

FINAL REPORT

**An Evaluation of the
Cuyahoga County Prosecutor's Office
Sexual Assault Victim Advocacy Initiative**

Dr. Wendy Regoeczi and Dr. Valerie Wright

Criminology Research Center

Cleveland State University

Submitted to:

The Cuyahoga County Prosecutor's Office &

The Ohio Consortium of Crime Sciences

March 2016

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the SAVA Board members for their helpful comments on the development of the victim survey. We are also grateful for the assistance and sensitivity training we received from the Cleveland Rape Crisis Center. Special thanks to Marya Simmons for all of her assistance in recruiting victims to be interviewed for the study and to Reanna Karousis for all of her help in coordinating the interviews with the agency members. We are extremely grateful to all of the individuals who consented to be interviewed and shared their time and perceptions with us.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Sexual Assault Victim Advocacy (SAVA) Initiative was created to address the growing need to provide a victim-centered approach in the handling of the backlogged rape kits in Cuyahoga County. The primary goal of this project was to ensure that victims' rights are safeguarded and that victims are treated with compassion during the processing of cases, particularly when they are reluctant to testify. To achieve this goal SAVA was established as a collaborative victim-centered response that addresses the individual needs of victims and provides victim advocacy and counseling services. To this end, the SAVA Initiative proposed to incorporate a team approach, establish case protocols, provide sensitivity and rape crisis training, implement evidence-based practices, and incorporate an evaluation.

The current report addresses the last of these by presenting the results of an evaluation of the SAVA Initiative. Part of the evaluation involved a process evaluation of the extent to which the Sexual Assault Victim Advocacy (SAVA) Initiative was implemented as proposed and adheres to evidence-based practices. The primary method of data collection for this process evaluation was interviews with Sexual Assault Task Force team and SAVA board members, specifically two investigators, two assistant prosecuting attorneys, the Special Investigations Division Chief, two victim advocates, and an employee of the Cleveland Rape Crisis Center (CRCC).

The second part of the evaluation used a qualitative outcome evaluation that required conducting interviews with a sample of victims whose rape kits have been tested as a result of the initiative to assess their views of the process and identify any areas needing improvement. Advocates from the County Prosecutor's Office recruited victims for the study. Twenty women indicated they were interested in participating. Contact was successfully made with eight of the 20, who form the victim sample for this study.

Overall, the results of the evaluation suggest that SAVA has successfully met its goals, although there have been some challenges that need to be addressed.

Among the key findings are the following:

- The investigators and assistant prosecutors conveyed a very limited understanding of what the SAVA Initiative is while the victim advocates and CRCC employee all had a clear understanding of a victim-centered approach, following protocols, and the importance of collaboration.
- Much of the discussion around the role of individual agencies in the SAVA Initiative focused on achieving justice for victims both through maintaining a victim-centered approach and holding offenders accountable for their crimes. Also emphasized was the importance of working together in a multidisciplinary fashion, sharing procedures and thought processes, improving protocols, and receiving feedback from other partners on how to improve interactions with victims.

- Agency members varied widely in terms of their perceptions of the role of other agencies as well as the degree of collaboration among agencies in the Task Force.
- Support, the sharing of ideas, and the counseling services offered by CRCC were among the benefits mentioned of working with other agencies through SAVA.
- Challenges noted during the interviews with respect to working with other agencies included the hiring of advocates within the Prosecutor's Office rather than independent advocates and the resulting concerns over territory, the hiring of a significant number of investigators that may have produced certain jealousies, and the potential for fallout with the police should it come to light that one or more cases were improperly investigated initially.
- The most frequently mentioned advantage of the SAVA Initiative was the involvement of victim advocates and referrals to CRCC much sooner in the process.
- Increased communication among individuals in different agencies and the additional opportunities to meet and discuss issues face-to-face was felt to have strengthened relationships among members of the participating agencies.

- Among things that were felt not to have worked well included a lack of attendance at the SAVA Board meetings by prosecutors and investigators, the insufficient number of advocates hired as part of the initiative, and the struggle to maintain a victim-centered approach.
- The perceptions of agency members regarding whether victims were generally willing to be part of the prosecution process varied across agencies.
- Agency members varied considerably in terms of whether they felt that the SAVA Initiative was meeting its goal of providing a victim-centered approach to the testing and potential prosecution of sexual assault kits in cold cases.
- Among victims, perceptions of the notification process were generally positive, but areas for improvement were identified with respect to maintaining confidentiality.
- All but one woman reported feeling adequately informed and updated about the status of their cases and that they had been treated with dignity and respect.
- All of the victims who were interviewed reported that they were offered counseling services, but none of them accepted the services.
- Two of the women reported feeling some pressure to participate in the legal proceeding.

- Five of the eight women were satisfied with the sentence the defendant received.
- The women provided overwhelmingly positive feedback regarding their interactions with advocates.
- The vast majority of the women reported that a victim advocate had followed up with them on several occasions after the closing of the case to check on their well-being.
- The women raised concerns regarding their personal safety, the timing and length of the case, and the need for more preparation for trial.

Recommendations

1. Secure Additional Funding and Support. The need for additional resources and staff to support current efforts was a common theme in the agency member interviews, particularly with respect to the number of advocates. Several interviewees also recommended that the Task Force be expanded to cases that are not cold.

2. Ensure Notifications are Confidential. Results from the victim interviews indicate that greater steps may need to be taken to protect the privacy of victims, particularly given the length of time between the sexual assaults and the testing of the rape kits. Protocols should be established regarding the content of messages left for victims.

3. Establish a Victim Participation Protocol. The sexual assault cases that are the focus of this initiative inevitably produce a difficult balancing act between

protecting the public and providing a victim-centered approach. The results of both sets of interviews point to the need to establish a protocol for cases in which a victim expresses she does not want to be involved in the case.

4. Establish a Tracking and Follow-up Protocol. Several agency members were concerned about the impact of the case on the victims and their families. The collection of aggregate data on the use of counseling services by victims would allow agency members to track trends or patterns over time.

5. Renew Agency and Board Members' Commitment to SAVA. The lack of knowledge regarding SAVA among some of the agency members interviewed and the declining attendance at SAVA Board meetings suggest it may be time to re-engage Task Force and SAVA Board members regarding their commitment to the initiative.

