

Violence Against Indian Women (VAIW) Pilot Study Research Workshop

MEETING SUMMARY

**National Institute of Justice
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VIOLENCE AGAINST INDIAN WOMEN (VAIW) PILOT STUDY

Thursday, March 1, 2012

Opening Remarks

Bethany Backes, Social Science Analyst, NIJ

Kristina Rose, Deputy Director, NIJ

Ms. Backes opened the proceedings by introducing Kristina Rose, Deputy Director, National Institute of Justice (NIJ).

Ms. Rose thanked all the participants for coming to Washington, DC. She noted that NIJ's Director John Laub is a "huge advocate" of this research, but could not attend because of a conflict. She thanked the NIJ staff for putting the workshop together and for the federal partners participation that included the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Office of Violence Against Women (OVW), the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), and the Indian Health Service (IHS). Pointing out that all of this cooperation comes from the top, she noted that U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder has made violence against women a high priority: "We thank him for his support and strong commitment, and the White House as well."

Ms. Rose said the goal of the workshop was to obtain the research community's input on NIJ's Violence Against Indian Women (VAIW) Pilot Study. She stressed that research must be sensitive to the diversity of tribal culture, language, and world views. She also emphasized the importance of getting participants' honest and frank comments about what is presented at this meeting "because they will tell us where to go from here." After thanking RTI staff for their hard work on the pilot study, Ms. Rose turned the proceedings back to Bethany Backes.

Purpose and Overview of Meeting

Bethany Backes, NIJ

This is the time and place for a "midcourse adjustment," said Ms. Backes, who served as the workshop facilitator, we really want to examine and reach a better understanding of the methods required for this major undertaking. She acknowledged that we may not all agree on every point discussed at this workshop, but NIJ is looking to the participants for feedback on what has been done to this point and the next steps we take in studying violence against American Indian and Alaska Native women.

Ms. Backes outlined some guiding points for consideration:

- 1) Should we take a local/specific approach or a national approach?
- 2) How can we improve on the methods used in the pilot and what are the applicable lessons from your own work in tribal communities that could be applied to this project?
- 3) What are the overall strengths and weaknesses of the pilot approach?

Ms. Backes then turned the discussion over to Christine Crossland, NIJ Senior Social Science Analyst.

NIJ's Violence Against Indian Women in Indian Country Program of Research

Christine R. Crossland, NIJ

NIJ Senior Social Science Analyst Christine Crossland thanked the consultants in the pilot study—Ms. Ada Pecos Melton, President/owner of American Indian Development Associates; Dr. Michelle Chino, Professor of Environmental and Occupational Health at the University of Nevada Las Vegas, who could not attend; and Dr. André B. Rosay, Director of the Justice Center at the University of Alaska Anchorage. She also thanked the Native American field interviewers, interpreters, and most important the participants who were part of the pilot study.

To provide a legislative context to this research, Ms. Crossland took the group “back to where we all started”—the Violence Against Women Act of 2005. Public Law No. 109-162, Title IX, Section 904(a) mandated that the National Institute of Justice conduct a national baseline study “to examine violence against Indian women in Indian country.” The statute requires an examination of “(i) domestic violence; (ii) dating violence; (iii) sexual assault; (iv) stalking; and (v) murder.” Congress also required an evaluation component that assesses the effectiveness of federal, state, tribal, and local responses to violence against Indian women, as well as recommendations to improve the response. This is a program of research in which multiple projects are needed to cover all of the information encompassed by this legislation. This program is guided by a Federal Advisory Task Force whose members include representatives from tribal governments, national tribal domestic and sexual violence non-profit organizations, and other national tribal organizations. The Task Force convenes during their two-year appointment in order to provide guidance to NIJ on the development and implementation of this program of research. “The sun has set on one Federal Advisory Task Force, and another has been convened, which will continue to guide us in this process,” Ms. Crossland said. She stressed that the focus of this meeting is on the component of the legislation that mandates the collection of baseline data.

Ms. Crossland recalled that after meeting with the initial Task Force, “we discovered we were starting from ground zero” as it pertains to available data collection efforts, data systems, and sources. So, NIJ proposed a tribally representative study that would do the following: collect information addressed in the legislation; conduct secondary data analysis on federal, state, local, and tribal crime and health data systems; evaluate proposals that came through their solicitation process (i.e., investigator initiated); and, finally, consider special studies requested by task force members, if funding becomes available.

