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Reimagining the Criminal Justice Response to Sexual Assault

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Reimagining the Criminal Justice Response to Sexual Assault

by

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Abstract

After a crime is reported, several different stakeholders work to take the case from a police report to a conviction. In sexual assault cases, these stakeholders may consist of police officers, medical professionals, advocates, forensic scientists, prosecutors, and others. Yet, this process cannot begin until a victim reports their crime to law enforcement. Sexual assault cases are widely underreported and for a variety of reasons. Data from the 2015-2019 National Crime Victimization Survey suggests that only about one-third of sexual assaults are reported to police, while only about 3% lead to a felony conviction (RAINN, n.d.).

The criminal justice community must provide all victims with a trauma-informed and effective response to crime. It is imperative that the community work to develop and employ methods that promote the empowerment of sexual assault victims while increasing their willingness to report the crime, engage in the investigation, and participate in the criminal prosecution of their offender.

Criminal justice communities must consider implementing a multi-disciplinary, coordinated response to better serve victims of sexual assault. In this essay, the author reviews the issues of under-reporting and low conviction rates related to sexual assault. The author will explore the benefits and challenges of implementing an embedded victim advocacy program or creating a sexual assault response team while also focusing on the shortcomings of modern-day sexual offender treatment programs.

Keywords: sexual assault, rape, victim advocates, Sexual Assault Response Teams

Table of Contents

Abstract 2

Chapter 1: Introduction 5

 Statement of the Problem 5

 Background and issues to be covered in the Capstone..... 6

 Conclusion 9

Chapter 2: Review of Literature 10

 Victim Analysis 10

 Law Enforcement Analysis 11

 Victim Advocacy Services 12

 Proposed Solution 13

 Budget Implications..... 18

 Sexual Assault Response Team..... 20

 SART Impacts 20

 Ethical Considerations 23

 Implementation Strategy 27

 Post-conviction Analysis 29

 Victim Perspective 30

 Evidence-based Practices 31

 Sex Offender Treatment 34

 Proposed Initiative 35

 Conclusion 37

Chapter 3: Implications, Recommendations, and Conclusions 39

Practical Applications.....	39
Recommendations for Further Research	41
Conclusion	41
References.....	43
Figures.....	48

Reimagining the Criminal Justice Response to Sexual Assault

Chapter 1: Introduction

In 2016, Chanel Miller sat in a California courthouse and provided a victim impact statement. One year prior, she had been found lying unconscious outside a college fraternity house, where she was actively being sexually assaulted. While recounting the physical, mental, and emotional effects she experienced following the assault, Miller courageously arrived at the courthouse to address her assailant directly, “My damage was internal, unseen, I carry it with me. You took away my worth, my privacy, my energy, my time, my safety, my intimacy, my confidence, my own voice, until today” (60 Minutes Overtime, 2020). Miller’s assailant was identified, arrested, and convicted of sexual assault. However, his conviction is relatively uncommon; it is the result that many sexual assault victims might dream of but one that most will never experience.

Statement of the Problem

Recent research suggests that over 3 million individuals are sexually assaulted each year in the United States. The same study found that 1 in 4 women and 1 in 26 men will become victims of sexual assault during their lifetime (Basile et al., 2022). Despite recent increases in sexual assault awareness amongst the news and social media, only a tiny percentage of these victims will ever receive justice for the crimes committed against them. Data from the 2015-2019 National Crime Victimization Survey suggests that only about one-third of sexual assaults are reported to police, while only about 3% lead to a felony conviction (RAINN, n.d.). These numbers are astonishingly low and represent a systematic failure within the criminal justice system.

As a result, the author believes criminal justice leaders must review their practices and begin to reimagine the system's response to victims of sexual assault. It is essential that leaders devote attention to finding new methods to increase reporting, promote continual victim engagement, improve offender conviction rates, and protect the community from further harm.

Background

Regardless of their age, gender, race, mental capacity, or other factors, all victims of sexual violence share a commonality in that they experienced a significant and traumatic event. Victims of sexual violence have been violated in a manner that is unfathomable, perhaps worse than victims of any other type of crime. As Chanel Miller noted, the damage is often unseen. The pain that they experience is much more than just the physical violation and damage caused to their body; it is also the mental and emotional effects that these victims continue to experience long after they recover from any physical injury. This trauma can last for years, if not a lifetime, have profound negative implications, and can be exasperated by engaging the criminal justice system.

There are countless reasons why a sexual assault victim may be unwilling to report their crime. At the most basic level, it is possible they have a fear of law enforcement or do not believe that they will be treated appropriately. The community may lack education on resources available, leading victims to be fearful of public shame or being labeled as sexual assault survivors. Alternatively, perhaps, the victim fears being re-victimized during the investigation, dehumanized during the evidence collection process, or re-traumatized during the criminal trial. To overcome these barriers, criminal justice leaders must consider employing innovative methods to improve sexual assault conviction rates.

Victim advocacy services can aid criminal justice practitioners by addressing the barriers that victims perceive prevent them from seeking help by engaging the criminal justice. The author believes a victim advocacy program embedded within a police department and operating under a co-response model can profoundly impact the community. An embedded advocacy program, which focuses on providing advocacy services to sexual assault victims, ensuring a trauma-informed approach is utilized by police officers, and introducing coordinated community response and education efforts, is believed to have a positive impact on a victim's willingness to engage the criminal justice system. Through the victim's increased involvement in their case, the criminal justice system can expect to increase the likelihood of reporting, improve evidence gathering, and increase offender conviction rates.

Another method for improving sex crime victim involvement in the criminal justice system is to implement a sexual assault response team (SART). The SART is a collaborative, multi-disciplinary group of professionals who respond to reports of sexual assault. Typically, the group includes police detectives, prosecutors, victim advocates, and sexual assault nurse examiners. As a team, these professionals can provide a standardized and holistic response to sexual violence, focused on encouraging help-seeking, promoting a victim-centered approach, and a comprehensive criminal justice response (Greeson et al., 2018).

The coordinated response provided by a multi-disciplinary group of professionals can positively impact victims, including a diminished likelihood of re-victimization and stronger criminal cases with greater access to physical evidence. Similar improvements can be seen within the community as a whole, as SARTs are a community-level intervention strategy. As such, the teams can tailor their mission and response plans to the sociocultural beliefs and needs of the community. Lastly, SARTs can positively impact the criminal justice system, which, as

the statistics show, is in dire need of an improved response to sexual assault victims. SARTs aid in ensuring criminal justice practitioners are providing a trauma-informed, advocacy-forward response to victims that reduces negative experiences and promotes the empowerment and engagement of the victim.