INTRODUCTION

Background

The goal of the Sexual Assault Victim Advocacy (SAVA) Initiative is to use a victim-centered approach to provide victim advocacy and counseling to sexual assault victims. This effort was designed to prevent and minimize the retraumatization of rape victims whose sexual assault kits from up to 20 years prior are now being submitted for testing and that may subsequently result in the prosecution of an identified offender. In the spring of 2011, Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine invited law enforcement agencies across the state to submit any untested sexual assault kits, regardless of age, that had been collected to be tested for deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA). Despite Cleveland's commitment to testing rape kits dating back to the early 1990s, many kits were preserved in storage. By mid-2014, the city's entire inventory of backlogged rape kits, roughly 4,300 of them, had been submitted for testing.

As rape kit test results began to trickle in from the Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BCI) lab, the Cuyahoga County Prosecutor's Office in 2013 committed to investigate and, whenever possible, pursue criminal charges against newly identified perpetrators. To that end, Prosecutor Timothy McGinty formed a partnership with BCI, the Cleveland Police Department (CPD) and the

Cuyahoga County Sheriff's Department to create what is now known as the Cuyahoga County Sexual Assault Kit Task Force.

The Task Force pairs CPD sex crimes unit detectives, Sheriff's Department Officers, and BCI Agents with investigators from the Prosecutor's Office to locate victims and witnesses as well as evidence in these old cases. These law enforcement partners then collaborate with a team of specially focused sexual assault kit (SAK) prosecutors to prepare cases for Grand Jury presentation and prosecution.

Purpose

The SAVA Initiative stemmed from the aforementioned efforts and was designed to oversee the process to ensure that a victim-centered approach was used in the handling of the back-logged rape kit cases. Specifically, SAVA was created to safeguard the rights of victims and ensure that the cases were handled with sensitivity. This was particularly necessary given that some victims may embrace a reopened investigation while others may struggle with and reject the intrusion of participating in the prosecution of their offender so many years after the initial crime. Thus, SAVA is committed to creating an integrated, comprehensive, and victim-centered response that addresses the individual needs of victims while providing them with advocacy and counseling services.

To achieve these goals, the SAVA Initiative proposed to incorporate the following: 1) a team approach; 2) protocols; 3) training; 4) evidence-based practices (EBP); and evaluation.

DATA AND METHODS

In May 2014 Professors Wendy Regoeczi and Valerie Wright of Cleveland State University's Criminology, Anthropology, and Sociology Department contracted with the Ohio Consortium of Crime Sciences to conduct an evaluation of the Cuyahoga County Sexual Assault Victim Advocacy Initiative. Two forms of evaluation were conducted, both of which had approval from Cleveland State University's Institutional Review Board. The first involved a process evaluation of the extent to which the Sexual Assault Victim Advocacy (SAVA) Initiative was implemented as proposed and adheres to evidence-based practices. The primary method of data collection for this process evaluation was interviews with members of the various agencies involved in the initiative. The second part involved a qualitative outcome evaluation that required conducting interviews with a sample of victims whose rape kits have been tested as a result of the initiative to assess their views of the process and identify any areas needing improvement. Feedback was obtained from the SAVA Board members in developing and refining this set of interview questions. The final set of questions is shown in Appendix B.

Agency Sample

The researchers interviewed two investigators, two assistant prosecuting attorneys, the Special Investigations Division Chief, two victim advocates, and an employee of the Cleveland Rape Crisis Center (CRCC). All SAVA agency members interviewed were asked a standardized set of interview questions (see Appendix A), including questions about their understanding of the role of the SAVA Initiative and the role of the agencies involved in it, their views of the benefits and challenges of working with other agencies within the initiative, what they feel has and has not worked well, their perspectives on victim participation (or lack thereof) in the prosecution of old sexual assault cases, and their views on whether the SAVA Initiative was meeting its goal of providing a victim-centered approach. These eight interviews were conducted during the spring of 2015.

Victim Sample

At the time the project proposal was written, the Cuyahoga County Prosecutor's Office had completed 160 rape kit investigations, 90 of which resulted in indictments. Additional indictments occurred throughout the course of the project period. While we didn't expect all of the victims would be willing to participate in an interview, our goal had been to interview at least half of those involved in indictments.

To interview survivors of sexual assault, we relied on referrals from the victim advocates. The victims gave consent to the advocates to provide us with their contact information. Victims were contacted and invited to share their experiences through a semi-structured interview. All of the victims were contacted by telephone although several victims that agreed to an interview did not follow up to participate and several never responded to our attempts to reach them. To ensure our contact efforts were not intrusive, we limited ourselves to a total of four attempts to contact a victim. Among the victims that were referred to us with contact information 40% (8 of 20) participated in an interview. All of the interviewees were women. Their current ages ranged from twenties to fifties. The majority was unemployed and divorced and/or single at the time of their interview. The length of the backlog among the women we interviewed ranged anywhere from three to 20 years.

It should be noted that it is possible that the victim data were biased by the sampling design for two reasons. First, the advocates experienced challenges recruiting victims that were willing to participate in an interview to discuss their feelings about how their backlogged rape kit and cases were processed. Such reluctance on behalf of victims can be expected when collecting sensitive information. Therefore, it is possible that self-selection bias was present since victims volunteered to participate and were not randomly selected. Such self-

selection bias may result in a non-representative sample where shy, dissatisfied or disgruntled victims may have opted out of the study. It is also possible that only victims that had a favorable relationship with the advocates in the Prosecutor's office agreed to be contacted.

Second, it is possible that our sample was impacted by exclusion bias as well. Exclusion bias could occur if only victims that were deemed likely to provide positive feedback were invited to participate in the study. Since we, as researchers, did not oversee the selection process, we cannot be certain that all victims were invited to participate. To address these potential limitations, the SAVA Board created a recruitment flyer that was distributed to potential participants. The flyer was an attempt to encourage participation from those victims that may not have built close rapport with the advocates or staff in the Cuyahoga County's Prosecutor's Office but wanted to have their experiences heard or from those women whose cases had concluded and they were no longer engaging with Task Force members. The Recruitment Flyer is included in Appendix C.

RESULTS

SAVA Agency Member Interviews

The Role and Function of the SAVA Initiative

The responses of the interviewees regarding the role and function of the SAVA

Initiative varied widely depending on the type of agency for which the individual was working. In particular, the investigators and assistant prosecutors conveyed a very limited understanding of what the SAVA Initiative is, although they had a general sense that it was meant to help facilitate a victim-centered approach and provide victims with resources. It is worth noting that at least one interviewee believed that SAVA was a collaborative of advocates only. The Division Chief, who was involved in the grant application for the project, had a much clearer understanding:

“We applied for a grant and part of the grant was to see that research was done to determine the effectiveness of our contacts and interactions with victims on our investigations and prosecutions. It was to be determined how the victims feel and were treated and how they feel about their interactions with law enforcement and the Task Force. Part of that will be a determination of how victim-centric we are.”

Not surprisingly, the victim advocates and CRCC employee all had a clear understanding of a victim-centered approach, following protocols, and the importance of collaboration, as can be seen in the following response:

“It is to make sure that victims were treated with respect as they went through the process and that all disciplines of the Task Force were working in a victim-centered manner.”

The Role and Function of Your Agency in the SAVA Initiative

Much of the discussion around the role of individual agencies in the SAVA Initiative focused on achieving justice for victims. This was a theme in the

responses of not only the victim advocates but also the assistant prosecutors. Achieving justice was described as both maintaining a victim-centered approach, including providing services to victims, and holding offenders accountable for their crimes. Also emphasized was the importance of working together in a multidisciplinary fashion, sharing procedures and thought processes, improving protocols, and receiving feedback from other partners on how to improve interactions with victims.

The CRCC employee felt the role of their agency in SAVA had been quite minimal and had largely been confined to providing counseling services on a case-by-case basis. However, she also noted a more recent expansion to the role of CRCC as a result of the heavy caseloads experienced by the advocates working for the Prosecutor's Office. CRCC also assists with training new members of the Task Force on trauma.

Among the investigators that worked on the SAVA Initiative, it was clear that their primary role as law enforcement was to ensure that offenders are prosecuted. Although they understood that not all victims were eager to participate, they felt it was the role of advocates to persuade victims that it was in their best interest to participate in the criminal processing of the case. One investigator had the following sentiment:

“We reach out to victims that are hard to connect with or teetering on the edge of not wanting to cooperate or prosecute the matter that’s being investigated. So SAVA sort of acts as a buffer for that purpose.”

Another investigator agreed that prosecution is a top priority by stating:

“My goal and I believe my organization’s goal is to provide the best victim-centered approach we can while still being able to prosecute and put the guys who deserve it away.”

Understanding of the Role of Other Agencies

The assistant prosecutors varied considerably in their responses regarding their perceptions of the roles of other agencies. One provided a list of potential collaborating agencies and indicated that these agencies would work together for the benefit of victims. The other’s response focused largely on the Cleveland Police Department and the possible lessons that could be learned in terms of reducing the alienation victims feel when interacting with police. The importance of advocates and CRCC in terms of providing support and services was also mentioned.

One victim advocate’s response centered largely on their collaborations with other advocacy agencies, particularly CRCC and the Witness/Victim Service Center in terms of providing additional advocacy services and counseling for victims. The other discussed the support other agencies provide through their

membership on the SAVA board, including attending meetings, brainstorming new ideas, and determining what can be done better.

One investigator indicated that there is minimal collaboration with members of the other agencies in the handling of cases. Most of the interaction with other agencies' members was limited to discussions at weekly meetings where statistics on the number of cases being processed were reported. When asked about the perception of the role of other agencies to ensure a victim-centered approach, they reported that:

“Other agencies facilitate counseling. Our agency puts together cases for prosecution. Very seldom worked with the Rape Crisis Center.”

The Benefits and Challenges of Working with Other Agencies

The assistant prosecutors identified a number of benefits to working with other agencies (particularly the Cleveland Police Department and CRCC). One assistant prosecutor discussed the frontline engagement of the Cleveland Police Department with the victim and their development of the evidence that is critical to the case. The CRCC was also seen as central to the successful prosecution of a case. As described by one assistant prosecutor:

“Supporting the victims of sexual assault and violent crime is essential to doing my job. If the victim feels they are not supported or they are out there on their own or are not getting the level of support they need, that will absolutely negatively affect my case. The stronger the victim, the better the case. You need to have someone who is willing to go through

what we are asking them to do; it is obviously a very traumatic experience. CRCC is a resource that I've found as long as the victim is willing to take advantage of it, they always benefit. We get a residual benefit because they are always better on the stand. Getting services for victims necessarily helps the victims. But victims who are willing to work with advocates and take advantage of services, because of their engagement and continuing the process of healing are usually stronger witnesses on the stand, they are better prepared, they are in more frequent contact, they are in a place where they can be a stronger witness."

Most agency representatives indicated that their agency merely worked collaboratively, when necessary. Examples include detectives relying on advocates to build rapport with victims or prosecutors relying on investigators to provide evidence. However, one agency member indicated that the SAVA Initiative improved the overall interactions of the agency members such that they gained a better understanding of the perspectives other members brought to discussions about the cases. The responses of the advocates and Division Chief focused the benefits of the support they receive from other agencies, the ability to brainstorm with them and learn from what they do, and the opportunities provided by the SAVA Initiative to strengthen those relationships. As described by one interviewee,

"The benefits have been candid and frank discussions about any cross-purposes that we have. And rather than speaking to the general public about the frustrations that the partners have, it is forcing them to speak together about them. A byproduct of that is that there have been less negative comments made to the general public about each other because we understand we are attempting to work collaboratively with each other.

We may not always agree but at least because of the conversations we are understanding the thought process behind it. In the past, prosecutors would say this is the way it's going to be because we represent the state and you can't tell us what to do."

They also discussed the importance of the counseling services offered by CRCC.

Although counseling was an important component of the initiative, not having an adequate number of advocacy members assigned to the project did create some challenges. Additional challenges noted were the possibility of causing fallout with the police from uncovering some cases that were improperly investigated initially and the distribution of resources. Other problems included a victim having a complaint against the police, the hiring of advocates within the Prosecutor's Office rather than independent advocates and the resulting concerns over territory, and the hiring of a significant number of investigators that may have produced certain jealousies.

What Has Worked Well with the SAVA Initiative

Although one assistant prosecutor did not feel they were sufficiently knowledgeable about SAVA to be able to respond to this subset of questions, several common themes emerged from the responses of the other interviewees regarding perceptions of what has worked well with the SAVA Initiative.

The most frequently mentioned advantage of the SAVA Initiative was the involvement of victim advocates and referrals to CRCC much sooner in the process. As described by one interviewee,

“Even if a victim is not immediately willing to accept services, getting someone involved and putting a friendly and helpful face to this process, which can be intimidating, has helped tremendously because if it wasn’t for them, then I’m the face of this process and I try as much as I can to be empathetic but that is not my training. I’m a lawyer. I’m focused on doing a job, presenting evidence and getting these people into court. I’m not saying I’m not willing or unable to be that person but it helps that someone much better than me is doing it. That has worked very well within the context of our project.”

Another concern was the strengthening of relationships among members of the participating agencies and the teamwork involved in working the cases together. The increased communication among individuals in different agencies and the additional opportunities to meet and discuss issues face-to-face is felt to have facilitated this growth. Furthermore, regular in-person meetings were felt to require partners to consider the other partners’ perspectives. The impact of the trauma training was also mentioned as something that had worked well under the initiative.

