



I am somebody's somebody.



Minnesota Sexual Assault Response Team
Roundtable Report



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Project Summary



The Sexual Violence Justice Institute (SVJI) at The Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MNCASA) hosted roundtables to learn more from sexual violence victims/survivors in Minnesota about their experience with resources in their community. The goal of the roundtables was to better understand victims/survivors' needs and what it means to have effective and appropriate community resources, increased coordination between agencies, and greater support for victims/survivors in the community.

Methodology



This section explains the approach used to gather the experiences and perspectives of Minnesota sexual violence victims/survivors.

PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURES

SVJI at MNCASA hosted four roundtables in June 2023 to learn about Minnesota sexual violence victims/survivors' experience with resources in their community.

Each roundtable was facilitated virtually through the online platform, Zoom, and lasted ninety minutes. Individual participation in the roundtables was voluntary and confidential. Participants had the option to change their name on Zoom before each roundtable if they wanted to maintain anonymity. Each roundtable was recorded and transcribed. After transcription was complete, all recorded roundtables were deleted. After the roundtable, participants were provided a Visa gift card via mail to thank them for their time and feedback if they accepted.

Participants were selected on a first come, first serve basis, ensuring there was as much representation and diversification from across Minnesota at each roundtable as possible. Five participants were invited to each roundtable, however, not everyone attended (Roundtable #1 had three participants, Roundtable #2 had two participants, Roundtable #3 had three participants, and Roundtable #4 had three participants). In total, there were 11 participants in the roundtables. In addition, due to the roundtables being virtual, attendees were able to participate from all over Minnesota.

FACILITATOR

Project staff facilitated the roundtables utilizing five open-ended questions. Two additional staff members at SVJI served as moderators, taking notes, and offering technical support. Project staff also provided a separate breakout room for advocacy expertise where a site coordinator from a Minnesota Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) was available throughout the roundtable if a participant required support.

During the roundtable discussions, participants were asked the following questions:

- 1 What was important to you when seeking support after experiencing sexual violence?
- 2 How did you feel the different people you worked with treated you?
- 3 Did you feel like the responders were communicating with each other?
- 4 Were you given options for connecting with other responders or clarification on what others do?
- 5 Did you feel the services you received were culturally responsive or inclusive of your specific needs?
- 6 Suppose you were in charge and could change the way things currently operate, what would you change in order to have victims/survivors get their needs met?

Data Analysis



To start the data analysis process, project staff, technical support, and the notetaker gathered to debrief after each roundtable. SVJI staff discussed the roundtable content, what was learned, and how we could improve for the next roundtable. After the completion of roundtables, project staff compiled all the transcriptions and started to identify recurring themes.

Themes and Recommendations



The themes were determined by grouping responses and identifying recurring patterns across all four roundtables. These groupings helped project staff understand the scope and relevance of the themes overall and identify core concerns & obstacles specifically for victims/survivors in Minnesota.

WHAT WAS IMPORTANT TO YOU WHEN SEEKING SUPPORT AFTER EXPERIENCING SEXUAL VIOLENCE?

One consistent theme that came up with this question is the victim/survivor need to be validated.

“It was definitely making sure that I didn’t feel alone as I had been raped twice in like four months.”



“It was important for me that I get validation for what happened, and that it wasn’t my fault, that healing and understanding to take place.”



“I was actually needing some sort of verification or confirmation from a professional, that, indeed, what happened to me was rape because, like so many survivors, I had known the man who did this to me... in those first days of experiencing trauma, my mind was going back and forth, back and forth...”



“...Making sure that I wasn’t alone, getting the resources, having someone to talk to.”



Recommendations for SARTs



All members of the SART should be trauma-informed and utilize a person-centered approach. When members of a SART are utilizing these approaches, they are aware of the impact of trauma and prioritize safety, trust, and empowerment. Together, these approaches can help individuals feel heard, seen, and supported. SARTs should reach out to technical assistance providers for the latest information on trauma-informed practices. To ensure these approaches, all members of the SART should participate in training on this topic regularly.

Another theme for this question was the need and desire for confidentiality.

“I feel like my identity has been stolen a 1,000x over. I have had absolutely no protection on that level.”



“I think the first thing that was really important was like remaining anonymous.”



Recommendations for SARTs



SARTs should be aware of all the different confidentiality dynamics on the team and what limits each discipline has. An important focus of the SART should be victim/survivor rights, including the right to confidentiality. MNCASA has a resource on confidentiality titled [What Can We Talk About](#).

Lastly, available & accessible resources were identified as a need by victim/survivors.