A final consideration for criminal justice practitioners when reimagining the response to sexual assault victims includes the criminal sanctions of convicted offenders. With recent community interest in the efficiency and efficacy of the criminal justice system, it is important that criminal justice professionals and the community consider how criminal offenders are punished for their crimes. In the last few decades, the focus of corrections has shifted from prison sentences to community-based supervision, which now appears to be the evidence-based best practice. These supervision practices, such as the risks-needs-responsivity model and cognitive behavior interventions, focus on the cognitive restructuring of offenders to promote pro-social behavior. Recent research shows that these models can effectively reduce offender recidivism.

While many people would likely agree that violent offenders, including sexual offenders, deserve to be punished with a prison sentence, criminal justice practitioners have a duty to ensure that the most effective criminal sanctions are utilized to ensure long-term, community-wide safety. In some cases of sexual violence, a prison sentence might be appropriate; in others, community-based probation sanctions may be more effective long-term. The author believes it is possible that increasing the effectiveness of corrections through more successful rehabilitation efforts and reduced recidivism rates of sexual offenders could increase a victim's willingness to participate in the criminal investigation of sexual violence.

Conclusion

“To protect and serve” is possibly the most widely recognized motto of law enforcement agencies in the United States. However, as the statistics show, the modern-day law enforcement response to sexual assault victims fails to do either of these effectively. The criminal justice community has an obligation to reimagine its systematic response to sex crime victims. To protect and serve properly, it is necessary to explore new methods and develop strategies that can more effectively promote a victim’s willingness to participate in the criminal investigation of sexual violence, from reporting to conviction. With increased victim participation throughout the investigation of sexual assaults, the criminal justice system can protect victims by assuring they feel safe and empowered to report their crimes and serve victims by working to increase the rate and effectiveness of sexual assault convictions.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Throughout this project, the author has focused their research on exploring how the criminal justice community can more effectively promote a victim's willingness to participate in the criminal investigation of sexual violence. There are a variety of reasons why a victim may be unwilling to report their crime to law enforcement or to disengage from the criminal justice system after making their report. New recommendations suggest that the process of investigating and prosecuting sexual violence requires a multidisciplinary approach from law enforcement, prosecution, and multiple sources of victim advocacy programs. Each involved agency has differing benefits and limitations to the process (Sexual Assault Kit Initiative, 2022). The author believes that a victim advocacy program embedded within a police department, focusing on advocacy services, a trauma-informed approach, and coordinated community response and education efforts, can effectively improve a victim's willingness to participate in the criminal investigation of sexual violence.

Victim Analysis

Processing trauma is a personal journey that can look, feel, and hurt very differently for each individual. For victims of sexual assault, identifying as a survivor can be empowering for some while overwhelming for others. Khan et al. (2018) studied the factors related to survivors labeling their experience as an assault, telling someone about the experience, and reporting it to an authority figure. Throughout the study, it was determined that the risks of non-reporting could be grouped into three categories: personal identity, interpersonal/relationships, and risks related to future endeavors.

Research regarding the prevalence of sexual assault reporting and reasons for non-reporting has also found interesting variations between individuals of varying demographics.

Therefore, it is essential to consider how a community's understanding of sexual assault and victim privileges plays a role in reporting and the reasons for non-reporting. Johnson and Lewis (2022) studied these factors with a specific interest in Alaskan Indian/Native American populations. Interestingly, they found that among this population, over 40% of survivors stated one of their top three reasons for not reporting their crime is because of a poor experience with, lack of trust of, or dislike of police. An additional 8.5% of survivors said they did not believe their assault was a crime.

As a result of these studies, it could be understood that increased community education on sexual assault victim ideology is beneficial in empowering victims and the community. Furthermore, community education on sexual assault, Minnesota statute, and the law enforcement response be beneficial to increase sexual assault reporting.

Law Enforcement Analysis

The first step to initiating a criminal investigation regarding a sexual assault includes reporting the assault to law enforcement. From the first report to law enforcement, a case travels through the criminal justice system with a police report, evidence collection, investigation, and attorney charging determination. Lathan et al. (2021) argue that rape myth belief, a lack of trauma-informed approach, and burnout culture are three of the most critical officer-related factors that contribute to victim-blaming and the impersonal police response to sexual violence. Due to a police officer's position in a sexual assault report, the rape myth belief, lack of training or knowledge of providing a trauma-informed approach, and pre-existing biases affecting police burnout all harm victims and the successful investigation of their reported assault. Lathan et al. (2021) concluded that extensive and continual training could positively impact officers'

awareness of their role and the empathy shown during the initial reporting of a sexual assault, as well as throughout the entire investigation.

Victim Advocacy Services

Sexual assault victim advocates work to address the barriers that prevent victims from reporting their crimes to law enforcement, and research has found that victims have identified their advocates as having a positive influence on their engagement with the criminal justice system. Victim advocates are able to improve an individual's experience with the criminal justice system through an approach based on empowerment. Advocates can aid a victim in navigating the criminal justice system while also focusing on providing emotional support, safety planning, and reducing feelings of guilt or self-blame (Patterson & Tringali, 2015).

While evidence shows that advocacy services promote victim participation in the criminal justice system, many sexual assault victims do not seek out advocacy services. Campbell et al. (2001) found that only 39% of victims obtained mental health services following their sexual assault, and only 21% contacted a rape crisis center. Even more interestingly, of the victims who did seek mental health services, 69% were white, while 31% represented minority groups. Similarly, but more pronounced, was the racial makeup of victims who contacted a rape crisis center; 91% of these victims were white, while 9% represented minority groups. Logan et al. (2005) studied barriers that prevented sexual assault survivors from obtaining health and mental health services. The research group found a lack of awareness of victim services to be a top reason cited for why many women did not seek help. In many communities, the topic of sexual assault is not widely discussed, and therefore, discussions regarding rape victim services also do not occur.

In the 21st century and following the COVID-19 pandemic, the world of communication has changed, for better or worse, into a digital mode. The criminal justice system needs to ensure that victim services are advancing along with technology. Meetings occurring in person or via phone call have become rarer, while digital services remove barriers that prevent victims from accessing advocacy services and the criminal justice system as a whole. Victim services organizations must invest in providing digital contact services, such as email, text messaging, and video calling, in order to ensure they are able to reach the community effectively and equally (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2021).

Proposed Solution

The reviewed research presents several factors related to why an individual may be unwilling to report their sexual assault victimization to law enforcement. The author believes many of these factors can be grouped into three categories, including the risk of personal identity changes and its effects, a lack of community education or resources, and unprepared or untrained law enforcement officers. In recent years, many law enforcement agencies have explored the option of in-house, embedded social workers to resolve an increase in community issues like mental health, homelessness, and substance abuse. This author believes that a similar model could be utilized to embed victim advocates into a police department. It is believed that an embedded advocate will aid the community by improving the police department's response to sexual assault and aid the police department by increasing positive results in sexual assault investigations.

