

# The Examination of Economic Empowerment Programming and Service Practices of Domestic Violence Agency Staff

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## INTRODUCTION

- ✦ Ninety-nine percent of all intimate partner violence (IPV) survivors experience economic abuse (EA; NNEEDV, 2020). IPA and EA increase women's and their families' risk for revictimization, unstable housing and homelessness, and decreased wellbeing (Adams et al., 2008).
- ✦ EA is the deliberate control of a partner's personal and shared finances, and the deprivation of their economic independence (Natalier, 2018; Postmus et al., 2012).
- ✦ Attention to survivors' economic empowerment decreases their risk for these negative outcomes and improves their rehabilitation and wellbeing (WHO, 2017).
- ✦ *Economic empowerment* (EE) is an individual's ability to access, understand, and control economic resources (Hahn & Postmus, 2014) and their vocational and economic self-efficacy and self-sufficiency (Chronister, 2003, 2012).
- ✦ EE interventions have been shown effective, yet little research has been conducted on what EE programs social service agencies provide survivors, on a national scale.
- ✦ More knowledge about what types of EE services agencies across the U.S. provide survivors, and with what training and confidence, will provide foundational information to further scholars' knowledge of what services are needed and provided, with what levels of training and efficacy.

## PURPOSE OF PRESENT STUDY

- ✦ The present study aimed to ask U.S. social service providers who work in community agencies serving IPV survivors:
  - ✦ (a) what economic empowerment services they provide,
  - ✦ (b) how confident they feel providing each EE service,
  - ✦ (c) what training they received, and
  - ✦ (d) whether staff members' confidence providing EE services varied with individual- and agency-level factors.

## METHODS

### Provider Participants

- ✦ 154 providers (93.1% women) who worked for current agency for an average of 4 years ( $SD = 6.6$ , range <1 year to 30 years) and ranged in age from 21 to 74 years ( $M = 39.3$ ,  $SD = 12.6$ ).

### Agency Participants

- ✦ Agencies located in the United States provided EE services to an average of 10.5% ( $SD = .24$ ) of their client annually. Agencies employed an average of 33.3 employees ( $SD = 53.2$ , range = 2-500). All services were offered in English and any other language via interpretation call services.

## METHODS CONTINUED

### Procedure

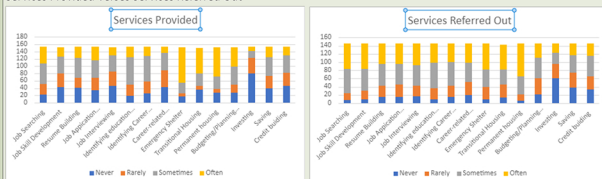
- ✦ Data were collected using a survey research design and original self-report survey. Survey was administered using Qualtrics and survey links were distributed via email to 1488 U.S. survivor-serving agencies. Agencies were asked to distribute the survey link to agency employees and volunteers. The study took 5-10 minutes to complete. Participants could choose to receive a \$10 electronic gift card for participating.

### Measurement

- ✦ 102-item self-report. Survey items comprised open-ended and Likert-type scale items to assess demographic information, and 16 types of EE practices including what EE services they provided/referred out for, confidence in providing EE services, EE service training, etc.

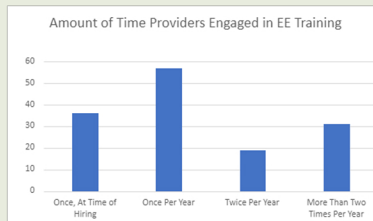
## RESULTS

Figure 1  
Services Provided Verses Services Referred Out



- ✦ Findings demonstrate that most frequently requested included housing/job search services and providers most frequently offered and referred out for these services with average to higher-than-average levels of confidence.
- ✦ Least requested, offered, and referred out EE services included assistance with saving money, career-related networking, and investing information.

Figure 2



- ✦ A series of six ANOVAs were conducted to examine if EE services requested, offered, and referred out differed by agency factors including geographical location (rural, suburban, urban), staff size, and the number of clients served every annually.
- ✦ Overall, participants reported lower levels of confidence for services that were requested, offered, and referred out less frequently and providers' confidence levels were higher when they voluntarily completed EE service training two or more times per year.

## DISCUSSION

- ✦ When other factors were controlled for, an array of housing services, including emergency shelter and transitional and permanent housing, were the most requested, offered, and referred-out services.
- ✦ The least requested, offered, and referred out EE services included assistance with saving money, career-related networking, and investing information.
- ✦ Overall, agencies' are structured and funded to focus on crisis-oriented services rather than preventive intervention and prevention.
- ✦ Findings from the present study illustrate that domestic violence agencies are not offering a broad range of EE services, particularly those related to vocational development that facilitates longer-term housing and economic stability.
- ✦ These findings raise questions such as, *where and when do survivors receive the many other EE services that contribute to their short- and long-term economic empowerment, rehabilitation, and safety?*
- ✦ Further research is needed to evaluate whether a broader range of EE services should be integrated into current agency service structures, with advanced staff training and funding, or if certain EE services should continue to be offered and evaluated separately by other organizations.

## CONTRIBUTIONS & LIMITATIONS

- ✦ A key strength of the present study is that we examined a large, representative sample of U.S. agencies AND we examine sixteen different EE services agencies offer IPA survivors. This is the first study to assess what kind of training staff receive to provide these EE services and their confidence levels doing so.
- ✦ Limitations include the COVID-19 impact on data collection, smaller sample size than anticipated, nature of self-report, and most importantly while funding for the economic development of girls and women affected by violence has expanded in the past 20 years, these services are not often integrated into the current agency structures serving IPA survivors and so were not included.
- ✦ The finding of the current study is consistent with past literature which found that providers want to offer more EE services but identify a lack of flexible funding (Sullivan et al., 2019) and their own lack of training and financial security as barriers to doing so.
- ✦ A staff would benefit from broader range EE education and skill development that is integrated with and enhance other services and survivor outcomes (Author; Ahrens et al., 2021).

## Contact Information

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