What Hasn’t Worked Well with the SAVA Initiative

Interviewees discussed several things that they felt had not worked well with the SAVA Initiative (although one person did not identify anything that had not

worked well). One challenge concerned a lack of attendance at the SAVA Board meetings by prosecutors and investigators. With their absence, the meetings became largely a group of advocacy staff talking; those who could direct a big change or explain why things are done a particular way in some of the other agencies were felt to be missing from the table. Another challenge concerned the insufficient number of advocates hired as part of the initiative (at the time of the interviews there was only one position). This was felt to be a hindrance to the maintenance of rapport with victims by producing caseloads that did not allow for time to check in with victims while cases waited to go to trial. Furthermore, there were struggles to maintain a victim-centered approach and a need to view cases as more than a conviction. More detailed thoughts on these issues emerged in response to the questions regarding victim participation in the process.

The final issue that was raised concerned a lack of data and measurement on the impact of the process on victims as described in the following response:

“We still have no information from our counseling partner on how often our victims are choosing to go to counseling sessions during and after the case. If we are attempting to measure the effect we have had on raising and reopening an old investigation, we cannot do that without having some data and quantitative measure that the victim is seeking counseling. We know that every single case/survivor is being referred to CRCC for counseling; we know that every single case/survivor information is being given directly to CRCC to contact the survivor. However, we don’t know to what extent the victim/survivor is accepting counseling and at what rate they continue to go to counseling, i.e. one session, two sessions, three sessions or more. Without this information we don’t have an overall idea

of what our interaction and contact with the victims has been on them for a long period of time. We don't know if a crisis has occurred during our investigation or during our prosecution or if there are lingering dilatory effects because of our attempts to hold an offender accountable."

It was also perceived that it would be helpful to have data on variation in use of counseling services according to the age of the victim, how long ago the victimization had occurred, and the relationship of the victim to the offender.

Victim Participation in the Process

From the point of view of those working for the Prosecutor's Office, even if reluctant at first, the majority of victims were willing to be involved in the prosecution, particularly once their allegations of rape were validated by a DNA test and their fears of no one believing them were assuaged. Moreover, their perceptions were that in general victims were satisfied that they finally got justice.

In contrast, from the perspective of those working in positions of victim advocacy, the response of victims to the idea of participating in the prosecution of their old sexual assault cases has varied considerably. As one interviewee describes it:

"We had a few people who didn't believe us because they just never thought anybody would have ever been identified. We had a few who denied it was them in the rape kits. We had people that were really happy

that somebody was identified, especially when it was a complete stranger. And then we had some ladies who were in a really good place, ready to go to court and confront the offender. We had ladies who would relapse. We had a woman we had to go out and get her because she was intoxicated and threatened suicide. She had been sober 10 years. We had ladies who had been victimized numerous times after the sexual assault but never engaged law enforcement. The response has been all over the map.”

A number of reasons were identified for why victims decided they did not want to participate in the process. The most commonly mentioned were that many victims had completely changed their lives and lifestyles since the time they were victimized and they feared bringing up the past both for themselves and for those around them (who sometimes did not know about what had happened to them in the past), or that they feared retaliation.

Both those working in prosecution and advocacy discussed the obstacles of embarrassment and lingering perceptions that the victimization is the woman’s fault.

“We still have people dealing with the shame and embarrassment. Or people who went to counseling and moved on, they got to a place where they were healthy and were scared this would bring back a time when they were not healthy.”

Another person stated that many survivors of rape blame themselves for their victimization and are less likely to want to move forward with participating in the prosecution of the offender if it was someone they knew.

“Some victims claim they put the matter behind them and don’t want to pursue it. For a lot of the ones [victims] that are hesitant [to participate in the process] it’s usually because they blame themselves.”

The related theme of the stigma and judgment experienced by victims of sexual assault was also discussed as a source of reluctance to engage with the criminal justice process. One prosecutor mentioned the daunting prospect of a not guilty verdict for victims:

“I think a lot of victims put a lot of stock in the outcome of the case and they know the guy could get acquitted. They see the prospect of a not guilty verdict as very intimidating. Whereas a guilty verdict will vindicate them, a not guilty verdict means another human being does not believe you, or twelve human beings in the case of a jury.”

Reasons given for why victims elected to participate in the process included wanting to have the person who harmed them be held responsible, to see justice served, to receive the counseling services and advocacy assistance that resulted from engaging in the process, the empowerment that comes from confronting the offender and having the opportunity to speak the truth, the validation produced by the fact that DNA was found, and the desire for closure. The fact that many cases have ended up having multiple victims was also seen as a factor, generating a “strength in numbers” effect. Having an advocate present from the very beginning of the process was also credited as a reason why victims were willing to participate.

With respect to improving victim participation, those working outside of advocacy realized the importance of engaging an advocate as early on as possible, particularly in cases where the survivor appeared hesitant to become involved in the process.

Meeting the SAVA Goal of a Victim-Centered Approach

The interviewees varied considerably in terms of whether they felt that the SAVA Initiative was meeting its goal of providing a victim-centered approach to the testing and potential prosecution of sexual assault kits in cold cases. Those working in advocacy positions were more likely to feel that this goal had not been met generally or that victim-centered approaches had not been met in some cases. They pointed to subpoenas being issued and sent to the survivors' places of employment as a means to coerce the victim into participating as examples of where and how the SAVA Initiative had failed to be victim-centered. The inability to maintain constant contact with victims throughout the process and accompany victims to meetings as a result of extremely high caseloads was also viewed as evidence that the initiative was not providing a victim-centered approach. Finally, anecdotal examples of the negative consequences experienced by some women as a result of bringing back up these traumatic events were also discussed, including the following:

“We have had victims who have been clean for 15 years and sober for 10 and by the time we are done, they are neither.”

There were also victims who initially declined to participate but were eventually persuaded to participate, particularly in cases that had multiple victims. The emphasis for many investigators was on convicting the offender, sometimes at the expense of putting the victims' desires first. Focusing on efforts to enhance public safety, one SAVA interviewee attests:

“Just have to persuade them and impress upon them that the perpetrator has been identified, has a long criminal history or has raped before. Our office still goes forward. I've had one or two cases where I had to subpoena a victim to come talk to me. As far as victim desires and wants, we have to also look at this viewpoint. Say the individual is identified, has a long criminal history, there is still a responsibility to the public. He's raped you, he's raped before and he's going to do it again. So you have to weigh it.”