Organizational Change

Following the formation of the Minnesota Sexual Assault Kit Initiative (MN SAKI) and the 2018 grant-funded creation of sexual assault investigation protocols by MN SAKI, many

police departments throughout Minnesota heavily invested in reimagining and improving their sexual assault response protocol. As a part of this investment, many police departments were able to create a permanent, full-time detective position dedicated to investigating reported sexual assaults. Law enforcement organizations within Ramsey County also teamed with Ramsey County Sexual Offense Services (SOS). After receiving a report of sexual assault, law enforcement organizations are able to connect victims with SOS, which can provide a wide range of victim advocacy services. As a result of these efforts, over the past several years, Ramsey County law enforcement agencies have experienced a strong positive increase in the success of investigating and criminally prosecuting sexual assault cases.

Over the last decade, the community has experienced several police-involved deaths of citizens in the Twin Cities Metropolitan area. Between these tragic incidents, the mental health and financial effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, and an increased interest in policing strategies within our communities, social justice groups are calling for a change in law enforcement. In 2020, the Roseville Police Department invested in recognizing the evolving community they serve. One of these investments includes the addition of a Community Action Team (CAT), that focuses on addressing homelessness and mental health concerns in the community. The CAT team consists of police officers paired with social workers who operate on a co-response model. Over the last several years, the organization has experienced the exciting, positive impact that a multi-disciplinary approach can provide. The civilian social worker-law enforcement approach has significantly increased the organization's community reach while decreasing the adverse effects of interactions between law enforcement and individuals experiencing a crisis.

In response to the success of the embedded social workers and the previously reviewed literature, the author proposes exploring a similar model with an embedded victim advocate. It is

believed that investing in a department-embedded victim advocate focused on providing services to sexual assault victims can increase a police department's ability to respond to reports of sexual assault appropriately, provide necessary education to the community, and improve a victim's experience with the criminal justice system. As a result, it is expected that there will be an increase in the willingness of sexual assault victims to participate in the criminal justice system.

Organizational Benefits

As previously noted, Lathan et al. (2021) believe that rape myth belief, lack of trauma-informed approach, and burnout culture are three common and critical officer-related factors that contribute to the negative impact on victims during the reporting and investigation of their sexual assault. However, the study found that a two to four-hour training session regarding sexual assault neurobiology and the responding officer's role did not significantly improve the response of police officers. Instead, positive impacts are not seen until a much longer training program, with interactive role-playing, is administered.

Lehner (2017) focused their study on sexual assault reporting and the investigation in a city that is comparable to many in Ramsey County. Although different in population size, comparisons are noted in demographics, economics, and inequality measures. Through studying law enforcement's and the community's view of how a sexual assault case travels through the criminal justice system, Lehner (2017) determined that instituting an oversight group separate from the police department can significantly impact a victim's experience and participation in a sexual assault investigation.

By creating an embedded victim advocate position in a police department, the organization will be much more effective in responding to reports of sexual assault. In order to affect this improvement, outside of providing advocacy services, the advocate will be tasked

with creating and administering a police academy-based training program, an intensive, in-service training program, and a recurring role-play mini-series. In addition, the advocate is responsible for conducting oversight duties, including reviewing officers' responses to victims and statistical tracking of the success of sexual assault investigations.

Community Benefits

In addition to organizational impacts and benefits, a department-embedded victim advocate can also provide many positive impacts on the community. An advantage of the department-embedded advocate is that the organization can choose how and where the advocate interacts within the community. The City of Roseville is inhabited by approximately 36,000 citizens, with about 26% of the population identifying as a race other than solely white. Other predominant races include Black, Hispanic, and Asian, with one of the largest Karen populations per capita in the United States (United States Census Bureau, 2022). As previously noted, Johnson and Lewis (2022) found significant reporting disparities when studying minority sexual assault victims. By embedding a victim advocate into the police department, the organization can capitalize on the availability of a knowledgeable, non-threatening civilian employee who can work to strengthen relationships, engage in community outreach, and provide education to local minority populations. Through these community relationships, an advocate-police co-response model could potentially reduce the 40% of individuals whom Johnson and Lewis (2022) found did not report their crime due to mistrust of, poor experience with, or dislike of police.

In addition to co-response and education with minority groups, the embedded advocate would be tasked with developing a sexual assault education program within the local school district. Khan et al. (2018) suggest that youth education related to sexual assault survivorship could have a significant positive impact on the number of reports and amount of participation in

sexual assault investigations of youth. Through community education, criminal justice practitioners can reduce the stigma of identifying as a sexual assault survivor and empower our youth survivors to receive the protection and justice they deserve.

While the current response model, which provides advocacy services through SOS, has been effective, an embedded advocate allows for quicker and more variable change. As mentioned by the International Association of Chiefs of Police (2021), law enforcement must continue to evolve, provide innovative services to their community, and interlace new technologies into their work. An embedded advocacy program allows the police department to remain in control of the advocacy services a victim receives. Therefore, the department can research new technologies, create policy and standard procedures, and integrate the technology much faster than in the currently used, county-wide shared advocacy model. In doing so, the police department has greater options for connecting with the age, ethnically, and economically diverse group of citizens and victims that they serve.

Hierarchy

Historically, the Roseville Police Department has maintained a relatively tall hierarchy with a narrow span of control, ensuring multiple levels of supervision and coordination related to the law enforcement services provided to the community (Stojkovic et al., 2015). The Community Action Team (CAT) is currently supervised by a Sergeant and is comprised of five Police Officers and a group of social workers. The team's mission is to take a community-forward, non-traditional approach to solving community issues before they become problems requiring significant law enforcement involvement. The Community Action Team has strong connections with community organizations and leaders often works closely with the Investigations Unit.

Currently, the CAT Sergeant supervises nine individuals. The individuals assigned to this unit are high functioning, have been interviewed and evaluated, and have demonstrated proficiency in their job and leadership within the department. Therefore, widening and flattening the CAT Sergeant's span of control with the addition of an embedded victim advocate would not significantly disrupt the organizational hierarchy (Stojkovic et al., 2015). Although the advocate would work very closely with the assigned sex crimes detective, housing an advocate within CAT would be most beneficial as they can more easily create relationships with community leaders and organizations while operating in a non-traditional law enforcement setting.

Budget Implications

As of 2022, the City of Roseville, as a whole, is currently operating on a \$58,100,000 budget annually. In the same year, the Roseville Police Department was budgeted for 9,330,332, accounting for approximately 16% of the City's annual spending (City of Roseville Finance Department, 2021).