“In my area... the amount of resources available is not as vast as like say Minneapolis/St. Paul... I found... there is only a handful of resources, even throughout the state of Minnesota.”



“...What I needed when I first walked in that door at that rape crisis center was an advocate to sit and tell me, yeah, you know you walked in, and you’re what you’re feeling, what you’re sensing, what minimal knowledge you have about sexual assault is correct.”



“I didn’t know where to look...In the town I lived in there was nothing... Trying to find the support was really hard as I didn’t know who I could trust or where I should go.”



Recommendations for SARTs



SARTs should be aware of the communities they serve and the potential gaps in service, particularly in rural areas. It may be helpful to collaborate with neighboring communities who may have more resources to assist in filling any potential service gaps. SARTs can also complete a community resource mapping activity to identify and organize available resources for victims/survivors. MNCASA has a resource on [Community Resource Mapping for SARTs](#).

HOW DID YOU FEEL THE DIFFERENT PEOPLE YOU WORKED WITH TREATED YOU?

The biggest theme for this question was how poorly the victim/survivors were treated by law enforcement.

“Law enforcement, I feel like as soon as I am done with them, they all go into a backroom and mock me and make fun of me... What is your job if you’re not here to service us, help us, and protect us, and do things for us. What are you here for?”



“We all have our assailants...But to me it seems like the assailants are the police officers...and that is unacceptable.”



“Every other time I have been assaulted after that, I will not go to cops. As a victim/survivor there is this narrative you are supposed to report...I can’t in good faith recommend other victim/survivors necessarily report to law enforcement... I don’t necessarily want them to go through the hell that I have went through and I know that many, many victim/survivors have been through.”



“Even if I had to dial 911 right now, I don’t know if I could do it. If my kids were choking or drowning, I just don’t feel that support.”



Another theme was the positive experiences some of the victims/survivors experienced from responders.

“I do feel that the medical professionals all worked with me in a very trauma informed way, even at the hospital where I presented to for my SANE exam... I will say I felt seen, and I did feel respected and treated well.”



“I didn’t need someone to tell me what to do, but they {advocate} just kind of came along side. They didn’t push me, but they made me see what I already knew.”



“My therapist and my physician monitoring my mental health medications, they have been excellent at trying to work with me and figure things out.”



“My advocates... they have been a huge, huge part, to get me to where I am today. They have helped me so much. Helping me find different numbers, resources to call, also just support wise. Being there, being present, to listen to me talk, to listen to the stuff I am going through. I owe a lot to my advocates.”



Recommendations for SARTs



There is a lot of room for improvement in how law enforcement handles cases of sexual violence. There is a clear need for trauma-informed response training as well as improved communication practices. Law enforcement can examine their own culture in relation to sexual violence to identify if there is a need for increased training and education on the dynamics of sexual violence and the importance of trauma-informed approaches. Law enforcement can also recognize and address any bias or stereotypes that may impact their interactions with victim/survivors. This can ensure victims/survivors receive the support and resources they need to heal and recover. SARTs can also review their protocols to ensure there is explicit communication between the different disciplines and victim/survivors. It is crucial the SART then implements the protocol and reviews effectiveness regularly. SARTs can also complete a text analysis on their protocol to ensure it is person-centered and trauma-informed. A text analysis involves examining written language to identify patterns, themes, and/or insights. By examining the protocol, SARTs can identify problematic language or themes and most importantly, amend these to be trauma-informed. Another option is to complete a case file review to assess law enforcement response to sexual violence.

DID YOU FEEL LIKE THE RESPONDERS WERE COMMUNICATING WITH EACH OTHER?

Most victim/survivors did not feel there was effective communication between responders.

“I wish they {responders} would have talked to each other and communicated so that I didn’t need to reshare things that were hard to share the first time.”



“No, the only people that were willing to communicate were my therapist and my advocate.”



“I feel like there was a lot of communication, but the communication did not get communicated to me... nothing was relayed to me. I felt like I was in the dark on a lot of different things. It was really difficult when I already felt so alone, and kind of isolated from everything.”



“I didn’t feel like there was communication. I had to repeat, repeat, repeat, repeat.”



To ensure “...the advocate, if not the investigator themselves, is checking in weekly with the survivor/victim, along the way of that investigation.”



Recommendations for SARTs



To address the lack of connection between responders, SARTs can examine who may be absent from discussions. SARTs can also understand the roles of each responder as all members have a responsibility to keep the victim/survivor informed. In addition, SARTs can analyze their sexual assault protocols to ensure there is explicit communication between all members of a SART and the plan on how to follow-up with the victim/survivor regularly even if there are no specific updates. It is crucial the SART then implements the protocol and reviews effectiveness regularly.

