context	1
Other: other practitioner steps but that do not fit in the above categories	6
General/systemic steps	13
Training: the need for training to facilitate stronger connections between research and practice	1
Pressing: identifying the most pressing areas for needed research and practice advancements	0
Communication: the need to maintain good communication	0
Other: other general/systemic steps but do not fit in the above categories	12
NO CODE: this code was used for statements that do not fit clearly into any of the above codes. Statements that also did not have an identified consensus code were grouped into the "NOCODE" category	145

The researchers went through multiple revisions to the coding system for clarity in the categories' definitions. Prior to the full analyses, four coders did a pilot coding of 25 randomly selected statements, which led to a decision to add the text of the questions to the database. Next a second pilot coding process with 101 statements was conducted with all four coders. Once it was determined that sufficient interrater reliability was obtained, the full coding process began. For the full coding process, each statement was coded by three coders. Four doctoral students studying in counselor education programs, all with research experience related to domestic and/or sexual violence, were the coders for this study. Two coders coded the full data set, and the other two coders each coded half of the statements. We included three coders for each statement in order to provide a validity check on the coding system, as well as to provide a procedure for identifying a final code in cases where there was disagreement in the codes assigned by each statement's reviewers. When there was full agreement among the coders for a statement, the agreed-upon code became the final consensus code. However, if only two coders agreed, then the final consensus code was the one selected by the majority (i.e. 2) of the coders. If all three coders selected different codes for a particular statement, that item was designated as having "no code" and was not considered in any further data analyses. Only the final consensus codes were included in the report of this study's results. A total of 700 statements were coded by three coders per statement, for a grand total of 2,100 codes. Using ReCal3 (http://dfreelon.org/utils/recalfront/recal3/; Freelon, 2013) to determine reliability for three coders, the average pairwise percentage agreement was 71.62 percent, and the Fleiss' kappa statistic was found to be 0.365. This Fleiss' [kappa] -statistic is indicative of a fair level of agreement among raters (Landis and Koch, 1977).

Results

Table I contains the frequencies and brief descriptions of codes within each category based on the final consensus codes. Items that were coded, "NOCODE," or did not have an identified final consensus code are not included in the description of the results below. Our presentation of the results is aligned with the three main themes:

1. researcher-practitioner collaborations;

2. defining a good research question; and

3. future directions for bridging research and practice.

Researcher-practitioner collaborations

The most frequent theme related to researcher-practitioner collaborations was relationship issues. Participants noted the importance of strong communication. For example, one participant said, "It would be better if both researchers and practitioners [were] communicating on same level." Another noted the problems that can arise as a result of "poor communication between partners" and an "ineffective ability to end the relationship." Next, participants emphasized the importance of building trust and understanding. Statements coded into the "Partner" sub-category included the following: "Having every partner in the collaboration feel they have equal value;" and "Everyone shares knowledge - who is the expert?" 22 statements related to the importance of communication about how to sustain collaborations over time (e.g. "People usually don't discuss how long the relationship will last at beginning. You don't know how to discuss closing something.") The importance of clearly defined roles was noted in 17 statements, such as "Clearly defined roles discussed in advance and managing expectations." In all, 12 statements addressed the need for more networking opportunities for researchers and practitioners. For example, one participant said, "Bring providers and researchers together to network on a regular basis." Other relationship issues that were not coded into any of the above sub-categories included the following: "high turnover;" "lead/contact person to coordinate [...] to manage project;" and "one side may be more dependent than the other."

The second most-common theme related to collaborations was challenges that can arise. Resources were noted as the most common challenge, as illustrated in the following statements: "Best practice models often require implementation by a clinician - not all agencies have clinicians on staff - creates accessibility issues at grassroots agencies" and "Overworked - too many hats on direct service." Another challenge was perceived differences between researchers and practitioners, such as "Researchers not having much experience with direct practice" and "Different languages and frames of reference between researchers/practitioners." Other challenges noted by participants included "people that are involved that need to be involved but lack interest;" "unequal contributions;" and "jurisdictions - restraints with county and city exchange of research."

Ethical, legal, and safety considerations were also noted in 45 statements. These included the following: "Is it ethical to provide incentives for testimonials?;" "Researchers don't consider after

effects or follow-up as necessary for many/most victims/survivors;" and "Prepare the victim/survivor by informing them about the possibility of triggers/regression in the healing process!" Similarly, 22 statements address research process issues, such as how findings are handled (e.g. "No follow-up after research is completed/during"), training issues (e.g. "Mutually beneficial/reciprocal trainings between practitioners and researchers"), and other concerns (e.g. "definitions of data; date ranges" and "breaking up research needs into discrete blocks that can be completed in short periods of time by different students").