Although investigators and prosecutors were more likely to perceive the process as being victim-centered, they viewed their primary role as protecting the community. The prosecutors, for example, pointed to the work of the victim advocates in providing assistance to victims as evidence of having a victim-centered approach in place. When asked about policies and practices in their own agency to ensure a victim-centered approach, the response of one prosecutor focused exclusively on the policies and procedures followed by the advocates.

The issue of the media and the public pressure to achieve convictions in these cases was also raised. Those working in advocacy positions recognized the microscope under which the Prosecutor's Office is functioning as a result of the publicity given to the cold sexual assault case initiative in Cuyahoga County. On the upside, it was hoped that the significant attention brought to this issue would mean future sexual assault kits would be treated differently.

Several of those interviewed discussed the difficulty of balancing the needs of the victim and protecting public safety. As described by one prosecutor,

"I know that we make efforts to consider the position and feelings of the victims of these cases every step of the way from charging past trial into sentencing. I think that we have made a lot of effort to consider these cases from the victim's perspective. I think a criticism could be that we don't give victims of these crimes the final say in most decisions as to should we charge a case. If we believe a crime has been committed, even if the victim doesn't want to go forward, we will usually charge that case. Even though the victim has an interest in this case, so does the rest of the community. Other jurisdictions have handled this in a different way. If the victim doesn't want to go forward, they will drop the case. We have made a policy decision that these cases are bigger than one person and while we try to respect the position of that person, we have a greater job to do. We have made every other effort that we can to consider the victim throughout the whole case. As far as I know we have not compelled anyone to come to court, or asked a judge to compel anyone to come. When a victim expresses a desire not to come, we will do everything we can to resolve the case out of court."

An investigator also agreed that balancing the priorities of using a victim-centered approach while protecting the community has been an ongoing challenge:

“If you are a fully victim-centered approach and they [the victim] say no, does it [the case] go forward or doesn’t it? That’s the biggest hurdle to sort out. We’ve been taught both ways. You know, we’ve been taught at seminars and different functions that if a victim doesn’t want to go forward and we force them to we are basically reopening all their wounds. But then you balance that with I know this man raped four other women and he’s still out on the street. Where do you go? That’s the hardest thing.”

For those working in advocacy positions, the concern is that the needs of the community have taken precedent over those of the victims:

“We talk about the ramifications for society if we leave this offender out there, but we don’t talk about the ramifications for society if we re-victimize the survivors. What if they lose their job, go back on unemployment or their kids get taken away because they relapse?”

Several of those working on the Task Force mentioned the importance of the messages coming from those in higher-level positions (such as County Prosecutor Timothy McGinty) regarding the importance of maintaining a victim-centered approach, and the weekly meetings held by the Task Force. As noted by one interviewee,

“I know [the SAVA Initiative is meetings its goal of providing a victim-centered approach] because we have weekly meetings where the SAVA partners are in attendance and we discuss each case including having frank discussions in an open meeting with over 20 people participating to discuss

the victim's thoughts on proceeding and to discuss the facts of the case as well as possible resolutions to the case. Because of the SAVA Initiative, we are making sure that the same partners are invited to these meetings to offer their input."

Training, the participation of advocates throughout the entire process, having an advocate go with investigators to make the initial contact, making referrals for counseling, seeking victim input prior to trial or a plea agreement, notifying victims of pre-trials, plea, and sentencing hearings, and the openness of investigators to feedback were listed as practices or policies that helped ensure a victim-centered approach was taken.

Improving the Handling of Cold Sexual Assault Cases through the SAVA Initiative

Several of those interviewed did not feel they had a sufficient understanding of the SAVA Initiative to make recommendations for improvement. In fact, many of the interviewees did not know how many advocates were involved in the SAVA Initiative.

It is clear that an expansion of the number of advocates hired under the initiative was believed to go a long way towards providing the support and resources needed to maintain a victim-centered approach. A related suggestion was to possibly slow down the rate at which kits are tested and new investigations opened as another means of reducing advocate caseloads.

Another issue that raised concerns revolved around using advocates that work for the Prosecutor's office instead of hiring advocates from an outside agency such as CRCC to ensure there was not a conflict of interest. There was some concern that this decision may have hurt the project by limiting the options presented to victims, particularly in cases where they were reluctant to participate, or creating unnecessary obstacles to connecting survivors to services provided by other advocacy agencies.

One interviewee felt that additional staff training on how to work with victims would be beneficial to improving the handling of cold cases through the SAVA Initiative.

"Preparing for trial does not mean it is all about preparation for the trial when you have a victim on the edge. It is not about forcing a victim to participate. It is not about making them feel that if they do not participate the offender will get away with the crime. The Cold Case Task Force, the investigators, the prosecutors are all there to hold the offender accountable, but that can't be the only focus. Victims deserve to be communicated with throughout the case, not just by the advocates but by other entities who are working on the cases. And being able to see beyond statistics, being able to look past numbers, and seeing that in a case that does not make it into a courtroom for trial, it is more important for a victim to stay healthy than to pursue an offender who may already be serving time for other crime."

Another interviewee agreed that sensitivity training for detectives and investigators would have been beneficial:

"Some training may have been appropriate for some of the investigators

who haven't dealt with this before. Some sensitivity training for some people may have been a bit more appropriate."

SAVA Victim Interviews

Perceptions of The Notification Process

Of the victims interviewed whose sexual assault kits were tested as part of the initiative, all but two were notified about the results of the testing by phone. No significant concerns were expressed by any of the women with respect to the way in which they were notified that their kit had been tested. In addition, all of the women interviewed felt their privacy had been protected during the initial notification. That said, descriptions of the specific processes through which notification occurred given by several victims raised some concerns with respect to maintaining confidentiality.

Only one interviewee expressed significant anger over having been contacted about a rape kit she had done nearly two decades prior. Her concern was that the cold case initiative was largely a political movement and she expressed major resistance to being involved in the political agenda of others.

In her words,

"To me it was nothing but a political stand that they were opening so many cases after 20 years. To me it was a big political stand. It wasn't for the victims."

This same woman expressed very negative perceptions regarding much of the process.

“What I didn’t like is that they were very persistent about me participating. I told them, sorry, I don’t need to do anything, I’ve moved on with my life. They got to the point where they said they could subpoena me. You didn’t do your job and now you are forcing me to participate? If someone says no, it is no. It is like domestic violence; if I don’t want to be involved, I shouldn’t have to participate. What good is having a witness who doesn’t want to participate? It was their error.”

She ultimately participated in the process, to get them to “leave me alone.”

The Pre-Court Process

The feedback provided by the interviewees regarding the pre-court process was largely positive. All but one woman reported feeling adequately informed and updated about the status of their cases and that they had been treated with dignity and respect.