Noting the work done since 2007 to find and gather the baseline data, Ms. Crossland said that federal agencies have coordinated to see what existing information could shed light in this area while being mindful of avoiding duplication of efforts among the federal research entities. She pointed out that a report was commissioned to look at all the research areas that might be helpful in addressing the particular mission at hand (see <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/223691.pdf>). By way of example, she noted that NIJ

looked to the work of their federal partners—particularly the Bureau of Justice Statistics’ (BJS) National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS), and work done by the Census Bureau (e.g., American Community Survey)—to see what survey data might be useful in addressing Congressional concerns. After looking at these and other data within the FBI, EOUSA, and other various state, local and tribal sources, they discovered that there was very little available in terms of relevant, reliable data, Ms. Crossland said (for more information see http://www.jrsa.org/pubs/reports/nij_tribal_DVSA_data_report.pdf#xml=http://69.46.26.162/texts/search/pdfhi.txt?query=tribal&pr=default&prox=page&rorder=500&rprox=500&rdfreq=500&rwfreq=500&rlead=500&rdepth=0&sufs=0&order=r&cq=&id=507903a81f).

Ms. Crossland stressed that in their outreach, NIJ aimed to be transparent and collaborative with its tribal partners. She thanked Ada Pecos Melton, without whom this research “would not have happened.” A basic tenet in NIJ’s research efforts, Ms. Crossland said, was “whatever we do, do no harm. I would rather do nothing than do something that will harm this community.” She observed that NIJ did not want to engage in helicopter science—it was important to observe the sovereignty of tribes involved and the tribal resolutions that we required to gain permission to come into participating communities. Ms. Crossland indicated that the debriefings held after the pilot study concluded shows that “things went very well” and encourages future work and collaboration. A major point that she stresses with her staff, she said, is that “We cannot just begin work and quit. We must remain connected to the community.” This point about having a close nexus to tribal communities and relying on respected consultants was reiterated throughout the day.

Ms. Crossland then outlined key decision points and explanatory notes important to giving the pilot study context. She cited some of the following noteworthy points:

Unit of analysis: Does the term “Indian women” mean just enrolled women in tribal communities, or does it mean any woman in a community that is part of a federally recognized tribe? There is a gap between the two, Ms. Crossland acknowledged. Should the survey be limited to only adult women, or should the age range be expanded? Given data that show a high prevalence of violence against men as well, it would be ideal to include men in the study.

Cross-walking to other national studies: At the start of this research effort, the Centers for Disease and Prevention Control had just begun collecting data using their National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS) (i.e., random digital dialing CATI mode versus in-person interviewing using CAPI/ACASI). At the same time, the State of Alaska was conducting a statewide victimization study with important corollaries to the pilot study. NIJ decided to use core pieces of the two studies to make it possible to cross-walk among all three studies (i.e., NISVS, Alaska State Victimization Study, and NIJ’s VAIW pilot study).

Mode: Frequently, data of the kind sought in this project are collected through computer-assisted techniques. However, those involved with this project had deep concerns about whether the use of a computer to capture sensitive information would be viewed as culturally offensive. Ms. Crossland noted that experience in the pilot study showed great promise for computer use going forward.

Sampling: This is always an issue, and we do not have all the answers. We tested different sampling methods in the pilot, which is discussed later. However this key element needs further development.

Burden on the respondents: Ms. Crossland acknowledged that a 90-minute questionnaire could be viewed as too long, but respondents in the pilot study did not indicate that length was a problem. They, in fact, found that the length was appropriate to gain rapport and get to the information being sought.

Language: For cost reasons, NIJ had an English-only version of the instrument, but used local community interpreters to assist participants in one pilot site location.

Pilot Study Goals

As noted in the slide presentation, the goal of the pilot study was to test a survey that would help us understand the experiences of American Indian and Alaska Native (AI&AN) women living on tribal land and Alaska Native communities, including:

- ▶ Their opinions about safety issues in their communities;
- ▶ Their experiences with violence;
- ▶ The kinds of support available to them; and
- ▶ Their opinions about police, courts, prosecutors, and service providers.