Defining a good research question

Statements related to defining a good research question addressed methodological issues and specific topics to address in practice-relevant research. In total, 39 statements in this category related to methodological issues for researchers to consider when studying domestic and sexual violence. Participants' suggestions included the following: "Develop a list of clients that want to make a difference and are willing to share their experiences;" "Minimize what victim has to go through [...] knowing what's done with their story [...] respect client's decisions;" and "Staff education first can help get involvement."

Participants suggested several populations of interest for future research, and these included "survivors that are further along in the process of therapy," "the college specific population," "children exposed to domestic violence," "LGBT population needs," and "K-5 schools." Likewise, the interventions that were suggested as important to study included "support group," "What are effective responses as a community?" "How do we prevent violence? What actually works?" and "accountability of abusers/abuser treatment programs." The 11 statements in this category that addressed evidence included the following two examples: "Program effectiveness; how the programs are staying alive" and "Difficult to measure 'success;' how is recidivism measured?"

The staffing issue that a participant raised related to research methodologies was "How can my agency help with this study with limited staff?" Other issues participants raised included the following: "Be sensitive to the issue you are studying and design the research in that context; Be flexible with your research design/change if what you want to do isn't possible;" "There appears to be less research on sexual assault (compared to DV);" and "Generalizability of research to low resourced area focusing on rural areas and different populations."

Future directions for bridging research and practice

Participants noted general next steps, as well as unique opportunities for various key stakeholders.

Next steps for funders and coalitions. Funding agencies and state-level and national domestic violence and sexual violence coalitions can advance the integration of research and practice in several ways. First, participants noted the role of these groups in the process of disseminating research findings to practitioners. For example, one participant suggested, "Create opportunities for regional collaboration that allows for research sharing between counties with more resources and those with more limited resources." Funding agencies and coalitions also can play a key role

in building connections and collaborations among researchers and practitioners. For example, a participant suggested, "Develop tabs on coalition websites devoted to (1) identifying researchers interested in working with agencies and (2) provide place for practitioners to identify what they need or would like done." Other steps funders and coalitions can take include assisting with the implementation of research (e.g. "Providing network-based resources & technical assistance"), developing the capacity for more funding and other resources (e.g. "Help us fund research on DV/SV - we need to get more DV/SV advocates in office"), and other general strategies, including for funders to "recognize that evidence takes many forms [...] be more flexible in requiring evidence based practices."

Next steps for researchers. Participants suggested several strategies for researchers. First, researchers can make more intentional connections with practitioners (e.g. "Can researchers be more intentional around bridging connections between different communities?"). Second, researchers can take on efforts to disseminate their findings in ways that are targeted and accessible to practitioners (e.g. "Educate practitioners on value of research - what it is, why it is needed, how it works, your role" and "Help make research accessible to practitioners"). Third, participants suggested that researchers should work to better understand the unique context of practice agencies (e.g. "Encourage/require researchers to observe or participate in services to learn about the day to day realities of providers and survivors"). Fourth, researchers can involve practitioners in all steps of their research process, from the earliest stages on (e.g. "Researchers need to involve practitioners and survivors in developing their study"). Other suggestions for researchers included "talk with (the) agency to ensure you can access needed information before creating the research project" and "help practitioners identify ways to evaluate practice without taking energy and support from services."

Next steps for practitioners. First, participants suggested that practitioners can initiate contacts with universities and researchers when research-relevant needs arise (e.g. "Reach out to a university - to start a conversation about needs"). Second, practitioners can learn more about the value of scholarly research for addressing the questions they face in their work (e.g. "Try to maintain an open mind about researchers and the potential benefits of engaging in research"). Third, practitioners can share information they find about research findings among other staff members and other stakeholders (e.g. "Educating staff in ways they can understand"). Fourth, one participant made the following suggestion for practitioners to assist researchers with the logistical details of research studies: "Designate an individual or committee whose job it is to assess the validity of scholarly research and disseminate findings into digestible pieces for practitioners." Other suggestions for practitioners included to "push for research that meets our emerging needs" and "keep abreast of what research is being done."

Other general steps. One suggestion related to training (i.e. "cross-training"). Other general suggestions included "more educational opportunities such as this [conference];" "keeping people engaged;" "good planning;" and "need to provide greater awareness."

Discussion

Data for this study were collected through a unique conference that was designed to bring together researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to address the integration of research and

practice related to domestic and sexual violence. Given the focus of this conference, most participants likely had some level of interest in this issue, and many had relevant experiences with research, practice, and/or the integration of the two. Because participants were randomly assigned to discussion groups for completing the worksheets that were used for data collection, the ideas that stemmed from this research are a reflection of the dialogue that can emerge when researchers and practitioners have meaningful opportunities to connect and network. Overall, the findings of this study support the ideas put forth in previous research about how to better integrate research and practice related to domestic and sexual violence. In particular, three key strategies are:

1. fostering researcher-practitioner collaborations;

2. designing research to be both methodologically sound and reflect current practice needs; and

3. involving all key stakeholders in the process of integrating research and practice.