All of the women reported that they were offered counseling services, but none of them accepted the services. One woman stated that the only time she was offered counseling was by a judge at the end of her court case. Several of the interviewees explained that they had worked with a therapist after their attack many years back and did not feel the need to return to counseling again.

The Court Process

Two of the women reported feeling some pressure to participate in the legal proceeding. All but one woman agreed to testify at the trial of the defendant. The interviewees reported feeling a variety of emotions while testifying. Some were anxious and fearful, and this was often attributed to the offender's presence in the courtroom. One woman described it as both liberating and scary to have someone question you about your decisions. All but one woman reported that they were given the opportunity to make a victim impact statement. Of those who had the opportunity, only one declined to do so.

Post-Court

Five of the eight women were satisfied with the sentence the defendant received. In the cases where the women reported they were not satisfied with the sentence, the defendant had received a prison sentence of less than three years, which in their view was too short.

“He just recently got sentenced for two rapes, kidnapping and gross sexual impositioning and he got two and a half years in prison and only has to register for five years.”

Plea deals also seemed to be perceived as both a benefit and a setback. While several women were grateful for the fact that the defendant took a plea and therefore they were not required to testify at the trial, another woman was

extremely critical of a plea deal that she felt did not punish the offender nearly enough.

“Pisses me off that he got such a light sentence. Don’t give deals out like they are pieces of candy.”

After being reluctant to participate in the process, another victim had a similar sentiment and was disappointed with the prosecutor allowing the defendant to accept a plea.

“I sat in court and watched another case and the guy got eight years. [Defendant’s name] only got [#] months and took the easy way out by pleading.”

Furthermore, those women who were not satisfied with the sentence also expressed the most negative views about participating in the process. As described by one interviewee,

“When I came in the room, I saw his name on a file and I was like oh (sigh). My brain had put it so far back.....I was better off not knowing. It conjured up old feelings I didn’t know I had. It’s been 10 years and I never dealt with it. I had pushed it out of my mind and just didn’t think about it. It’s like a dog in a cage – you open it and it may come out and be friendly or it may come out and bite you.”

Half of the women reported having contact with the prosecutor’s office or investigator after the case was closed. The vast majority of the women reported that a victim advocate had followed up with them on several occasions after the closing of the case to check on their well-being.

Victim Concerns and Recommendations for Improvement

Overall the responses of the interviewees were generally positive; however, several concerns and recommendations for improvements emerged from the victim interviews. Some of these revolved around a desire for communication regarding specific aspects of the case, such as when an offender was arrested, released, or when a plea offer was being considered.

One of the most consistent criticisms we heard from victims was that they were angry about the amount of time it took to have their rape kits tested. In some cases they explained that they thought no one believed their initial allegation and in others cases victims felt that they were simply not a priority to the criminal justice system. One rape survivor asserted the following:

“Do it sooner, because the prosecutor seemed like she wanted the case to go fast, for it to go away, but I wanted it to go away 10 years ago.”

Several interviewees also discussed the fears they had regarding their own personal safety at various points in the process. One interviewee reported that her primary concern during the processing of the case was what the defendant might know about her.

“I would get suspicious phone calls. I went through 15 phone numbers in one year. He paranoid me and now his wife calls me to this day and there’s nothing I can do. She told me ‘you got him so I’m going to get you.’ The part I didn’t like was that both times I had to go to court, I had

to walk past the rapist. I wish there was a way to not have to see him and his wife before court.”

The anxiety of having to face their perpetrator in court was also a source of hardship for victims.

“She [detective] wanted to go trial but I was scared because I would have had to sit across from him in court.”

Another woman discussed the extensive fear she experienced while the defendant was out on bond, resulting in her moving multiple times and going out to do things like grocery shop in a group. Her fear was further compounded by her perception of the short sentence the defendant received:

“I still have nightmares and I wake up screaming. There are days that I wake up pissed off because in [a short period of time] he’ll be out and I know he’s going to be pissed.”

Other concerns raised in the interviews revolved around issues of timing and the length of the case. The speed of the process appeared to work better for some victims than others. For example, some of the victims experienced frustration at the numerous continuances that occurred during the court proceedings.

However, at the outset of the process, some victims desired more time to process what was going on and to have more time to make decisions regarding their willingness to participate in the case.

“It had been 19 years. I was shocked and I wasn’t ready to talk about that. I had moved on, and didn’t think I could even process it. I told the

detective that I needed time to think about it. I just needed time to process it. They [prosecutors and detectives] need to be more understanding to victims. Work as slow or quick as victims are willing to work. Don't rush victims."

Additional recommendations were made with respect to the court process itself.

One interviewee thought it would have been helpful to have more preparation for trial regarding what questions to anticipate, what to wear, and what to expect from the defense while they were on the witness stand. Such preparations may have allowed victims to feel more empowered.

DISCUSSION

For investigators and prosecutors, the SAVA Initiative appears to be synonymous with victim advocacy and in this respect is related to the work they do only in so far as an advocate is assigned to work with the victim on their cases and offer counseling to ensure cooperation. For advocates, the SAVA Initiative is tantamount to ensuring protocols for a fully victim-centered approach. Despite having conflicting goals at times, the SAVA Initiative has successfully brought together multiple agencies to collaborate. Overall, all parties involved in the endeavor are eager to enhance public safety. The biggest source of contention revolves around how to simultaneously hold offenders accountable while ensuring that a victim's right to participate, or not, is protected during the prosecution of the assailant.

With regard to victims, an important theme that emerged from the victim interviews was the overwhelmingly positive feedback received regarding their interactions with advocates, and in some cases the prosecutors as well. In the words of one interviewee,

“I wouldn’t change a thing. The group of people I worked with, I even tried to find out the supervisor’s name, they did such a great job. They are some great people.”

Another woman stated the following at the end of her interview:

“I genuinely felt cared about. They thought well of me and I felt like a priority. They helped me to realize that I didn’t do anything wrong.”

Evaluation of Meeting Proposed Goals

Incorporating a Team Approach

This assessment finds that the SAVA Initiative has successfully met its proposed goal of implementing a team approach by holding meetings consistently and sharing information about agency-specific aspects of the cases as well as collaborating on how to proceed. It is clear that each agency has been provided a voice and a platform to offer and hear alternative approaches that has allowed for a more inclusive and informed process.