With the completion of the data analysis and report generation, the pilot study should provide considerably more knowledge, tools, experience, and methods to coordinate and field the larger study.

As to the specific study activities, Ms. Crossland noted that NIJ has:

- ▶ Created and pilot-tested a survey instrument with women who self-reported as AI or AN and reside on recognized tribal lands in the United States;
- ▶ Developed and tested a study method, including different sampling strategies and data collection approaches, that enables the safe collection of data and analysis of results, which can then be generalized to AI &AN women aged 18 or over residing on tribal lands; and
- ▶ Worked collaboratively with tribal and local contacts to implement the pilot study at three sites.

Pilot study data collection occurred in the fall 2011 and winter 2012. The original data collection submission to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) requested three full-scale studies at three different geographical locations. However, the OMB and NIJ agreed that three separate pilot studies focusing on different factors of the study's methods would be more beneficial.

Pilot Study #1 used a map-based approach to sampling households on one reservation. The work involved three independent activities: (1) using a map-based approach to identify and enumerate all household units in predefined area of the reservation; (2) traveling to the

predefined area and working with tribal partners to undertake more traditional counting and listing; and tribal staff reviewing enrollment lists and comparing them to the research teams lists.

Pilot Study #2 conducted a small, full-scale pilot test of all components of a field-collection study that involved activities such as: recruiting, hiring, and training Native American women field interviewers; randomly sampling potential respondents from an enrollment list; contacting sampled American Indian women at least 18 years of age to ask them to participate in a field interview; and administering the field interviews and debriefing the interview participants and interviewers regarding the survey, mode, etc.

Pilot Study #3 set out to cognitively test the survey instrument and consent form; to collect information about confidentiality issues and the potential for telescoping on the 12-month and lifetime victimization estimates; and to test respondent preferences for the data collection mode and interviewer characteristics. In this pilot, researchers conducted cognitive interviews with Native American women at least 18 years of age, and Native American interpreters were available to debrief respondents following the interview.

NIJ's Overall Conclusions

Ms. Crossland noted that after three months of hard work, local cooperation and buy-in, the pilot study was successfully completed. She pointed out that the difficult history between tribal communities and the federal government cannot be ignored, and it is vital to get local coordination and buy-in for this program's activities. Most important it is imperative to show respect for tribal sovereignty. True collaboration, she explained, involves more than simply calling someone on the phone and expecting good results and automatic access. Another real challenge is to merge Western science-based approaches with Native American traditions. The pilot study has resulted in some encouraging findings in this area. She emphasized the need to compensate participants and local, onsite research staff (e.g., interviewers, coordinators, interpreters) for their involvement in this work and above all to respect tribal traditions and customs.

Participant Comments

One workshop participant commented that it also is important to note that this work began with support and advocacy from tribal communities and grassroots efforts to address violence against Indian women. When asked by another participant when this push began, the woman said it started more than 20 years ago, with later help from former U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno in paving the way for this research. Domestic violence and sexual assault are not easy topics to discuss in tribal communities, she observed, noting that "it takes a long time for things to bubble up" in the American Indian community.

When another participant asked why the pilot study had three different goals and purposes at each of the different sites, the NIJ team (and Jennifer Park, senior statistician at OMB) reframed the question. While the pilot study had three different goals and purposes, NIJ and OMB decided that to gain a better understanding, the sites would address research questions separately.

Another participant expressed concern that survey respondents might have their intimate secrets improperly disclosed by indiscreet local tribal members. In response, the NIJ team gave assurances that confidentiality and privacy protection were paramount. Dr. Krebs of RTI

International noted that if an interviewer personally knew the survey respondent, she was permitted to interview that respondent.

Another workshop participant asked the NIJ team to identify the particular geographic regions. The team responded that the terms of the confidentiality agreements with the tribes prohibited disclosure of those sites.

Sampling Methods Used in the NIJ Pilot Study

Christopher Krebs, Ph.D., RTI International

Dr. Krebs of RTI thanked the NIJ staff and agreed that this is indeed a “midcourse” discussion. To obtain a random sample of individual participants, researchers often use sampling methods involving a preexisting list of the population from which the sample is drawn, such as a tribal enrollment list, a tribal census list, a tribal address list, or a convenience list. This method was used at Pilot Site #2 with the tribe’s enrollment list.