WERE YOU GIVEN OPTIONS FOR CONNECTING WITH OTHER RESPONDERS OR CLARIFICATION ON WHAT OTHERS DO?

There were mixed answers from victim/survivors on this question.



Recommendations for SARTs ○ ○ ○

Members of the SART should be aware of the roles and responsibilities of the other members of the SART and provide this information to victim/survivors. It may be beneficial for a SART to have a document with all the services and resources available to the victim/survivor in that community. This document should be reviewed annually at a minimum to ensure all services and contacts are current. Also, it was made evident by victims/survivors how crucial advocates are to the response to sexual violence, particularly related to support, guidance, and having continuity with the victim/survivor.

DID YOU FEEL THE SERVICES YOU RECEIVED WERE CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE OR INCLUSIVE OF YOUR SPECIFIC NEEDS?

Most victim/survivors that identified as a member of a Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) community shared services were not culturally responsive and those that identified as White acknowledged their privilege.

“To have it simply dismissed, just because I don’t look like a typical...I don’t know if they wanted me to ride in on my buffalo with my mocs or what the deal was. I don’t know how to be more Native than I am. I was definitely disrespected.”



“They didn’t my violate culture, they just violated me as a human being. Just as a woman and human being and that’s all. Pretty sad that I just said, “that’s all” isn’t it?”



“I am privileged to be a young, white, attractive woman and still be treated like crap. I can’t imagine if I didn’t speak English as my first language or if I weren’t white how much worse that treatment would have been... I look at things at things in an intersectional perspective, I was already treated like crap I...I don’t know if I would necessarily have even had a report taken from me, or taken seriously for even a second even if I weren’t in the position that I am.”



“I was listed white, and I don’t identify that way... I was culturally shamed most definitely.”



Recommendations for SARTs



SARTs can start by acknowledging systemic oppression and then creating spaces and connections within the community where BIPOC individuals are seen and treated with person-centered care. Partnering and forming alliances with anti-violence and community programs can bolster service delivery and enhance cultural responsiveness on a SART. In addition, SARTs should apply a racial justice and anti-oppressive lens to all of their work and continuously center the needs and experiences of BIPOC victims/survivors. This is a chance to collaborate and identify gaps in services and irregularities in protocols. It is also critically important that SARTs strive for team membership that is demographically consistent with the makeup of the community being served. This will increase buy-in and engagement with all core disciplines, increase diversity of perspective and experience, and decrease the risk of important issues or gaps in service going unnoticed/unresolved. Lastly, SARTs should have resources on language access. Some options include funding to hire bilingual, deaf, or hard of hearing staff, certified interpreters, and translation of written materials into multiple languages etc. SARTs can research additional funding opportunities in their communities to assist with this process.

SUPPOSE YOU WERE IN CHARGE AND COULD CHANGE THE WAY THINGS CURRENTLY OPERATE, WHAT WOULD YOU CHANGE IN ORDER TO HAVE VICTIMS/SURVIVORS GET THEIR NEEDS MET?

Victims/survivors had many different ideas on how the response to sexual violence could improve in order to have their needs met. See some overall themes below:

FUNDING

“More victim funds. \$1,500 would have radically saved my life.”



“Culturally connected health fund.”



“More fundraising for SV organizations.”



Recommendations for SARTs



There is a very clear need for more crime victim services funding. It would be beneficial if each agency on the SART was transparent about who has funds and what the funds are allocated for. Additionally, discussions about where funding support is needed. SARTs need to broaden their scopes to see what other programs and services fill these needs in their communities and learn how victims/survivors can access these services. SARTs may also provide education about sexual violence to the community to further support increased funding. Lastly, SART members can support legislation to increase this funding at the next legislative session. Individual members should check with their agencies about this.

SYSTEMS CHANGE

“I couldn’t imagine survivors that are waiting eight months for their SANE exam kits to be tested and returned... just inappropriate. I waited two months for my SANE exam and one of the major things of how that effected my case was that my investigator was not going to call my rapist and begin trying to talk to him until those same results were returned. So those two months that it took the BCA to test my kit and get the results to PD. Those two months of just me navigating trauma and trying to get my own therapist and my own doctors, and such set-in place to get myself by. Because, yeah, I just, I do believe that 90 days is much needed.”