Establishing Protocols

The SAVA Initiative proposed to establish protocols related to the handling of cases. Interviews with agency members suggest that the criminal proceedings

and victims are handled on a case-by-case basis. Although the need for some flexibility is essential, the absence of protocols has subsequently left the process unpredictable for victims and, at times, frustrating for victim advocates. The lack of protocols is of particular concern in the two following areas: 1) what information detectives and investigators can share with individuals (i.e. victims' family, friends, or co-workers) with whom they may come into contact while trying to locate and notify victims; and 2) determining when a victim is merely being encouraged rather than coerced or harassed to participate. Ideally, prosecutors, advocates, investigators, and the SAVA Board should collectively agree on such protocols to ensure a victim-centered approach is being adhered to in all cases as the SAVA Initiative proclaims.

Evidenced-Based Practices

Each agency is consistently and effectively using evidence-based practices respective to their fields in the handling of the cases. Prosecutors have successfully used tactics to convict numerous sex offenders, sway victims to testify, and to garner rapport with advocates to ensure their assistance with getting the victim to cooperate during the court proceedings. The investigators are also performing well by consistently locating and notifying victims, obtaining evidence, and providing the resources necessary to substantiate a prosecution.

Likewise, advocates have diligently worked to offer support and serve as an activist on behalf of sexual assault survivors.

Unfortunately, the respective evidenced-based practices sometimes are too specific to the roles of the individual agencies. Thus, agencies need to broaden their approaches to encompass the overarching goals of the SAVA Initiative that rely on unique talents and efforts from each agency. It is evident that the goal of public safety is essential to all of the individuals interviewed, and additional data on victims and cases need to be collected so that evidenced-based practices can be established that are mutually beneficial for victims and agency members alike.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Secure Additional Funding and Support

An important recommendation that emerged from several interviews was the idea of having the Task Force expanded to cases that are not cold. The team approach, immediate assignment of an advocate, direct connection to victim services, and co-location of personnel was felt to be a very valuable approach that needs not to be limited to older cases.

Another recommendation that emerged among several agency members was to increase the funding so that additional resources and staff would be available to

better support the current efforts. It was made clear by one interviewee that more funding is needed for the testing of rape kits as well as to ensure that there is enough manpower to handle the caseloads.

“It’s funds. They have to test the rape kits. That’s why I say it all goes back to funds. From the couple of seminars that I’ve been to that is one of the main problems and main components. They have all these backlogged rape kits but they don’t send them to get tested because each rape kit costs a certain amount of money. So, they prioritize where they want to spend their funds when it comes to law enforcement, or whomever. So if they had the funds, the rape kits would get tested. But then you would also need to start a cohesive cold case unit. And you have to put in manpower, you just can’t have 15,000 back-logged rape kits and start a cold case unit with three detectives or three investigators. That’s like banging your head against the wall. We are lucky that the funding became available.”

Another agency member was more specific and emphasized the need for additional victim advocates:

“I think we have identified the need for more victim advocacy. Due to the volume of cases, we should be moving immediately towards providing more advocacy and counseling. Our one advocate has 268 cases. This is unacceptable and we need to address how each partner agency might provide more resources for victims.”

Ensure Notifications are Confidential

It is essential to protect the privacy of victims, particularly given the length of time between the sexual assaults and the testing of the rape kits. More often than not, victims have not shared their experiences with current romantic partners, children, co-workers, neighbors or other individuals that may be likely to be

present when the notification occurs. The notification process must be both discreet and occur in private.

In addition, notifications should be made only to victims. While it may be necessary to leave contact information in the event that the victim is not available, a protocol should be established to ensure what the message should include. Messages left with a third party should be vague enough not to allude to the nature of the victimization, yet detailed enough to guarantee that the victim, or anyone relaying a message to a victim, will know that they are not a suspect or at risk of being charged with a crime. Importantly, any and all correspondences (i.e. letters, voicemails, business cards) left for a victim should not have any identifying (i.e. SAVA, SART, Rape Crisis Center) information related to the nature of the reason the victim is being contacted.

Establish a Victim Participation Protocol

Agency members, particularly those in law enforcement and prosecution, are faced with the challenge of protecting the public while providing a victim-centered approach, which in some cases means respecting the rights of a victim to choose not to participate in the prosecution of their assailant. While this is a difficult balancing act, it is necessary to establish a protocol for cases in which a victim expresses she does not want to be involved in the case. Such a protocol

will avoid the need to handle victims on a case-by-case basis and risk some victims feeling coerced to participate in the process.

Establish a Tracking and Follow-up Protocol

Several agency members were concerned about the impact of the case on the victims and their families. Despite counseling services being offered to victims, agency members are typically not informed about whether or not victims are choosing to go to counseling sessions before, during, or after the processing of the case. One agency member expressed the need to track how many and at what rate victims are accepting and participating in counseling services. These data could be provided at the aggregate level to ensure that the confidentiality of individual victims is not violated.

An agency member also conveyed that having a protocol to track the counseling sessions would be informative for the investigators and prosecutors handling the cases. Such a protocol would allow agency members to track trends or patterns over time.

Moreover, tracking the number of rape kits tested, investigations opened, prosecution rates, counseling services rendered, and convictions rates will be important tools to convince legislators and funding sources that the project is viable and should continue to be supported. This would also allow for

benchmarks to be established and evaluations to be conducted to ensure the goals of the initiative are being met.

Renew Agency and Board Members' Commitment to SAVA

The SAVA Initiative has been running for several years now. During that time, members of the Task Force have changed and expanded. The lack of knowledge regarding SAVA among some of the agency members interviewed and the declining attendance at SAVA Board meetings suggest it may be time to re-engage Task Force and SAVA Board members regarding their commitment to the initiative. This would also provide an opportunity to educate newer Task Force members regarding the goals of SAVA and to evaluate the need for additional trainings for Task Force members with respect to sensitivity, trauma, and working with sexual assault victims.

APPENDIX A

Interview Questions for SAVA Agency Members

1. What is your understanding of the role/function of the SAVA Initiative?
2. What is the role of your agency in the SAVA Initiative? How does your agency assess whether it is meeting its goals?
3. What is your understanding of the role of the other agencies?
4. The SAVA Initiative required considerable planning and cooperation between the County Prosecutor's Office, the Cleveland Police Department, and the Cleveland Rape Crisis Center. Looking back at the process, what were the rough and smooth spots?
5. What were the benefits and challenges of working with other agencies?
6. What do you feel has worked well with the SAVA Initiative?
7. What do you feel hasn't worked well with the SAVA Initiative? Have any efforts been made to address these challenges?
8. In general, how responsive have victims been to the idea of participating in the prosecution of their old sexual assault case?
9. What is your perception of why victims decide to participate or not? What efforts were made to encourage participation?
10. Do you feel that the SAVA Initiative is meeting its goal of providing a victim-centered approach to the testing and potential prosecution of sexual assault kits in cold cases?