At pilot site #2, there was a “nuts-to-bolts” data collection effort (hiring interviewers, recruiting respondents, collecting data, etc.). As mentioned, in this site, researchers used the tribe’s enrollment list to randomly select 100 women age 18 and old who were prescreened as living on the reservation. Also, 42 women were placed in a reserve sample, but this list of women was never used. Of the 100 randomly sampled women, 33 were interviewed. [NOTE: Interviewers were told to interview no more than 35 women.]

At pilot site #1, a household-based sampling method was used. In this site, we used the well-known method of counting and listing houses. He said that an advantage of this method is that the list generated can be more complete with current information (whereas lists of individuals, such as enrollment lists, are not always up-to-date). It is not known how many tribes would welcome the use of this type of sampling method in their communities and allow researchers to drive around rural areas counting dwellings/households. In the pilot site #1, the tribe with which he worked welcomed this sampling method. The counting and listing method is labor intensive, expensive, and invasive, he stressed: “You certainly need collaboration, buy-in, and cooperation from the local community.” Also it is important to note that this method requires an additional round of screening, to determine that a woman 18 years of age lives in the house.

Dr. Krebs discussed an additional map-based sampling method that uses aerial photographs and maps to determine the number of households on a reservation. Dr. Krebs noted that map-based methods can be very efficient and inexpensive, and that, unlike counting and listing, they can allow a better view of borders between properties. Still, he acknowledged that age, quality, and accuracy can be a problem with maps and photos. Further, as with counting and listing, additional questioning is required to determine the availability of a woman at least 18 years of age. One reason they wanted to test this method, was because OMB wanted evidence that it was a valid method. This method will not work everywhere, Krebs conceded, stressing that local buy-in and cooperation are vital in this context as well.

NIJ staff again emphasized the need to adhere to and respect local tribal traditions. Staff noted that the project sought permission from the tribal leadership and council to use publically available aerial photographs of their homelands. Getting permission involved sharing the

photographic information with the Native American officials so that they could use it to provide services to their populations. This gave the local officials a reason to buy in to the project and understand “what’s in it for them.”

In terms of sampling, one meeting participant noted that her reservation is a “patchwork quilt” of federal, state, tribal, and local lands where this approach would not work to enumerate households. Another participant said that when incidents occur in Indian Country, sometimes a surveyor is called before calling police authorities to first make sure the incident happened in Indian Country. Many others acknowledged this point that tribal nations lack authority over incidents beyond their reservation borders. When one meeting participant questioned whether this experiment signaled a move away from lists to map-based surveys, Dr. Krebs clarified that the map-based approach was merely being tried as a backup where a list is not an option.

The map-based approach segment of his presentation provided a visual demonstration of aerial photos showing three non-contiguous regions of the reservation. To draw a comparison between aerial photography and physically counting households, an RTI team expert with aerial maps and imaging analyzed aerial photographs of three non-contiguous areas of the reservation and a team of people from RTI and NIJ went to the reservation to physically count households in the same area. The counting and listing method showed 223 households; the map-based method showed 220 households. Two explanations account for the differences: the map-based method missed two households because clouds and trees obscured them; the counting and listing method mistakenly tallied a house that was off reservation land. Nevertheless, the high overall accuracy of this testing clearly showed that the map-based approach is a valid method so long as tribal authorization for aerial photography is secured.

When asked about the cost differences between these two methods, Dr. Krebs said he had not done a formal head-to-head comparison, but that the difference was stark. Given the high costs involved with planning, hiring people on the ground, and physically sending them out to the field to count dwellings, there is no doubt that the map-based approach which can be performed in hours makes the cost answer very clear. A participant added it was cost-effective for RTI do this method given their GIS specialists on staff but it would not be cost-effective for other organizations without GIS or necessary software to utilize this method.