“I think that it is important to note that if you experience sexual violence once you will ultimately experience it again. There is this when will this stop? Will this stop? Why isn’t there more protection out there? It’s hard not to feel broken, or somehow, I am responsible for this even though logically that I am not... People will tell me that I am so strong I am so brave...I don’t want to be this strong. I don’t want to be this resilient.”



The civil/legal system is a huge gap and figuring out how to remedy this. We have not, especially in the State of Minnesota, figured out how to serve victim/survivors of sexual assault.”



Recommendations for SARTs



It may be beneficial for SARTs to include civil attorneys on their teams. This could be another avenue for victim/survivor justice and to expand services in the community. SARTs can also do outreach and host educational trainings for their communities on topics of sexual violence.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

“I want someone to give a shit. Because I wish someone would have said that when my stuff happened instead of you don’t count. I think my situation would have went a lot different. If they {victim/survivor} sees someone as their equal, they are more open to communication and looking for more resources. They are not scared off.”



“Start from scratch with law enforcement and give them all new training. Rebuild and reform. That would be my wish.”



“I come at it from the perspective of a someone who does not believe the police system can be fixed and needs to be abolished at a bare minimum. And then some sort of public safety infrastructure needs to be built after that. I do not think you can fix police officers when their institution is meant to harm people of color, harm women, and harm queer people. I don’t foresee that ever getting better.”



“More training with law enforcement and how they respond to a situation.”



Recommendations for SARTs



As mentioned in the previous section, there is a lot of room for improvement in how law enforcement handles cases of sexual violence. There is a clear need for trauma-informed response training as well as improved communication practices. SARTs can review their protocols to ensure there is explicit communication between the different disciplines and victims/survivors. It is also crucial the SART then implements the protocol and reviews effectiveness regularly. SARTs can also complete a text analysis on their protocol to ensure it is person-centered and trauma informed. Lastly, SARTs can complete a case file review to analyze the law enforcement response.

MEDICAL

“Changing the way we talk about rape kits. We talk about them like they are the most horrible but that’s what made me not get one. Just the way people talk about it being so bad... “you get violated again.” Maybe that is the truth but if we reframe it...it would encourage a lot more people to get one... It could be a really positive thing.”



“There needs to be more funding for sexual assault nurses. There should be one at least in every county in Minnesota and I would argue that there should be more than one. That burden should not be placed on such a small group of people.”



Recommendations for SARTs



Every SART should have a medical representative on their team, ideally a sexual assault nurse examiner (SANE). If there is no SANE nurse in your community, approach the Emergency Department manager at your local hospital to inquire about capacity to participate. If that is also not an option, inquire with the hospital CEO/COO to invite them to select an appropriate staff member to represent the facility and medical perspective on the SART. If none of the above options result in a medical representative, it is encouraged to look at neighboring communities

to assist in filling in service gaps. All members of the SART should participate in training to accurately describe a SANE examination to victims/survivors in a trauma-informed approach.

HOUSING

“If you don’t feel safe, you can’t really move on from that until you feel safe, it’s a fundamental need.”



“If there is some way streamline housing. Housing is a big thing. No matter what area someone is coming from.”



“We need so much housing... very specific to the needs of the individuals that have gone through this trauma.”



Recommendations for SARTs



Accessible housing is critical for victims/survivors of sexual violence to ensure safety and healing. SARTs should be aware of the housing options for victims/survivors in their community and should have a representative from that organization (if applicable) on the team to ensure continuity in services.

RESOURCES

“I had no idea that so many departments existed. They should be more known and attainable.”



“One place where resources, links are kept current...an area where someone can get a set of resources.”



“Make resources more accessible. You get all this information and you just kind of look at it, as you don’t know where to start...let’s do this together. It can be overwhelming and kind of a lot to just process. It is comforting to have someone there to do it with you.”



Recommendations for SARTs



As mentioned before, it may be beneficial for a SART to have a document with all the services & resources available to the victim/survivor in that community and having documented protocol to ensure victims/survivors are receiving this document. SARTs can complete a community resource mapping activity to identify and organize available resources for victims/survivors. This document should be reviewed annually at a minimum to ensure all services and contacts are current. MNCASA has a resource on [Community Resource Mapping for SARTs](#).

Conclusion



The insights gathered from these roundtables are just beginning to understand victims/survivors needs and how agencies can increase coordination and have appropriate, accessible resources. This report illustrates that SARTs need to increase communication between responders and cultural responsiveness, ensure trauma informed, survivor-centered approaches, and walk with victims/survivors. We still have a significant amount of work ahead of us to ensure greater support for victims/survivors in our communities. SVJI staff are excited to continue these conversations and collaborate with victim/survivors in Minnesota.



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