11. What practices or policies are in place at your agency to ensure a victim-centered approach?
12. Do you have any specific recommendations for improving the way cold sexual assault cases are handled through the SAVA Initiative?
13. The SAVA Initiative has the potential to receive national attention from the Department of Justice, victims of crime organizations and other federal, state, and local institutions. What program elements do you think should be replicated around the country? Are there any program elements that hindered success or that should be eliminated?

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions for Victims Involved in Sexual Assault Kit Initiative

Demographic:

- What year were you born?
- What is your race/ethnicity?
- Are you employed? If yes, full or part-time? What is your occupation?
- Do you have minor children? If yes, how many?
- Are you single, married, divorced, cohabitating or widowed?

Notification:

- How were you notified? By whom were you notified?
- How long has your case been backlogged? How do you feel about the delay?
- Did the delay impact your decision to be involved in the case?
- How long had it been since you last had contact with someone involved in the case?
- Please tell me what you remember about being notified.
- Were you contacted before or after the rape-kit was tested?
- Did you feel as though your privacy was protected during the initial notification?
- What was your response to the notification?
- Would you have preferred to be notified some other way?

- Were you given an estimated timeline for processing the case?
- Were you given any information about the perpetrator? If so, what information was shared?
- Do you have any suggestions for improving the notification process?

Pre-Court:

- After you were notified, when was the next time you were contacted?
- By whom were you contacted? What was the purpose of the contact?
- How many times did you meet with someone?
- Did you feel you were adequately informed and updated about the status of your case?
- What type of information was shared with you?
- Was there information that you wanted but never obtained?
- Were you informed about court dates, the offender being released, plea agreement/hearings, or a sentencing hearing?
- Did you ever try to contact anyone regarding the case? Were they easily accessible?
- Were you offered any counseling services? Did you accept those services?
- Were your family members offered counseling services? Did they accept those services?

- Did people from the prosecutor's office make attempts to accommodate your schedule? What about the investigators and or advocates? How were your scheduling needs met?
- Were you provided options regarding where meetings about the case would be held?
- Did you feel you were treated with dignity and respect?
- Did you feel as though your needs were a priority while your case was being processed?
- Were your needs adequately met? If yes, how so? If no, what needs were not met?
- Did you feel you were able to make informed decisions about your participation?
- Tell me how you felt about participating in the legal proceedings?

Court:

- Did you participate in any legal proceedings? What was your motivation for participating? What were your reasons for not participating? What factors did you consider in making the decision?
- Did you feel pressured by anyone to do so?
- Did you testify? Please share what you remember about that experience.
- Were you offered the opportunity to provide a victim impact statement? Did you do so? Why or why not?

- Were you provided with support or services during this period?
- Was your personal safety ever a concern?
- What would have been beneficial to help you during the legal process?
- Were you told what could happen to the perpetrator?

Post-Court:

- What was the outcome of the case? Were you satisfied with this outcome?
- Have you had any contact with the prosecutor's office, advocate, or investigator after the case was closed? If not, would you have liked someone to follow-up with you? If yes, who initiated that contact?
- What do you remember about what happened after the case?
- Were you offered any counseling/therapeutic services? Did you accept those services?
- How did feel about participating in the process after the case was closed?

Improvement:

- Did you have any concerns during the processing of the case?
- What suggestions do you have for improving how your case was processed?
- Were there things that people involved with handling the case did well?
- What would you want prosecutorial staff/investigators/advocates handling similar cases to know about your experience?

- What can you share with prosecutorial staff/investigators/advocates that may help them perform their jobs better?

APPENDIX C

VICTIM RECRUITMENT FLYER

Be heard.

Your voice matters.

As a survivor of a terrible crime, you deserve respect, compassion, and honesty as your case is investigated and prosecuted.

To help the Sexual Assault Kit Task Force improve, two researchers are interviewing survivors like you to hear about **YOUR** experience with the Victim Advocate, Investigator and Prosecutor you worked with.

These interviews will help us learn what has helped you and what we could do better for you and other survivors.

Interviews are 100% confidential between you and the researchers. Please consider scheduling an interview if you would like to talk about your experience.

Call to learn more: (216) 687-9349. Transportation assistance is available.

Who You'll Talk To



Wendy C. Regoeczi, Ph.D.
Cleveland State University
Director, Criminology Research
Center
(216) 687-9349
w.regoeczi@csuohio.edu



Valerie L. Wright, Ph.D. Cleveland
State University Department of
Sociology and Criminology
(216) 687-4509
v.l.wright17@csuohio.edu

Wendy and Valerie conduct research and teach on topics including violent crime, domestic violence, race and gender, and criminal justice policy at Cleveland State University. Their project will help women like you in Cuyahoga County get help after a sexual assault.

Would you like to share your thoughts and feelings about your experience with your case? Schedule your CONFIDENTIAL INTERVIEW with Wendy or Valerie - call or email today!

More information about this project

The Ohio Office of Criminal Justice Services provides funding to help form a Sexual Assault Victim Advocacy program at the Cuyahoga County Prosecutor's Office (CCPO) through a grant.

As we develop this program, the CCPO is seeking to develop "best practices"

— the most helpful way to provide services — for victim advocates, investigators and prosecutors as they work with survivors of sexual assault whose cases are being reopened through DNA testing.

Through interviews with Cleveland State University criminology researchers, your feedback will help us determine what these best practices are, and what we can do to help you and other survivors.

Your opinions and suggestions can help many other women in Cuyahoga County who are going through what you have been through.

We know that it can be very difficult for survivors of sexual assault to have their cases reopened, even if they want justice. It can bring back traumatic memories, stress and bad feelings. It can also be confusing and frustrating to deal with the criminal justice system.

We want to reduce your trauma, stress and frustration, and to help make sure you are involved and informed at every step.

We hope you will share both what we have done right and what we can do better. Please call **(216) 687-9349** if you would like to schedule a time to talk to a researcher. All interviews are private and confidential.

Victim Advocates

- Janine Deccola (216) 443-3865
- Susan Kennedy (216) 443-7773
- Jolanda Knowlin (216) 698-2221
- Adrena Merchant (216) 348-4466
- Jeanette Pellot-Ayala (216) 443-7822
- Marya Simmons (216) 443-7483



*Cuyahoga County Office
of the Prosecutor* 1200
Ontario Street Courts
Tower, Ninth Floor
Cleveland, Ohio 44113

Office Hours:
Monday - Friday, 8:30
a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
(216) 443-7800

www.prosecutor.cuyahogacounty.us