Limitations

The findings of this study must be understood in the context of its limitations. First, data were derived from participants at one conference, so it is not possible to determine the extent to which participants are similar to other researchers and practitioners in the field. Second, most participants were from one state, and therefore the regional influences could have a unique impact on participants' impressions of research and practice. In particular, the availability of state funding for practice agencies and the universities in the state may differ from that of other states. Another limitation relates to the data collection process. By collecting anonymous worksheets (i.e. participants were not asked to include their names on their worksheets), we were unable to determine the specific professional and demographic characteristics of each participant and how those may have impacted their responses. In future research, efforts should be made to examine the professional and personal contextual variables that impact researchers' and practitioners' perceptions and experiences related to the integration of research and practice related to domestic and sexual violence. In addition, participants worked in groups to complete their worksheets, and they could have submitted multiple worksheets per group, and thus some ideas may have been over-represented.

Implications for practice, research, and policy

The major implications of this study relate to: resources needed to support the integration of research and practice; continued attention to supporting researcher-practitioner collaborations; the importance of designing practice-relevant studies; and the need for stronger avenues for disseminating research findings to practitioners.

Despite the legacy of some tension between researchers and practitioners in the fields of domestic and sexual violence (Gondolf et al., 1997; Hamberger, 2001; Kilpatrick et al., 2001), the findings of this study provide further evidence that many researchers and practitioners are interested in working together to advance both research and practice. Although some funding agencies have begun to prioritize researcher-practitioner collaborations and practice-relevant

research (Auchter and Backes, 2013), participants in the current study highlighted the need for even more resources to help integrate research and practice. In particular, financial resources are needed to: provide compensation for the time and resources that practitioners and survivors devote to involvement in research; support networking opportunities to bring researchers and practitioners together; support research designs that address safety considerations and study topics that address current practice issues; and allow opportunities for disseminating research findings to practitioners.

Researcher-practitioner collaborations offer opportunities for all involved parties to contribute their unique expertise, skills, and insights to all aspects of the research process. However, they also can give rise to challenges, many of which were noted by participants in the current study. Similar to previous research (e.g. Campbell et al., 1999; Edleson and Bible, 2001; Kilpatrick et al., 2001), this study highlighted the limited resources that are often available to support these collaborations. Therefore, continued attention is needed to identify key elements of successful researcher-practitioner collaborations, strategies for overcoming challenges that may arise through them, and sources of funding and other resources to support these collaborations.

Research studies can be planned to strengthen their relevance to practice. First, practitioners can be involved in all aspects of the process, from study planning to the dissemination of findings (Feder et al., 2011; Murray and Welch, 2010). This level of involvement is not only critical to valuing the unique expertise of all collaborators, but also for study feasibility. Researchers could lose all the time they invest into planning a study that involves an agency or other community organization if the study is not feasible within the organizational context. Organizations cannot be expected to participate in research that they do not have the resources to implement or that they believe will compromise the safety of the clients they serve. In addition, the physical and emotional safety of survivors must be a primary consideration when developing research on domestic and sexual violence (Campbell et al., 2009). Practitioners in particular can make contributions toward making methodological decisions that will result in the safest approaches to research involving survivors. In order to impact future practice, research findings must be disseminated in accessible and meaningful ways to practitioners (Hamberger, 2001; Kilpatrick et al., 2001; Sullivan et al., 2013). Various stakeholders can come together to facilitate the dissemination process. For example, both researchers and practitioners can be involved in the interpretation and dissemination of new research findings to help ensure that data are used and understood in ways that do not create harm for survivors and the organizations that serve them (Auchter and Moore, 2013).

In conclusion, the integration of research and practice related to domestic and sexual violence requires ongoing commitment from various involved people and organizations. The value of this integration is apparent for many reasons - both research and practice can be advanced when professionals in both domains are working together, communicating their needs and expertise to one another, and ultimately uniting behind the missions of preventing further violence, supporting victims and survivors, and creating interventions that hold offenders accountable and stop their violent behaviors.

Implications for practice
• Practitioners and researchers who address domestic and sexual violence should work to build collaborative, mutually-beneficial partnerships with one another.
• Researchers should give consideration to disseminating the findings of their research through communication channels that will reach practitioners, and these findings should be written in language that practitioners can understand and apply to practice.
• Practitioners can be involved in all phases of the research process, and they should communicate their needs and expectations related to research to researchers with whom they work.

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