

## Researcher-Practitioner Collaboration: University of Arizona Agency Update

Jessica Skarda  
Research Specialist  
MEZCOPH  
Tucson, AZ  
February 2010

Collaboration between researchers and practitioners has become increasingly important due to a growing trend among funders to encourage or mandate collaboration. Also, both researchers and practitioners have recognized the benefits of working together. As researcher-practitioner collaboration becomes more common, the amount of literature on the topic has grown. This agency update will describe: Mel and Enid Zuckerman College of Public Health's (MEZCOPH) experience with collaboration and identify benefits, challenges, characteristics and strategies for successful collaboration drawn from the literature.

For several years the Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS) Sexual Violence Prevention and Education Program (SVPEP) has provided rape prevention and education to communities throughout Arizona. Prevention and education is provided by organizations through community level cooperative interventions. As part of this cooperative, MEZCOPH provides research assistance and resources to the SVPEP Program Manager and the funded contractors. The purpose of this "research arm" is to increase the use of evidenced-based practices. Feedback and good communication are examples of practices that have made collaboration between MEZCOPH, ADHS, and funded programs successful. MEZCOPH has been fortunate to work with such an extraordinary and dedicated group of individuals. Collaboration has ensured that information and resources provided to ADHS and the funded programs is highly relevant to current development and implementation of prevention and education programs. MEZCOPH receives feedback from ADHS and funded programs on a regular basis through email correspondence, an annual SVPEP Website Evaluation Survey, and SVPEP in-person quarterly meetings. Quarterly meetings with ADHS and the funded contractors provide a venue to discuss what is happening in the field around the state.

Collaboration at times can be difficult. Not all collaborations between researchers and practitioners are successful and many challenges are present. Fortunately, MEZCOPH has experienced very few challenges. Some things that have been identified as challenges included: staff turnover at most agencies, geographic distances between organizations, and limited staff time to review and utilize all research resources.

Difficulties surrounding collaboration are not unique to the field of sexual violence prevention; they occur in all fields. There are however, publications specifically geared towards those in the field of violence against women. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Violence Against Women Prevention Research Center published [Recommendations for Establishing and Maintaining Successful Researcher-Practitioner Collaborations](#).<sup>1</sup> Other publications that discuss collaboration and provide recommendations include: [Recommendations for Establishing and Maintaining Successful Researcher-Practitioner Collaborations](#)<sup>2</sup>, [Fostering Collaborations to Prevent Violence Against Women: Integrating Findings from Practitioner Researcher Focus Groups](#)<sup>3</sup>, [Working Together: Challenges in Collaborative Research on Violence Against Women](#)<sup>4</sup>, and [Forced Bonding or Community](#)

---

<sup>1</sup> Mouradian, V. E., Mechanic, M. B., & Williams, L. M. (2001). Recommendations for establishing and maintaining successful researcher-practitioner collaborations. Wellesley, MA: National Violence Against Women Prevention Research Center, Wellesley College.

<sup>2</sup> Mouradian, V. E., Mechanic, M. B., & Williams, L. M. (2001). Recommendations for establishing and maintaining successful researcher-practitioner collaborations. Wellesley, MA: National Violence Against Women Prevention Research Center, Wellesley College.

<sup>3</sup> National Violence Against Women Research Center. (2001). Fostering collaborations to prevent violence against women: Integrating findings from practitioner researcher focus groups.

<sup>4</sup> Riger, S. (1999). Working together: Challenges in collaborative research on violence against women. Guest editor's introduction. *Violence Against Women*, 5, 1099-1117.

## Collaboration Partnerships between Science and Practice in Research on Women Battering<sup>5</sup>.

Recommendations from these publications are summarized below. Many of the benefits, challenges, and strategies were mentioned in each of the publications.

### **Benefits**

#### *For Practitioners*

- Improved victim outreach and community education
- Improved program planning and evaluation
- Enhanced support for prevention initiatives
- Enhanced efforts of social change to end violence against women

#### *For Researchers*

- Improved research questions
- Improved research implementation
- More accurate interpretation of findings
- Provide connection with larger social movement

### **Challenges**

- Sharing control
- Resolving misunderstandings of power
- Mistrust
- Differences in expertise, values, and priorities

### **Characteristics of Successful Collaborations**

- Mutual respect for each other's expertise and contributions
- Trust
- Good communication
- Appreciation among all involved
- Willingness to learn from each other

### **Strategies of Successful Collaborations**

- Articulate expectations and goals
- Explicitly state responsibilities, areas of control, & rewards
- Address sources of possible tension
- Establish on-going communication
- Be flexible in problem solving
- Spend time together in each others domain and in neutral ones

Collaboration between researchers and practitioners not only has the ability to improve research but also increase the effectiveness of prevention programs and victim services. Successful collaborations may promote policies and increase funding for organizations and ultimately have a lasting impact on the prevention of violence against women.

---

<sup>5</sup> Edleson, J.L. & Bible, A.L. (1999). Forced bonding or community collaboration? Partnerships between science and practice in research on woman battering. In National Institute of Justice, Viewing crime and justice from a collaborative perspective: Plenary papers of the 1998 Conference on Criminal Justice Research and Evaluation (pp. 25-38). Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice.