CLIENTS’ EXPERIENCES WITH CASDA

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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to examine the experiences former clients of the Center Against Sexual and Domestic Abuse (CASDA) had with the programs and services they received. The data was collected using face-to-face interviews with five such individuals, who were clients between January 1, 2003 and December 31, 2004. The participants provided their personal views about services and programs, as well as offered suggestions for improvement.

Introduction

Problem Statement

Domestic abuse, both physical and sexual, has long existed throughout the world. Society’s understanding of violence has been based on preconceived notions and stereotypes which have enabled abusers to repeatedly commit violent acts; often, in the aftermath, the abused person has been left to suffer the consequences alone and unsupported. The social stigma relating to these behaviors, sadly, has further extended to the agencies which serve these clients, agencies like the Center Against Sexual and Domestic Abuse (CASDA). Ongoing research examining the need for services like CASDA has been an essential aspect of attracting continuing funding; without resources agencies like this might well have limited services and be left unable to meet client needs.

Description of Problem Background

CASDA, a local shelter and advocacy agency, in Superior, Wisconsin, has provided a great deal of assistance to victims of abuse since 1984. In 2003 alone, CASDA reported 82 cases of sexual assault in the city of Superior and two additional cases in Douglas County (CASDA 2004). CASDA and other like agencies have created safe havens in which clients can share their experiences, define roles, acquire life skills to support self-sufficiency, and acquire knowledge of the laws, policies, procedures, and other resources available to help. For example, like the Family Violence Prevention Fund, CASDA has worked with abuse victims to build safe and fair environments that allow survivors of abuse to speak freely, while ensuring that they understand the parameters of confidentiality (2003).
Agencies like CASDA have responded to individuals based on the social context in which the clients have lived and the background of his or her life, culture, and community. Their philosophy has been that it is crucial to understanding the survivor’s environment, if a provider is to provide and assure effective services for the client. Many women of color (both immigrant and U.S. born) have experienced discrimination and racism; the Family Violence Prevention Fund has urged that when working with immigrant or minority women, one should explain the different risks they may face within their cultures or within the majority culture (2003). CASDA, too, has provided all kinds of diverse women with opportunities to validate their experiences.

For several years, CASDA has educated the public about abuse and sexual assault through rural outreach programs and through support and education groups, open to the community. Committed to providing assistance of the highest quality, CASDA has continually expanded its services, acquiring support from all levels of government, public and private enterprises and foundations, and individual and community groups (Valerie Coit, personal communication, October 8, 2004).

Abuse and assault have occurred in many forms: physical, emotional, sexual, and spiritual, and also in the form of neglect. Survivors of abuse have experienced a loss of self-determination as well as an increase of feelings of anxiety, fear, guilt, confusion, and loneliness. CASDA has upheld certain core values and ethical principles in delivering its services. For example, CASDA has helped people in need, addressed social problems, challenged social injustices, respected the dignity and worth of all persons, understood the importance of human relationships, and practiced within its area of competence (Valerie Coit, personal communication, October 8, 2004). Most important, each individual’s situation was validated and addressed with empathy and in a trustworthy manner.

Agencies like CASDA have been important resources in the battle against violence; often agencies like these have been the first line of defense in the community against violent behaviors, even before the county social services. Many of these agencies were begun originally at the grassroots level before government entities began to involve themselves in and respond effectively to this social issue in the community; they have brought about tremendous changes in community attitude and in social service delivery through their presence and educational outreach.
Statement Research Purpose and Rationale

The goal of this research project was to describe the experiences of former clients of CASDA with its programs and services. The specific research question addressed was: What can former CASDA clients tell us about their experiences with the agency?

Research Design

Sample

Subjects were chosen within certain specified parameters. The subjects were previous CASDA clients, served between January 1, 2003 and December 31, 2004; they were not to have obtained further CASDA services since that time. The clients must have checked “okay to contact” on the CASDA intake form at the time they began their encounters with the services. They had to be willing to participate in a face-to-face interview lasting 25-60 minutes in length. Finally, they were to be 18 years of age or older.

Size

This sample was small—five Caucasian women—but the data gathered held rich details about CASDA, its services and its programs.

Generalizability

The study used systematic random sampling, which, if there had been sufficient numbers, would have allowed for the elements of the study to be generalized to all clients in that period of time. Because so few participants actually engaged in the study, however, the results are generalizable only to these five participants, even though they were randomly chosen.

Sample Characteristics and Selection

The researcher worked with the volunteer coordinator at CASDA, who arranged for her to sort through previous client intake forms to find prospective volunteers. In addition, the volunteer coordinator helped the researcher increase her general knowledge of CASDA through on-site training about domestic abuse and sexual assault.

The researcher formed a list of all the potential clients (over 300 files) and then began calling every 10th client on the contact list, after a random start. During this first contact the researcher explained the purpose and benefits of the study and how confidentiality would be maintained. The researcher also explained this at the time of the face-to-face meeting; there the potential participant was asked to sign a consent form before completing the 20 – 60 minute interview.
After 220 calls, in the end there were five participants, all adult women, who followed through with interviews. Many of the numbers (over 180) were no longer current, were disconnected, or had people living at the number who did not want to share the person’s new number. There were also approximately 40 people who said they did not want to come to Superior (some would have met the researcher away from Superior in their home community), about 10 people said they would have responded if it were a telephone survey, others said it was too personal a topic (about five of them), or some said they were too busy and could not fit it into their schedules (between 15 and 20 people).

**Research Methodology**

**Type of Study**

The study was exploratory and used a cross-sectional design (0); it was based on discovering, at one point in time, what CASDA client experiences were with its services and programs. It was considered exploratory because not much written reporting exists about CASDA client feedback.

**Methodology**

*Data collection techniques:* The data collection technique employed in the study was the semi-structured interview format. This data collection method had several advantages and disadvantages. The advantages were that the interviewer had more freedom to pursue suppositions and was able to improvise. The interview format also allowed more client input and any ambiguous questions to be clarified. The disadvantages were the potential for influence by the interviewer on the client, the cost in terms of time to both the interviewee and interviewer, and the loss of anonymity (Marlow & Boone, 2005). Indeed, this loss of time and privacy may have impacted the final small sample size.

*Data analysis techniques:* The research produced descriptive statistics that were analyzed using the Minitab program with quantitative items; qualitative analysis involved developing themes in relation to open-ended questions.

**Discussion of design strengths – weaknesses:** It has been said that the strength of a design rests on its internal and external validity. Internal validity refers to whether or not a program or service is the reason for the final outcome or whether there are other factors involved. Some threats to internal validity with this kind of design include mortality, selection and history. Selection exists as a threat because a pretest was not conducted to determine if clients who participated in services and programs at CASDA were different from other clients who might have been selected. For instance, the clients who were interviewed for the study might have been
highly motivated to learn about ending violence (Marlow & Boone, 2005). Even though clients were selected randomly, selection was a threat to the research project. For example, some clients who were called to set up interviews wanted to participate but could not because of travel situations, while other clients’ contact numbers were disconnected or they no longer lived at the residence.

History also threatened internal validity. It was possible that there could have been elements other than the program and services from CASDA that may have affected the study’s outcome. For example, the clients could have been receiving services from another organization, as well as CASDA, at the time of the interviews, or perhaps only clients who liked CASDA decided to participate, or maybe the client’s situation had changed for the worse. Mortality, like history and selection, threatened the validity of the research because clients could have dropped out of the study by not showing up for scheduled interviews (Marlow & Boone, 2005).

External validity refers to the generalizability of the data to the wider population. Some threats to external validity in this study dealt with history–treatment interaction and selection-treatment interaction. History–treatment interaction existed because there could have been other factors that contributing to the outcome of the data. For example, the clients’ experiences with violence might have been different or the time of received services and programs from CASDA might have varied (Marlow & Boone, 2005).

Another threat to external validity was selection–treatment interaction. Since no pretest was conducted to determine how typical the clients were, generalizability was limited only to these particular clients from the period under review (Marlow & Boone, 2005).

Measurement validity and reliability: The applicability of a measurement instrument is determined by its reliability and validity. Validity refers to the extent to which the measuring instrument reflects what is being measured. The measurement instrument used in this study, the survey, was relatively neutral (Appendix A). The content of the survey was relevant to the idea which was being measured. The questions were stated in a clear, concise manner. Double negatives and double-barreled questions were avoided. The questions were not leading or biased, which allowed volunteers to answer the survey based on their own experiences (Marlow & Boone, 2005).

Reliability refers to the extent to which the measuring instrument reveals the actual differences in the phenomenon measured from the differences built in the instrument itself. The survey contained closed-ended and open-ended questions. Each type of question added a certain quality to the measurement instrument. For example, the closed-ended questions provided present answer categories, which made it easier for the researcher
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and the volunteers to understand. The open-ended questions allowed the volunteers the freedom to expand on their views, rather than forcing a response from only the researcher-constructed categories. However, sometime open-ended questions have been seen as intimidating by respondents, because they think the questions are too broad to answer readily. This may have put the volunteers on the spot (Marlow & Boone, 2005) and lessened their responses about CASDA’s services and programs.

The open-ended questions focused on the clients’ past experiences with CASDA. This required clients to recall recent past involvement. The questions would have been far more difficult for the clients to answer if they were recalling a more distant experience. To have an effective open-ended question, focus ought to be placed on the present or recent past (Marlow & Boone, 2005). Also, the measurement instrument questions could have been ordered differently. For example, the personal opinion questions could have been asked first, and the demographic questions (gender, age, and ethnicity) asked last. This might have added to some of the participants' response rates. People like to state their opinions versus factual data (Marlow & Boone, 2005).

**Ethical issues:** Before any data collection started, the study was presented to the University of Wisconsin-Superior Institutional Review Board (IRB) to assess ethical issues such as confidentiality, informed consent, and voluntary participation. Confidentiality was maintained by keeping all clients’ identifying information separate from the survey information. Clients were also preserved from possible discovery of having been a CASDA client because the interviews were conducted at the University of Wisconsin – Superior campus. The questionnaires were not labeled or numbered to identify the clients. This was to allow them to feel reassured and able to answer the questions objectively (Marlow & Boone, 2005).

**Social justice issues:** This research encouraged client participation. It was focused on clients’ voices, which have often been ignored in the research literature; here they had the chance to be heard. The data represented the clients’ personal perspectives. The information they provided was to be used in planning for future services and programs. Besides enabling clients to help in the battle against violence, the research also provided CASDA with additional data to seek potential funding for the organization.

**Human diversity issues:** Sexist language and exploitation of an at-risk population were avoided, and the interview questions were focused upon CASDA, its services and programs, rather than elaborating on the clients’ situations or circumstances. The study represented voices of an underrepresented population. It provided a fuller picture of how a diverse
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group can have input into the future of services and programs they have received themselves (Marlow & Boone, 2005).

Results

Findings Analysis

The purpose of this study was to gain information from a former client viewpoint about CASDA’s services and programs. The study provided an opportunity for an at-risk population to voice its insights.

Gender, ethnicity, and age: All five individuals who participated in this study were Caucasian and female. The average age of the interviewed population was 37.6 years. Ages ranged between 20 years and 52 years.

Specific services and programs involvement: CASDA has provided many services and programs to its clients. The services included both one-on-one services and group-oriented programs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Use of CASDA Services</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twenty-Four Hour Help Line</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short-Term Counseling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency Shelter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Groups</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is interesting to note that two persons (40%) used four or more these services and programs. All five respondents utilized more than one service or program offered by CASDA. The services or programs used most often were advocacy services and the twenty-four hour help line.

Services and programs from CASDA were helpful: Former clients reported that CASDA services and programs have been beneficial to them. The data suggested that CASDA has been a positive influence in the lives of the clients.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Table 2: Helpfulness of Services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level of Agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agreed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Strongly Agreed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Four persons of the five persons interviewed (80%) agreed very strongly that the services and programs they participated in were helpful. All five agreed strongly that services were helpful.
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*Services and programs from CASDA improved situation:* The responses in this study indicated that CASDA played an important part in improving these five clients’ situations.

### Table 3: Improved Client Situations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Agreement</th>
<th>Number of Persons</th>
<th>Percent of Persons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agreed</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Strongly Agreed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Four persons of the five interviewed (80%) reported that they strongly agreed that CASDA’s services and program had improved their situation. The fifth person rated this item as “very strongly agree,” making this an item with which all respondents agreed extremely positively.

*Safe with CASDA:* All participants were asked if they felt safe while engaged as a client with CASDA. The respondents’ comments offered two major themes: a legal theme and a general support theme as illustrated by the following verbatim responses:

### Table 4: Safety Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legal</th>
<th>Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, I felt I had the legal system on my side instead of trying to get the system on my side.</td>
<td>Yes, because I think they help very much, because they were there to talk when needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, knowing he could not come to my house because they helped me get a restraining order.</td>
<td>Yes, as far as, what I told them is not going any farther. Someone else was there to point me in the right direction.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, one person reported feeling unsafe. The person clarified that it was not due to CASDA involvement, but rather it was the realization that the restraining order was only a piece of paper. The same person reported that CASDA had done everything it could to help.

*Comfortable with CASDA’s services and programs:* Overall, the responses indicated that these clients felt comfortable with CASDA because of the environment provided and the personnel. The clients suggested that their comfort feelings were strong because the personnel listened, dealt with them (clients) on an individual basis, focused on what helped instead of what didn’t, and were organized. The clients also suggested the warm environment and good aura helped them to relax.

*Additional services helpful services and programs:* Overall these five clients reported strongly positive feelings about their experiences with the CASDA services and programs. Clients, however, when asked, did
suggest additional services or programs, as expressed by the following verbatim statements:

- Police should respond to a legal document, be more supportive of CASDA’s restraining orders.
- Just more time to talk.
- I wished there was a way to have not let me drop my restraining order; force me to commit.
- To provide rides to support group and advocacy sessions and be more apt to provide for older individuals.

Most rewarding aspects of services and programs: The former clients here mentioned things that called to mind three themes: the very existence of CASDA as a resource, legal support, and support groups. Two persons (40%) felt it was rewarding to know that CASDA existed in the community, and was there to help. Two other persons believed support groups were most rewarding. Together, the responses illustrated that the support groups were helpful, provided hope, and taught coping skills. The final person felt the ability to obtain a restraining order had been the most valuable.

Service and program improvements: Three persons (60%) of the five participants believed there was no need for improvements. However, two persons (40%), who were satisfied with their experiences (see earlier items), suggested improvements, as stated in table 5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5: Improvements Needed in Services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Responses</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Establish a more handicap-friendly shelter and housing facility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Hire male counselors to help, with both girls and boys to provide a different role model.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Establish one-on-one counseling with the children who are part of the crisis (like at LSS) to keep children out of a slump.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Would have liked to see more of a relationship developed between the state borders (Minnesota/Wisconsin) and the services from CASDA (restraining orders).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These responses suggested that continued development might add to an already effective organization.

*Overall rating of services and programs*: At the end of the interviews, clients were asked to give an overall rating of their experience with CASDA using a scale of poor, fair, good, or excellent.
All five clients rated their overall experience with CASDA positively.

*Other:* At the very end of the interviews the five former clients were asked if there were anything else they would like to share about their experiences with CASDA. The responses have been listed below, verbatim:

- The legal service team was very supportive and helpful through the process.
- I thought they were good. I like the atmosphere.
- CASDA is for men, just not for women. The public sees it as just for woman but services are there for both men and woman. The impression of who can go should change. Word should be spread that it is for men and woman.
- I never followed through with CASDA and wished they would have noticed and have done a follow-up to see how I was and if I still needed assistance.

*Application of Findings*

*Usefulness of findings to social work and the agency:* Each time that research like this is conducted from the client viewpoint, it strengthens the understanding of the field of social work. These five clients’ perceptions and suggestions may be useful to CASDA in planning services in the future.

*Relationship of Findings to Literature Review*

Like the agencies described in the literature review, former clients reported positive feelings about their experiences with the program.

*Conclusion*

*Summary of Major Findings*

- According to these former clients, the twenty-four hour help line, advocacy services, legal services, and short-term counseling were the services they used most often.
- One hundred percent of the participants strongly agreed that CASDA’s services and programs were helpful.
- One hundred percent of the participants strongly agreed that CASDA’s services and programs had improved their situations.
All participants reported they felt comfortable with CASDA’s services and programs. It was clear that these particular respondents valued their experiences with CASDA and viewed it as an important community resource. Clients also suggested some areas for potential improvements.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

In the future there are many research ideas that could prove useful in assessing CASDA services and programs. Some specific suggestions might be:

1. Interviewing larger numbers of the client population to increase the generalizability of the study results.
2. Using a more effective data collection mechanism, like personal telephone calls to former clients.
3. Interviewing current clients to make a comparison with previous clients’ perspectives.


Reference List

Center Against Sexual and Domestic Abuse (CASDA). (2004). *Reported sexual assault cases city of Superior: Reported sexual assault cases Douglas county* [handout]. Superior, WI: CASDA.


Appendices

Appendix A

Survey & Code Book

Specific research question:

What can former consumers tell us about their experiences with CASDA’s services?

1. Please select your gender? ____ Male  ____ Female
   
   C1 = Gender  Male = 1  Female = 2

2. What is your ethnicity _____________________________
   
   C2 = Ethnicity  Caucasian = 1

3. How old were you when you started working with CASDA?  
   ___________ (Years)
   
   C3 = Actual Age  
   C4 = Age  
   1 = 18-23  2 = 24-29  3 = 30-35  
   4 = 36-41  5 = 42-47  6 = 48 and older

4. What specific services / programs were you involved with as a client at CASDA? (Check all that apply)
   C5 = Involvement (Below are sub-categories, 10 in all)

   A check = a Yes:  Yes = 1  No = 2

   ____ Emergency Shelter C6  ____ Transitional Housing C7
   ____ Children Program C8  ____ Legal Services C9
   ____ Community Education / Professional Training C10
   ____ Rural Outreach C11  ____ 24 Hour Help Line C12
   ____ Advocacy Services C13  ____ Short Term Counseling C14
   ____ Support Groups C15
For the following two questions listed below, please indicate the response closest to your opinion by circling the appropriate number; use the six point scale below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>Very Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Very Strongly Disagree = VSD = 1  
Strongly Disagree = SD = 2  
Disagree = D = 3  
Agree = A = 4  
Strongly Agree = SA = 5  
Very Strongly Agree = VSA = 6

5. The services / programs from CASDA were helpful. C16 = Helpful
   
   1   2   3   4   5   6
   VSD   SD   D   A   SA   VSA

6. The service / programs from CASDA improved my situation. C17 = Improve
   
   1   2   3   4   5   6
   VSD   SD   D   A   SA   VSA

7. Did you feel safe while a client with CASDA? Explain. C18 = Safe  
   Yes = 1  No = 2  
   (Results from this have been bulleted using Microsoft Word, and written verbatim the volunteers response)

8. Did you feel comfortable with CASDA’s services / programs? Explain. C19 = Comfort  
   Yes = 1  No = 2  
   (Results from this portion have been bulleted using Microsoft Word, and written verbatim the volunteers response)

9. What other additional services would have been helpful to you in your situation? Please be specific. C = 20 = Additional Services  
   (Results from this have been bulleted using Microsoft Word, and written verbatim the volunteers response)
10. What was the most rewarding aspect of the services offered by CASDA? Explain.
   C = 21 = Rewarding
   (Results this portions have been bulleted using Microsoft Word, and written verbatim the volunteers response)

11. What services / programs at CASDA need improvement? Please explain.
    C = 22 = Needs
    (Results from this portion have been bulleted using Microsoft Word, and written verbatim the volunteers response)

12. Overall, how would you rate the services you received from CASDA
    C23 = Overall
    Poor = 1  Fair = 2  Good = 3  Excellent = 4

13. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience with CASDA?
    C = 24
    (Results from this portion have been bulleted using Microsoft Word, and written verbatim the volunteers response)