One meeting participant was impressed by this new survey technique, but wanted to be sure the group keeps in mind “where we are trying to go with this.” Given the historical neglect in this research area, perhaps we need to look at what we are doing with these numbers and what we are drawing from them, she cautioned. Rhetorically, she asked the group: What do we want the final product to look like? What are we trying to collect? For what do we want to use these data? If these numbers are just more concrete evidence of victimization prevalence rates, “I am not sure that would be the best use of this research endeavor,” she said.

The “missing link” in this approach, said one participant, is how sampling households is relevant to the prevalence of rape in a given area. Dr. Krebs acknowledged the point, but said that once the households are enumerated, one can find out how many women there are and then take the study further.

Instrumentation

Lisa Carley-Baxter, RTI International

Ms. Carley-Baxter discussed instrumentation for the pilot study. The core measures of victimization were adapted from CDC's NISVS, which considers psychological aggression, coercive control and entrapment, stalking, sexual violence, physical violence, victim characteristics, and perpetrator characteristics. Based on the recommendation of the initial round of cognitive testing, she noted that additional items were added to better capture victim and perpetrator characteristics relevant to tribal and village affiliation and residence in a tribal community.

Beyond those spelled out in the statutory mandate, additional domains of interest were included such as community crime and safety, victimization experiences, victimization impact, victimization reporting, service needs, attitudes toward the criminal justice system, and community strengths.

At this juncture, Dr. Rosay said the current draft of the instrument was structured to be a national survey. He recommended that this approach be revisited, especially because others had agreed with the earlier point that Indian Country is a "patchwork quilt" of varying laws, jurisdictions, and enforcement by local officials. This point is particularly relevant when one considers the survey questions asking for responses to the criminal justice system and the reality "that the criminal justice system is vastly different depending on where you are."

Workshop participants did not see the instrument prior to the meeting. Two important issues related to instrumentation remained open for discussion: (1) the length of the survey and (2) question of whether to pursue a national or tribe-specific approach.

Discussion

One participant noted that there are certain research functions that can be performed by tribes and universities that collaborate on federally funded projects to get the "best cultural tailoring." At the same time, she acknowledged that "the Feds are in an excellent position to do a national study that is standardized across places." As long as specific parameters are in place around the areas of focus, these disparate surveys can coexist and be useful, she noted.

Another participant asked whether survey questions cover childhood victimization. NIJ Research Associate Jane Palmer responded that it does not, but the instrument does ask when an incident first occurred. She added that some questions address lifetime victimization, but not victimization under age 18 specifically. Going back to the legislatively mandated focus on domestic violence, dating violence, sexual violence assault, stalking, and murder, Ms. Palmer noted that domestic violence can be defined in many ways, and some information on age can be gleaned from the responses to this survey. The participant then noted that the work she has done with other researchers in this area shows that early victimization puts women at a huge risk as teens and adults, and thus age is critical to prevention and intervention. She cited *Trends in Indian Health*¹ to illustrate how different geographic areas have different rates of suicide,

¹ http://www.ihs.gov/nonmedicalprograms/ihs_stats/index.cfm?module=hqPubTrends03.

homicide, and diseases, which are related to victimization. She went on to suggest that NIJ look at particular regions of the United States to sample groups exhibiting these health disparities.

Questionnaire Testing

There were two rounds of testing, both of which employed a convenience sample and used local contacts to recruit participants.

In the first round of cognitive testing conducted in 2010, the questionnaire was tested in its entirety, averaging about 120 minutes. Respondents were paid a monetary incentive; nine interviews were completed with Native American women living in tribal communities in three different locations around the country. Participants were asked prespecified probes in face-to-face interviews. Based on feedback received in these interviews, the wording of questions was refined, changes in the question order were made, and follow-up questions were added if the interviewer sensed that the respondent hesitated on initial questions. While this round only asked about physical violence, sexual violence, and stalking, one big finding was that respondents recommended adding questions on psychological aggression, coercive control and entrapment.

The second round of cognitive testing, conducted in January 2012, involved an abbreviated questionnaire administered by a combination of computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI) and audio computer-assisted self-interviewing (ACASI) in one site. On average, interviews took 90 minutes. This round included a post-interview debriefing by a bilingual, bicultural interpreter who asked questions about respondent comfort with ACASI, where interviews should be conducted, resources, transportation, and other issues. The findings showed that the informed consent form was too long, that questions needed to be shortened and simplified, and that most respondents felt an interpreter was needed to help respondents understand the questions. The findings showed that respondents preferred using ACASI on sensitive questions. A concern was raised that respondents might mistakenly merge victimization events that occurred later into the 12-month window. This is also called “telescoping,” a memory error that places events closer in time than they actually were. Ms. Carley-Baxter said the best way to assess the seriousness of this problem would be to test the accuracy of the past 12-month recall by conducting an experiment in which random samples of respondents were asked to report their experiences over multiple waves with different reference periods (e.g., 12, 6, and 3 months) to see whether the past 12-month reference period yielded comparable or sufficiently valid data. She noted, however, that the pilot study was unable to use this method because it is a cross-sectional study.

Unable to get the information they sought, researchers attempted to anchor the respondents to a date by saying, “in the last 12 months, that is, since March 2011,” or by asking respondents to think of a meaningful date such as a birthday or anniversary and then asking whether a victimization occurred near that date. The researchers, however, found that no respondents reported any victimization near the 12-month period. The victimization reported by respondents was either far in the past or in the last few weeks or months.

Comments from Mary Lou Leary, Acting Assistant Attorney General, Office of Justice Programs

At this time, Kristina Rose welcomed Mary Lou Leary, Acting Assistant Attorney General for the Department of Justice’s Office of Justice Programs. Ms. Rose noted that this was Ms. Leary’s

first day in the post, recently vacated by Laurie Robinson. She praised both Robinson and Attorney General Eric Holder. She also hailed Associate Attorney General Tom Perrelli's hard work in addressing violence against Indian women.

"We really don't know the scope of what's happening in Indian Country," Ms. Leary acknowledged, asserting, however, that the level of violence is very troubling. We have to understand the prevalence, the causes, and the consequences, and we are "just scratching the surface on that," she said. We desperately want to fix this problem and honor the promise we made in embarking on this mission, "but we want to base what we do on what we know," and that, she said, "can only come from the research."

Survey Administration

The participants began to discuss issues associated with culture and language, and all seemed to acknowledge the need to have a close tie to the locals who speak the language and know the given communities. "You're going to have to marry the Western approach with traditional approaches," Ms. Crossland said, referring to the difficulties in developing training materials and conducting field interviews. As an example, one participant noted that the word "jurisdiction" must be explained using many words and does not translate easily. In another example, she noted that questionnaire terms like "strongly agree" and "agree" can be said in many different ways. But they need to be expressed consistently if the questionnaire is to yield meaningful results. Furthermore, terms like "stalking" and "threaten" really have no direct translation in many tribal communities. She suggested that serious consideration be given to the materials we provide interviewers who interview the respondents. "The researchers who put together the survey instrument are not the face of the research," she said, "the interviewers are. They are the face of the study, and they need to be equipped—well equipped—and prepared to go out and collect the kind of information we seek."

Another participant noted that she was part of a study for the National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence and ran the survey language and questions past parents and others. She observed that many other steps are involved with something like this because children really do not understand terms like "assault." It is not up to the community to figure out what we mean by our questions, she stressed. She observed that this study seems to focus on just victimization. Ms. Crossland acknowledged this point and reminded the group of Backes's earlier statement that this was a "midcourse" discussion. This questionnaire is in no way final, and "we will make changes," she said.

Another participant agreed with the criticism of the language used in the survey questions and suggested that the questionnaire should be more colloquial. The survey language is "very, very clinical, and nobody talks like that," she said. The survey gives no definition for "sexual partner": "Does that mean a one-night stand or something else?" she asked. And what does "romantic" mean? Rather than asking about income levels, it might be easier to ask if a respondent has health insurance, which would simply indicate if one has a job², she suggested.

One participant suggested blending parts of different federal studies with other elements sought here to create some pieces that are more consistent with the world view of the tribal

² NOTE: having insurance does not mean one has a job and having a job does not mean one has insurance.

communities. The NIJ team agreed that this hybrid approach would be worthwhile in finding answers relevant to tribal communities while allowing for crosswalks of core elements that are key to other studies.

Another participant asked whether the survey was slanted to focus only on Native American perpetrators. The NIJ team pointed out that survey questions asked whether the event occurred on or off reservation, whether the victim knew the perpetrator, and the participant's reporting of race/ethnicity of the perpetrator.