Based on preliminary research, in 2023, the salary of a community advocate in the Twin Cities area ranges between \$48,000 - \$66,000, with an average salary of approximately \$56,000 (Salary.com, 2023). In addition, the average cost of benefits for a local government employee sits at 38.1% of compensation (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022). In total, the salary and benefits of adding an embedded two-person sexual assault advocacy team would require implementation and first-year costs of approximately \$228,090 (*Figure 1*). The implementation costs cover full-time employee salaries with benefits, office space construction, technology setup with licensing fees, preliminary training costs, and the purchase of one vehicle.

Following the implementation costs of the first year, the author has created a proposed annual budget to represent the ongoing cost of supporting the addition of an embedded two-

person sexual assault advocacy team. The proposed ongoing costs are similar to implementation costs, though the construction costs are removed and the fees related to technology setup are reduced. The proposed ongoing annual costs are \$190,090 (*Figure 2*). Though it is understood that the Police Department's budget does make up a significant portion of the City of Roseville's annual budget, it is also fair to note that this addition would only comprise 2.0% of the Police Department's budget and only 0.3% of the entire City of Roseville budget.

Related to budgeting concerns, additional methods of implementation that reduce budgetary constraints have been explored. For example, the City of Roseville has previously utilized the sexual assault advocacy services of Ramsey County SOS and has generally been pleased with their quality of work. By partnering and contracting with Ramsey County SOS to implement an embedded advocacy team, the City of Roseville could reduce the training and technology fees previously noted in Figure 1 by \$15,000. In addition, the Roseville Police Department actively attempts to combat sex trafficking efforts within the city multiple times each year. During these details, the police department often makes arrests for the promotion of sex trafficking and, as a result, usually forfeits thousands of dollars during each detail. In 2022, these efforts resulted in the seizure and forfeiture of two adequate vehicles and over \$180,000 in cash. If, for example, the City of Roseville were to contract two trained advocates from Ramsey County SOS while also using the 2022 Human Trafficking Forfeiture Fund and re-allocating one of the forfeited vehicles, the city would only need to budget approximately \$3,000 to offset the cost of implementing a two-person embedded sexual assault advocacy team. In that case, the city would need to pledge approximately \$190,000.00, less the amount forfeited from ongoing human trafficking details, each year to maintain ongoing costs of supporting this addition.

Sexual Assault Response Team

While an advocacy team embedded into the department allows for the easiest access to advocacy services for victims, it is fair to note that the majority of police departments across the United States are unable to support the addition of a victim advocacy group in their organizations. This change requires significant funding, infrastructure, and oversight that is not economical to most organizations. A second option, which is more realistic for many organizations, includes the development of a regional sexual assault response team (SART). A SART is a collaborative, multi-disciplinary group of individuals who respond to reports of sexual assault. Typically, the group includes police officers, prosecutors, victim advocates, and sexual assault nurse examiners. As a team, these professionals can provide a standardized and holistic response to sexual violence, focused on encouraging “help-seeking,” promoting a victim-centered approach, and a comprehensive criminal justice response (Greeson et al., 2018).

Any time that a multi-disciplinary team is created, it is important that the creators, as well as the members, consider the many barriers to successful implementation. SARTs often interact with individuals in one of the most vulnerable times of their lives. As a result, they can be met with significant ethical dilemmas related to resources, confidentiality, and expectations. Throughout the next section of this essay, the author will further introduce sexual assault response teams, discuss the benefits a SART can provide, and, most importantly, explore the ethical considerations of creating a multi-disciplinary, community-focused sexual assault response plan.

SART Impacts

SARTs were developed to improve the community’s response to sexual assault while removing barriers for victims seeking comprehensive assistance post-assault. In the recent past,

SARTs have become widely implemented in various forms throughout the United States.

Though the teams continue to face challenges, it is also understood that, overall, SARTs positively impact victims, the community, and the various criminal justice system stakeholders.

Victims

There is no way to foresee how a sexual assault victim may respond physically, mentally, or emotionally post-assault, nor is there a singular criminal justice response that can provide equal benefits to all victims. However, implementing a SART can increase the likelihood that sexual assault victims experience diminished impacts of trauma. Positive impacts of the SART include a trauma-informed approach through police and advocate co-interviewing; successful prosecution through collaborative efforts of law enforcement, prosecutors, and medical staff; and the availability of a comprehensive network of services to aid the victims during their recovery (Office for Victims of Crime, 2011b). Through a multi-disciplinary and collaborative response such as a SART, the criminal justice community can ensure that an all-encompassing and ethical post-assault response plan is available to victims of sexual violence. With these positive impacts provided to victims, they are believed to be more willing to report their victimization while remaining empowered throughout the criminal investigation and prosecution of offenders.

Community

SARTs are a collaborative intervention strategy, and as such, Greeson et al. (2018) found that the effectiveness of their community impact relies upon the "...social norms, beliefs, values, and attitudes" held by members within the community (p. 447). Two community-level themes, denial of sexual assault within the community and rape-myth belief or victim-blaming, have been noted as significant barriers to the successful implementation of a SART within the community. In another study, over 50% of sexual assault survivors stated one of the reasons they did not

report their crime was because they were too ashamed, while over 40% stated they did not report because they were afraid of others finding out (Johnson & Lewis, 2022).

Research shows that SARTs can positively impact the community, as a whole, when they tailor their team's response to the unique sociocultural norms of that specific population. While creating a comprehensive response to sexual assault is the primary goal of a SART, increasing community education is a secondary mission. The SART should focus on community education to decrease negative perceptions of and attitudes toward sexual assault victims. SARTs should make creative and persistent efforts in education that are tailored to the needs and sociocultural barriers that exist within their specific community. Some examples include educational efforts at pre-existing community events and educational efforts within local schools or religious groups. A creative method in communities where law enforcement is viewed negatively includes recruiting community members, such as hotel or bar and restaurant employees, to educate their patrons (Greeson et al., 2018). A SART cannot succeed when the community's sociocultural beliefs minimize the effects of sexual assault. However, when targeted through community education efforts, the SART can alter a community's morals and beliefs, creating a community-wide, ethical response to sexual assault.

Criminal Justice

As one could expect, an individual's perception of law enforcement and the criminal justice response to reports of sexual assault are instrumental in a victim's willingness to report their crime and stay engaged throughout the investigation and prosecution of the offender. A recent study found that many sexual assault victims stated they did not report their crime to law enforcement due to a mistrust of, poor experience with, or dislike of police officers (Johnson & Lewis, 2022). Separately, Lathan et al. (2021) believe the rape myth belief, lack of a trauma-

informed approach, and burnout culture are three crucial officer-related factors contributing to victim-blaming and the impersonal police response to sexual violence. Meeting with a police officer to report their crime is commonly a sexual assault victim's first interaction with the criminal justice system post-assault. This interaction can have lasting impacts on the victim, and when met with an officer who displays signs of rape myth belief, job-related burnout, or who fails to provide a trauma-informed approach, the lasting impact can be negative and subsequently affect a victim's willingness to participate in the investigation and prosecution of their assault.

A multidisciplinary response team, such as a SART, can alter these effects through shared expertise across professions. The teams can capitalize on interagency training, the co-development of best practices, and consultations with an established network of professionals to increase the effectiveness of their response to victims (Office for Victims of Crime, 2011b). Historically, SARTs have seen positive impacts on the criminal justice system, which include improved victim reporting, increased evidence, and stronger victim involvement, which leads to increased arrest and conviction rates. (Nugent-Borakove et al., 2006). The criminal justice system is morally obligated to provide trauma victims with an appropriate and caring response. With the implementation of a SART, the criminal justice community can institute an ethical and standardized response to the report of a sexual assault.

Ethical Considerations

There is a moral obligation for the criminal justice community to create an efficient and comprehensive response plan to reports of sexual violence. Implementing a SART can aid in fulfilling this moral obligation; however, multidisciplinary teams can create additional ethical dilemmas. Not only is each professional responsible for their own obligations, but decisions or actions made by one team member may affect the roles or actions of a member from a different

discipline. Any time that a new unit is created, especially one that is multidisciplinary, it is important to consider the ethical dilemmas that may present themselves and respond by creating a code of ethics that can aid in governing these situations.

Ethical Dilemmas

One of the most prevalent ethical dilemmas facing a SART could be prioritizing which cases will be investigated and which cases will be closed without charging consideration. Benefits of SARTs include early reporting, advocate-law enforcement co-interviews, and experienced evidence collection practices. These benefits can often result in strong cases built upon physical evidence supporting criminal charges. The SART must be prepared to respond to victims who elect to withdraw their report and to those who desire to proceed with a criminal trial. When a victim chooses to recant, despite a solid criminal case, it can create an ethical dilemma for members of the SART. The team must balance their moral obligation to the community and the benefit of convicting a sexual offender with the harm that doing so may cause the victim. Similarly, the team must consider the possible waste of resources spent on one case, where the victim is uninterested, that could have been reallocated to another case, where the victim seeks justice.

Another ethical dilemma that SARTs should prepare for is navigating the varying levels of professional obligation to victim confidentiality across disciplines. While law enforcement and representatives of the prosecuting attorney's office can, and often will, share information back and forth regarding a criminal case, other members of the SART are obligated to maintain confidentiality. In various states, sexual assault nurse examiners and sexual assault victim advocates must maintain victim confidentiality unless the victim provides written consent to release their information. Without written consent, these professionals cannot provide

identification, statements, or evidence to criminal justice professionals. A SART must be prepared for the ethical dilemmas that can arise from the differing requirements of victim confidentiality in their state. Initial and ongoing cross-discipline training among members of a SART is recommended in order to define the roles and responses of various team members, define their differing confidentiality obligations, and to create ethical action plans that can be instituted when confidentiality creates a barrier to the team.

Finally, the SART needs to define the missions of their unit and continually update them as needed. One of the main objectives of a SART should be the relentless pursuit of sexual offenders while seeking justice for the victims of those offenders. The general public, including many victims of sexual violence, would likely agree that offenders who commit a sex crime should be punished with a prison sentence. Byrne (2013) analyzed the United States' "Great Prison Experiment" that had taken place in the latter half of the 1900s. As a result of the experiment, in 2005, nearly 2.5 million individuals were incarcerated in jails or prisons nationwide. Through a literature review, Byrne (2013) reveals evidence to suggest that incarceration actually does not create the deterrent and rehabilitative effects that the community may expect. Instead, the evidence showed that mass incarceration creates a more dangerous community as the level of crime has risen in areas where offenders reside after their release.

The results of the Great Prison Experiment create an ethical dilemma for SARTs. While the community may wish to see sexual offenders be punished for their crimes, Byrne's (2013) findings suggest that probation may show stronger rehabilitation and deterrence results. Investment in evidence-based practices, such as addressing an offender's individual criminogenic needs, may be more effective than a prison term. Using evidence-based probation sanctions, victims can be assured they have received justice, while at the same time, the

community can remain safe by using the most effective sanctions to deter reoffending that are known. A SART must find a collective agreement and define its idea of 'justice' when pursuing convictions and sentencing of sexual offenders. Similarly, the SART must make its mission known early and prepare victims for possible sentencing outcomes of a criminal conviction.

Ethics and Expectations

In most instances where an individual chooses to report their victimization, they first turn to law enforcement. As previously mentioned, only a small percentage of individuals take this step. Therefore, law enforcement officers have a strong moral obligation to ensure those reaching out for help are afforded the respectful, ethical response they deserve. Ridding the law enforcement profession of rape-myth beliefs and promoting a trauma-informed approach to sexual assault survivors should be a top priority of SARTs. The SART should create an initial training course focused on sexual assault statistics, the investigation of sexual assault, and a trauma-informed approach that is required of all officers whom departments serviced by the SART employ. Similarly, the SART should create a continuing education program that police officers can attend after completion of the initial training. The continuing education program should be required of all officers at least bi-annually to ensure that officers responding to reports of sexual assault are responding with a knowledge base of the current best practices, the importance of an ethical response, and the expectations of the SART that serves their department.

Ethical Accountability

Ethical accountability relates to taking responsibility for one's actions and explaining the reason for that action while remaining open to review and criticism from others. With a multi-disciplinary team, each member must be willing to justify their actions and remain open to

criticism or questioning from other members, even if the criticizing member comes from a different discipline. Creating a pre-determined action plan of ethical responsibilities will not affect the behavior of SART members if the culture of the team allows for the ignorance of an individual who strays from the action plan and commits unethical behavior (Sherman, 2019). A significant benefit of SARTs is the collaboration of diverse stakeholders working closely together as a team. Research findings have recommended a variety of approaches that the SART can utilize to ensure ethical accountability. The approaches recognize the benefit of policies determining how each stakeholder is expected to respond to sexual assault, training sessions presented by one stakeholder group to the others regarding their roles and limitations, and multidisciplinary case reviews discussing the actions taken by each stakeholder (Greeson & Campbell, 2015). When these approaches are implemented within the SART, the team can work to identify areas of success and areas needing improvement, thereby ensuring that future victims will receive the highest level of care.

Implementation Strategy

Over the past two decades, SARTs have begun to be implemented in communities across the country. Despite their recent rise to popularity leading to only minimal research on their effectiveness, it is believed that all communities deserve to experience the benefits of a SART, and each criminal justice community should make efforts to transition toward this model. The United States Department of Justice's Office for Victims of Crime has identified several critical steps to the successful implementation of a SART, including designating a team coordinator and creating a team structure, creating a team vision, and evaluating team efforts (Office for Victims of Crime, 2011a).

Unit Structure

To be most effective, the SART should include membership from law enforcement, sexual assault advocacy groups, sexual assault nurse examiners, and the prosecutor's office. Over 75% of SARTs nationwide contain at least one individual from each of these groups (Greeson & Campbell, 2015). It is also important to designate a SART Coordinator responsible for providing team leadership, maintaining the team's focus, and promoting collaboration to ensure team stability (Office for Victims of Crime, 2011a). This author believes that an ideal SART is coordinated by the community's lead sexual assault prosecutor. This individual is likely to have the most in-depth knowledge of sex assault legal standards, as well as significant working relationships with each of the core members. A second leadership level, such as "team leads," should be created beneath the coordinator. The team lead positions consist of members from the remaining core groups, such as a police supervisor, a nurse educator from the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner group, and a supervisor from the designated advocacy group. Each of these team leads assists the SART coordinator in directing the team's functions while monitoring the work of the remaining members.

Policy Considerations

The Office for Victims of Crime (2011a) suggests that a SART does not redefine the team member's inherent professional role but integrates their role into a new identity. With that, each member remains responsible for abiding by the policies and mission identified by their organization. However, it is also essential that the SART identifies specific policies and procedures that can help guide the team. Some considerations for the SART's ethical code of conduct include maintaining team proficiency, providing a variety of services that remain accessible to victims, and ensuring the protection of a victim's rights and confidentiality.

Promoting an ethical workplace when organizing a collaborative, multidisciplinary group is equally important. The SART's ethical code of conduct should also include principles related to teamwork, such as respectful communication, constructive conflict resolution, and consistency in the quality of work produced.

Team Evaluation

Lastly, procedures must be created to promote regular, multidisciplinary case review meetings when implementing a SART. Nearly 74% of currently operating SARTs conduct regular case review meetings (Greeson & Campbell, 2015). These meetings aid in promoting teamwork, increasing interagency knowledge, and ensuring ethical accountability across the membership of the SART (Office for Victims of Crime, 2011a). While the case review meetings aid in ensuring ethical accountability amongst members of the SART, they can also effectively ensure the team's strategies meet the current best practices and aid in navigating ways to avoid future legal or ethical dilemmas.

In conclusion, it is clear that sexual assault response teams have proven to be an effective measure of responding to sexual assault reports and providing victims with a comprehensive team of professionals who can aid in their recovery. Implementing a cohesive SART within the community is a significant undertaking, requiring the collaboration of several different stakeholders. However, when done so with a victim-centered approach, a respectful mindset, and an emphasis on ethical considerations, a SART can provide significant benefits to sexual assault victims, the criminal justice system, and the community as a whole.

Post-conviction Analysis

While embedded advocacy services and the implementation of a SART are possible methods to help break down barriers that victims perceive in the criminal justice system, perhaps

reimagining the community's view of the corrections system may also aid in promoting victim involvement during sex crime investigations. In some cases of convictions, a lengthy prison sentence may be necessary, while in others, it is possible that community-based probation sanctions may be more effective long-term. Perhaps increasing the effectiveness of corrections through more successful rehabilitation efforts and reduced recidivism rates of sexual offenders could increase a victim's willingness to participate in the criminal investigation of sexual violence. In the following pages, the author will further explore the victim's perspective of convicted offender sanctions, discuss the effectiveness of community-based supervision, and analyze current sexual offender treatment programs.

Victim Perspective

Experienced criminal justice practitioners would likely agree that victims of crime who do make the choice to report their victimization to the police department elect to do so for a variety of reasons. However, when considering victims of trauma, such as sexual violence, a large majority of victims likely choose to report their victimization because they seek justice for the crime that was committed against them. In addition, they hope to prevent the offender from traumatizing them or another person again in the same way. Therefore, this author argues that the criminal justice system must determine the most appropriate method to hold sexual offenders accountable while also balancing the safety of the community as a whole.

One could reasonably assume most of the population agrees that sexual offenders deserve to experience time in prison as a punishment for their actions and the harm they have caused to others. This author would agree with that sentiment but also believes that society must understand the outcomes of incarceration versus the positive benefits of rehabilitation efforts. Byrne (2013) conducted an analysis of the United States' "Great Prison Experiment" that had

taken place in the latter half of the 1900s. As a result of the experiment, by 2005, nearly 2.5 million individuals were incarcerated in jails or prisons throughout the country at any given time, while nearly 3% of the American population had experienced time in prison. Byrne (2013) reveals evidence to suggest that incarceration actually does not create the deterrent and rehabilitative effect that much of the community may expect. Instead, evidence showed that mass incarceration actually creates a more dangerous community as the level of crime has risen in areas where offenders reside after their release.

Although a victim may initially feel valued and justified when an offender is held responsible through a prison sentence, society must ask themselves if a simple prison sentence is truly enough to keep communities safe or if it is, instead, causing more harm. This author believes that with education, it can also be possible for a crime victim to feel valued and justified when criminal sanctions other than a prison sentence are instituted. Byrne's (2013) findings suggest that probation may show strong deterrence results and that investment in evidence-based practices, such as addressing an offender's individual criminogenic needs, may be more effective than a prison cell. By utilizing evidence-based probation sanctions, victims can be assured they have received justice and at the same time, communities can remain safe through the use of the most effective sanctions to deter reoffending that are currently known.

Evidence-based Practices

Risks-needs-responsivity Model

With the rise of focus on evidence-based practices in nearly all aspects of criminal justice, including offender supervision, practitioners of criminal justice have been introduced to the risks-needs-responsivity model (RNR). The RNR model uses the three principles to aid supervision agents in determining who, what, and how to supervise their caseload. First, the risk

principle helps agents determine the level or intensity of services that each of their clients may need. By assessing the intensity of services necessary, supervision agents can choose which of their clients they should focus their time on (high-risk) versus which offenders might be able to be successful with just minimal supervision (low-risk). The needs principle assists in identifying the criminogenic needs, or dynamic criminal risk factors, of each client. This principle suggests that when these dynamic risk factors are altered, a decrease in further criminal behavior is likely to be observed. It helps to determine what specific factors a supervision agent needs to address in order to create a fundamental change in criminal behavior. Finally, the responsivity principle aids in determining how to deliver services. It states that to be effective, probation agents must use cognitive behavioral interventions to tailor their services to the individual learning style of the client (Arvidson, n.d.-b). Recent research on the principles of the RNR model suggests that modeling supervision procedures around all three principles can elicit a 25% reduction in the rate of recidivism (Bourgon, 2013).

Cognitive Behavior Interventions

Cognitive behavior interventions (CBI) is another evidence-based model that can, or as this author believes should, be intertwined and practiced with the RNR model. CBI can be applied in various fields of human services and can aid in developing a change in thinking and behavior. For example, in the field of corrections, CBI can be utilized to model a change in criminal thinking and behavior when used to address the criminogenic needs of an offender.