Instrument Development

André B. Rosay, Ph.D.

Dr. André Rosay began the afternoon session by observing that not much background was given on why the NISVS core victimization survey was used, and that might contribute to why many seemed to express dissatisfaction with the survey. The NISVS core was developed through a decade of research, and though some here asked why there is so much focus on the numbers of perpetrators, “we want to attribute the blame to the perpetrators and not to the respondents, which leads to better data”. So, there are some valid answers to many of the questions raised here earlier. At the same time, there are now “serious concerns” as to whether NISVS is still the best way to measure victimization and is still valid, particularly for AI & AN respondents. He noted that they developed early versions of this survey in Alaska after many revisions and thorough consultation with victim advocacy groups and tribal officials. While it is not perfect, he conceded, “We thought it was good overall.” He acknowledged that the survey is indeed very long and difficult to wade through, “but we did pick it in Alaska because we wanted comparability between this study and NISVS, while also being able to reflect the cultural nuances of the tribes.” This may not be the “final best product,” but it is comparable to NISVS and inclusive of tribal culture. Overall, he concluded, “we felt comfortable with the core. But I always add the caveat that right now, this is the best we have, but tomorrow we may have something better.”

Points to Consider: Other VAIW Pilot Data Collection Findings and Discussion

Jane Palmer, NIJ

NIJ Research Associate Jane Palmer then talked about points to consider. She enumerated the basic research themes participants had struggled with that day: respecting tribal members, treating them with autonomy, remembering to do no harm, and weighing the benefits and burdens of research.

Ms. Palmer described the training for this pilot study, noting that it involved instruction on survey content, handling distress, and finding support in the community for respondents. Here, NIJ considered the amount of stress on the interviewers because they had a burden, particularly when they went out into the field, managing time, being away from their families, and talking with respondents about traumatic events. Ms. Palmer added that the interviewers had to deal with confidentiality burdens and dilemmas as well.

A participant familiar with conducting surveys in Oklahoma noted that safety protocols are very important because interviewers go into small areas where everyone knows one another and ask sensitive questions. “We leave, but they stay,” and safety protocols are important, she said.

A discussion point arose around the issue of Tribal Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) protecting interviewers and participants, and the types of approvals that must be obtained for this type of research project. When a question was asked about RTI’s IRB, Dr. Krebs noted that RTI has three, including two for staff and outside personnel, but that none of the IRB members are an Alaska Native or American Indian. He noted that RTI relied heavily on Michelle Chino, who has experience working in Indian country. Also, tribal resolutions supported cognitive testing and the overall goals and objectives of the pilot study.

Another participant asked whether tribal IRBs were engaged in this survey or only RTI’s IRB was used, and, if RTI’s was used, whether there was a problem with a conflict of interest. Ms. Crossland clarified that DOJ requires an IRB based on whoever has a federal-wide assurance, which RTI does have. When NIJ reaches out to tribes, it asks if they have an IRB, she said. She emphasized that DOJ has very strict regulations relating to human subjects, and the staff follows them closely.

One participant noted that very few tribes in Alaska have an IRB, and most tribes want a tribal resolution. He cautioned that the tribes’ sovereignty must be observed, and we will not try to tell them what approvals are needed but rather ask them what they need.

A participant working on a research grant said she has obtained 22 tribal approvals in 6 months, working with partners like Northwest Indian College and the American Indian Higher Education Consortium. She stressed that it can be a very complicated process, and you need “authentic partners.”

Another participant noted that individuals who speak the tribe’s native language should be available if needed in the interviewing process. The question arose as to whether the interviewers should know the interview subjects. Some participants wanted familiar people as interviewers; others did not.

When Ms. Palmer addressed the problem of confidentiality that can arise when interviewers enter small communities, one participant noted that there is definitely a quieting effect.

Is this a health survey or a victimization survey?, another participant asked. “It is like they are being tricked,” he said. “Why not just call it what it is?” It all became clear in the discussion that what the community thinks of as a survey matters because new activities are scrutinized. Another researcher noted that some elders he worked with found it best to call a survey a “women’s experience survey,” not a victimization survey.

Ms. Palmer noted that some areas she has visited had women “bursting” to tell their stories. Another participant pointed out that many American Indian and Alaska Native people want to tell a story in discussing victimization not answer questions in a scientific research format.

The discussion then returned to the grassroots reasoning behind the study. A participant suggested that perhaps more people would be willing to take a survey if there were no stigma associated with the victimization label.

On the subject of translation, a researcher noted that “posttraumatic stress disorder” can be said no other way in Spanish. Ms. Palmer agreed that some English terms have no translation. Understanding and interpreting language is very important, she acknowledged.

Another participant pointed out that many things happen to women who are not enrolled in the tribe, but this characteristic should not be exclusionary. Ms. Palmer agreed, saying enrollment should merely be a variable, not a determinative factor.

Single vs. Mixed-Method Approach

Christine Crossland, NIJ

Given the clear expression of interest in a storytelling component to blend with the quantitative research, Christine Crossland opened up the discussion of mixed methods. “Stories add context and go beyond the raw data,” she said.

One commenter suggested randomly selecting victims, then asking for oral stories. “What could have been better for you in your experience after victimization?” is a question to ask, she said.

Another participant, however, observed that a qualitative study can have merit, but it must be carefully used to serve the community. “Is the science advanced by having people tell their horror stories?” she asked. “There is already much storytelling out there, and I am not sure that much more of it will be helpful.” A third participant picked up on that point, observing that engaging in focus groups and compiling 150 pages of stories may have some value, but the next steps should be questioned.

Another commenter agreed that story collecting can be valuable, but said the stories must be tied back to the data to provide meaning. He said it would be nice to have oral histories, but they need to be combined in some helpful way, not just there for their own sake.

A participant who said she writes textbooks on statistics took issue with the suggestion that “we are losing the science” by adding storytelling. There are anecdotal horror stories out there, she agreed, but “there has never been a scientific, qualitative study that you can make generalizations from, and I don’t mean generalizations in a prevalence sense, but generalization in an experiential sense.”

Another participant referenced a Hawaii study³, saying “the story puts all the pieces together.” She insisted that this type of research can be incredibly important to this area. Agreeing with that point, another researcher noted that storytelling should be done and must be done well so that it is respected among scientists and others in the field.

One participant advised planning a key informant group meeting, revisiting her earlier statements in support of a storytelling complement to the quantitative research. “As with a study I am working on now, this method is giving back to the community by telling how the intervention went, which is a key element,” she said. “That makes the overall work more effective and more

³ Taylor, W.K., Magnussen, L., & Amundson, M.J. (2001). The lived experience of battered women. *Violence Against Women*, 7(5), 563-585.

relevant and gives the statistical component meaning,” she added, inviting participants to consider how much other knowledge this will generate. She cited a December 2011 meeting in which the Health Resources and Services Administration brought in experts on elder abuse, child abuse, intimate partner abuse, and other areas. She urged a “close look at the common knowledge we have” in these areas. Study the life course model⁴ and see if some innovative recommendation could fit once you have examined the data from the study, she advised. “I think the study is an excellent stepping-off point for NIJ; it doesn’t have to be perfect,” she said.

Another participant who agreed with the value of blending a qualitative focus related a story involving a woman being treated at an Indian Health Service center to show how this approach helps directly answer the earlier criticism about how this survey information is used. In this incident, the tribal police officer responsible for getting the Indian woman treatment by health care staff said, “Hurry up. Rape victim here!” For a long time, rape victims refused to visit that clinic because they heard this horror story, she said. This qualitative piece goes well beyond the closed-ended survey questions that ask the victim, “Were you satisfied?” or “What was the response from law enforcement?”

Wrap-up

In closing, the NIJ team acknowledged that the day’s discussion raised as many questions as answers, and that they expected to have their work analyzed and critiqued. They said they appreciated the comments, questions, and ideas, and welcomed the different interdisciplinary perspectives of social work, nursing, public health, and criminology. The team promised to disseminate the notes on the proceedings to generate more discussion and feedback in planning next steps for this research.

⁴ <http://mchb.hrsa.gov/lifecourse/rethinkingmchlifecourse.pdf>.

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March 1, 2012**

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