CBI revolves around the theory of the thought-behavior link. The theory suggests that all humans are subject to the fact that their internal thoughts and reactions to a situation control their behaviors or responses to what occurred. In addition, no one other than ourselves can control how we think or react. Therefore, by controlling or changing their thoughts, any human is

subsequently able to control or change their behavior or reactions to a specific situation (Arvidson, n.d.-a).

Behavior Change Analysis

Cognitive behavior interventions and the thought-behavior link are theories that could be better understood through the behavior change analysis graph. The theories of CBI and the thought-behavior link rely on cognitive restructuring and increased personal development of social skills. Cognitive restructuring aids an individual in revealing their internal anti-social thoughts and behaviors in a given situation to recognize the risk. Further, it teaches an individual to acknowledge their risky thoughts and alter their response to produce a pro-social result (Arvidson, n.d.-a). For example, utilizing Figure 3, the author will review the possible response of a sex offender to a situation where they do not wish to attend their court-mandated sex offender treatment group. In the “thoughts” column, the offender may think, “I do not belong here, the other participants are not like me, I do not deserve this, and I have better ways to spend my time.” Subsequently, in the behavior column, the offender would skip the day or remove themselves from the treatment program. Although the consequences column may produce short-term benefits, such as increased leisure time and contentment for the offender, the negative consequences, such as an angry probation officer, dismissal from the program, or an executed prison sentence, are long-term and more significant. Using a cognitive model worksheet (Fig. 3), a probation agent can utilize cognitive restructuring to demonstrate the benefits of pro-social outcomes to their client. In this example, the offender may consider replacement thoughts similar to “treatment is a requirement of probation, and I want to get off probation, I am sick of the negative or illegal thoughts that I have, or other people in my treatment group are experiencing similar challenges as I am.” As a result, the new behavior will likely consist of attending their

court-mandated sex offender treatment program. Furthermore, the new consequences are much more positive, likely consisting of sentiments similar to “I am satisfying the elements of probation, my probation officer is leaving me alone, or I am experiencing personal growth in this program.” Ultimately, through the use of evidence-based practices, such as cognitive behavioral interventions and the risks-needs-responsivity model, probation programs can aid in the rehabilitation of offenders by identifying their criminogenic needs, restructuring their pro-criminal thoughts, developing common social skills, and encouraging pro-social behaviors.

Sex Offender Treatment

Sex offender treatment programs have existed in society since the late 19th century and, over time, have evolved to meet the standards of newly introduced evidence-based practices. With the increased practice of behavioral interventions, the 1970s could be marked as the beginning of modern-day sexual offender treatment initiatives (Harrison et al., 2020). During this time, sex offender treatment began using a form of cognitive behavior intervention similar to what is recognized as the current best practices. Currently, CBI is the most widely used practice across the United States, and treatment programs often utilize a multi-dimensional approach targeting the physiological, psychological, social, and environmental influences on an offender’s risk of recidivism (Harrison et al., 2020).

Although cognitive behavioral interventions and the risks-needs-responsivity model are widely accepted as methods that reduce recidivism rates of general offenders, sexual offender treatment programs remain somewhat controversial (Hanson et al., 2009). Despite that, multiple meta-analysis studies have supported the theory that CBI and RNR models of sexual offender treatment are effective. When combined, meta-analysis reviews of 66 studies on the recidivism of sexual offenders found that the offenders who attend sexual offender treatment programs are

relatively unlikely to re-offend with a new sexual offense. Specifically, the offenders who completed sexual offender treatment showed a sexual offense recidivism rate of approximately 10-12%, while those who did not attend a treatment program showed a sexual offense recidivism rate of nearly 17-19% (Hanson et al., 2002, 2009).

However, more interestingly, the same or similar meta-analysis studies have also found that, although sexual offense recidivism may be low, sexual offender treatment programs fail to address non-sexual offense recidivism accurately. For example, in a review of 25 studies, Harrison et al. (2020) concluded that sexual offender treatment programs resulted in a sexual offense recidivism rate of 13%. However, the same offenders showed general recidivism rates of 31% and violent crime recidivism rates of 30%. Similarly, in a meta-analysis of 23 studies, Hanson et al. (2009) found that offenders who completed sexual offender treatment programs produced a general recidivism rate of nearly 32%. Although these percentages are more favorable than the 48% recidivism rate of offenders from the same study who did not complete treatment programs, it is clear that sexual offenders are much more likely to re-offend with a non-sexual offense than a sexual offense.

Proposed Initiative

With the previously mentioned results in mind, it appears universally understood that sexual offender treatment programs based on cognitive behavioral intervention strategies are relatively effective in reducing sex crime recidivism. However, it is also clear that sexual offender treatment programs are not accurately targeting the criminogenic needs of sexual offenders, which has resulted in general and violent crime recidivism.

In addition, this author believes that victims of sexual violence often report their crimes to the police because they wish for the offender to be held responsible and to make the

community a safer place. It is also known that research has shown prison sentences are often not as effective of a deterrent as probation sanctions. Criminal justice leaders in the State of Minnesota have an ethical obligation to ensure that Minnesota's sexual offender treatment programs are accurately addressing recidivism rates related to all types of crime. If programs are found to be failing at reducing recidivism of any type of crime, it is imperative that a program overhaul be initiated to correct this problem.

Stakeholders and Funding

A systematic review of Minnesota's sex offender treatment program is mutually beneficial to many different stakeholders. The criminal justice community has an obligation to provide offenders with the most beneficial evidence-based practices that are known and available. Similarly, the criminal justice system must commit to the community, and to victims, to provide the same level of service in an effort to create the safest society that is possible. Lastly, the systematic review can ensure that the most effective tools are being utilized to relieve any undue burden on the criminal justice workforce.

The author recognizes that a comprehensive review of Minnesota's programming is not a small task. It is recognized that a sufficient review would need to review policies and practices from across the state, conduct in-person audits of treatment sessions, and review law enforcement records to determine the recidivism rates of thousands of offenders over several decades. Not only is this process expected to be time-consuming, but it likely will also require significant funding initiatives. The author believes that funding to conduct this research and review project is most appropriate to be drawn from the state through legislative change and from the federal government through possible federal grant funding, similar to Minnesota's previous Sexual Assault Kit Initiative grant.

Perceived Outcome and Effects

The author believes it is possible that a comprehensive review of Minnesota's sex offender treatment program will likely result in similar findings as the meta-analysis studies mentioned above. Specifically, it is believed that the review will find Minnesota's programming is highly effective in producing low offender recidivism rates of a subsequent sexual offense, but it is also theorized that the review will find Minnesota's programming less effective in rehabilitating an offender's likelihood to re-offend with a non-sexual offense.

In response to the perceived outcome, the author believes it is most appropriate to enact a committee to review the findings and enact statewide, systematic procedural changes. The author recommends that the review committee be multi-dimensional, consisting of members from the research group, Department of Corrections, law enforcement, attorneys, social workers, victim advocates, psychologists, and victim-survivors. As a group, the author believes the committee will be able to review the findings, interpret where changes can and should be made, and develop new recommendations on incorporating increased cognitive behavioral interventions or thought-behavior link education while reducing non-sexual offense recidivism.

Conclusion

When considering strategies to increase reporting of sex crimes and promote victim engagement with the criminal justice system, it is believed that victim advocacy can be the most influential. Creating a victim advocacy group that is embedded within the police department aids in combatting the barriers to reporting that a victim may perceive. However, it is also recognized that this strategy is financially unrealistic for most police departments in the United States. A more realistic and widely deployable strategy includes the formation of a sexual assault response team. While these teams are not embedded directly into the law enforcement agency, they can

aid the criminal justice system by providing a readily available, strategic, and holistic response to sex crime victims. Lastly, it is important that the criminal justice community re-analyze criminal sanctions of sexual offenders. While prison sentences protect the community temporarily, improved offender psychiatric care coupled with community-based sanctions may be able to provide more beneficial long-term community safety impacts.

Chapter 3: Implications, Recommendations, and Conclusions

Criminal sexual offenses are known to be widely underreported. Nationwide, as few as 1 in 3 sexual assaults are reported to the police (RAINN, n.d.). Furthermore, in Ramsey County, only about 33% of the reported crimes are referred to the attorney's office for charging, and only 11% result in an offender being criminally charged (Ramsey County Public Health, 2019). As a community, the criminal justice system has an ethical duty to rid society of sexual offenses while providing victims of these offenses the dignity and respect they deserve. The dignity and respect of these survivors equates to providing a criminal justice system that empowers individuals to report their crimes, supports them throughout the investigation process, and protects their safety after the criminal trial.

Practical Applications

Law enforcement collaboration with sexual assault victim-advocacy services is essential, and embedding victim advocates into the police department is the gold standard practice.

Advocates possess a wide variety of skills that can positively impact victims and law enforcement alike. They can provide emotional support and safety planning strategies to victims while also aiding in navigating the complexities of the criminal justice system. With reduced stress and diminished likelihood of revictimization, advocates can promote stronger and more continuous victim engagement throughout the criminal justice process.

Victim advocates are also highly skilled in utilizing a trauma-informed approach. The presence of rape myth beliefs and a lack of a trauma-informed approach are two critical law enforcement-related factors that contribute to a victim's willingness to engage the criminal justice system (Lathan et al., 2021). With embedded victim advocates, law enforcement organizations can develop a co-response model that allows law enforcement to obtain the

information they need while ensuring that victims are adequately supported throughout the process.

Despite evidence of the positive benefits of victim advocates, only 21% of victims contacted a specialized rape crisis center following their assault. The community also recognizes there is a stark racial divide in the victims who obtain advocate support following their assault, with only 9% being victims of a minority group (Campbell et al., 2001). A lack of awareness of victim services is a leading reason why a sexual assault victim does not obtain advocacy support services following their assault (Logan et al., 2005). By embedding victim advocates into a police department and deploying a sexual assault co-response model, law enforcement organizations can ensure that each victim receives an equal and adequate response.

While embedded victim advocates can provide great benefits to the criminal justice system, it is important to recognize that this model is unrealistic in most communities. Implementing just one embedded advocate is estimated to cost nearly \$100,000 annually, and many police departments across the country are unable to sustain the financial burden. Another way for law enforcement agencies to gain access to a working relationship with victim advocates is through the development of a collaborative sexual assault response team (SART). These teams have been found effective in impacting sexual assault cases in several positive ways. When utilizing this approach, sexual assault cases are reported more quickly, have more DNA evidence, have increased victim participation, increased arrest rates, and increased conviction rates (Nugent-Borakove et al., 2006).

SARTs rose to popularity after being implemented in several communities across the country. Due to the lack of a standardized model, various forms of SARTs exist today, yet they still positively effect victims and the criminal justice system (Greeson & Campbell, 2015). As a

result of the lack of a standardized model, A SART team can be relatively easy to establish, depending on the level of formality. Many of these teams are comprised of professionals who are already operating within the community and do not require any of these professionals to alter their job duties. Instead, the SART reaps benefits by promoting co-responses from professionals of differing disciplines as well as through collaboration, discussion, and education across disciplines.

Recommendations for Further Research

While sexual assault response teams are a relatively new strategy, they have undergone significant research. There is a wide variety of research that can aid in how to formalize a team, how to select a leader, and which professionals should be included on the team. Similarly, a research base has determined the effectiveness of SARTs, finding that the teams are successful in promoting victim engagement and impacting offender conviction rates. However, there is also evidence to show that when only a portion of SART members are able to collaborate on a case, the level of victim engagement is actually lower than in cases where an SART is not involved (Nugent-Borakove et al., 2006). With the knowledge that there is no standardized SART model in the US, the author believes it is important that the criminal justice community explores why SARTs are effective and which members or services are necessary for the SART to be more desirable than a non-collaborative response.

Conclusion

Criminal justice practitioners take an oath to protect and serve their community as best as possible. However, it is also clear that the criminal justice system is failing their communities when utilizing the modern-day criminal justice response to sexual assault. Sexual assault survivors have been violated physically, as well as mentally and emotionally. Their safety,

confidence, and self-worth are stripped away from them by their assailant. The criminal justice community has the ability to aid these victims in taking back their lives. But first, the criminal justice response to sexual assault victims must be reimagined. A multi-disciplinary, collaborative response to these victims can increase reporting and victim engagement while leading to stronger criminal cases, higher conviction rates, and more effective criminal sanctions.

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Figures

IMPLEMENTATION COSTS

CATEGORY	BUDGET AMOUNT	ACTUAL COST
ADVOCATE #1 SALARY	\$55,000	
ADVOCATE #1 BENEFITS	\$34,045	
ADVOCATE #2 SALARY	\$55,000	
ADVOCATE #2 BENEFITS	\$34,045	
OFFICE SET UP	\$5,000	
TECHNOLOGY/LICENSING	\$5,000	
VEHICLE	\$30,000	
TRAINING	\$10,000	
TOTAL	\$228,090	

Figure 1

ONGOING ANNUAL COST

CATEGORY	BUDGET AMOUNT	ACTUAL COST
ADVOCATE #1 SALARY	\$55,000	
ADVOCATE #1 BENEFITS	\$34,045	
ADVOCATE #2 SALARY	\$55,000	
ADVOCATE #2 BENEFITS	\$34,045	
TECHNOLOGY/LICENSING	\$2,000	
TRAINING	\$10,000	
TOTAL	\$190,090	

Figure 2

