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## Impact of Victim Advocacy Integration on Cold Case Investigations: Lessons Learned from the Cuyahoga County Sexual Assault Kit Task Force

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# Impact of Victim Advocacy Integration on Cold Case Investigations: Lessons Learned from the Cuyahoga County Sexual Assault Kit Task Force

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\*This author did not review the final version of this report.

## **Introduction**

### **Background**

The Cuyahoga County Sexual Assault Kit Task Force (Task Force) was started in 2013 to address the investigative and prosecutorial workload resulting from the DNA testing of nearly 7,000 untested sexual assault kits (SAKs) from 1993-2011 in the county. The Task Force is comprised of five collaborating organizations—Cuyahoga County Prosecutor’s Office (CCPO), which serves as the lead agency, Cleveland Police Department (CPD), Cleveland Rape Crisis Center (CRCC), Cuyahoga County Sheriff’s Office (CCSO), and Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BCI). Since early 2015, the Begun Center for Violence Prevention Research and Education (Begun Center) at Case Western Reserve University’s Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences has been the Task Force’s research partner.

From its inception, the Task Force has integrated victim advocacy into its processes via the hiring of justice-based victim advocates who were employed by the Cuyahoga County Prosecutor’s Office. Each tested SAK (~7,000) is investigated (not just those that returned a DNA hit). Each case is assigned an investigator, a prosecutor, and a victim advocate. At the beginning of the initiative, the team had only one victim advocate, but staffing and resources increased over time. At the time this research was conducted, there was a victim advocate supervisor and four full-time victim advocates on the Task Force.

This Task Force is unique in its inclusion of victim advocates on a multidisciplinary team (MDT) focused solely on cold cases. Cold cases can be difficult because of the passage of time. Evidence gets lost or is difficult to locate. Victims move on with their life. Witnesses do not remember all the details. The Task Force leadership held that by increasing the amount of victim advocacy on the team (especially in with cold cases), victims would be better supported, resulting in more successful investigative and prosecutorial outcomes.

The Task Force recognized the need to critically monitor and evaluate its own victim advocacy processes and protocols. It was also well-positioned to disseminate the findings from the evaluation to other jurisdictions grappling with these issues, due in large part to its tenure and collaboration with the Begun Center, who were already knowledgeable about and embedded in this process.

Due to their mission to provide services to best support victims’ needs, victim advocates play a unique role in the untested SAK Initiative. Research shows that

victim involvement can make or break a case (Morabito et al., 2019; Spohn & Tellis, 2014; Spohn et al., 2014); therefore, effective victim advocacy and a victim-centered team not only supports the victim but have been found to positively influence court outcomes (Patterson & Tringali, 2015). Programs, such as the Sexual Assault Kit Initiative (Henninger et al., 2019) and community groups such as Joyful Heart Foundation, have encouraged the inclusion of victim advocates in their processes as more jurisdictions address their SAK backlog (Joyful Heart Foundation, 2016). However, best practices are still being established in this cutting-edge practice. Victim advocates, being the newest recognized stakeholders, are the most likely to be the champions of systematic change.

*The purpose of the research detailed here was to assess the integration of victim advocacy on the Task Force.* More specifically, we focused on assessing: (a) the integration of the victim advocates into a Task Force, (b) how well victim-centered behaviors and attitudes were exhibited by all members of the Task Force, and (c) whether people believed the integration of advocates or victim-centeredness impacted the Task Force outcomes. This paper contains four Sections—each Section corresponding to a different aspect of integration, including:

1. Assessing the Impact of Victim Advocates on the Sexual Assault Kit Task Force
2. Research Strategy to Integrate Victim Advocates into a Multidisciplinary Team
3. How Long-Term Involvement of Victim Advocates Influence Multidisciplinary Task Force Culture
4. Recommendations for Integrating Victim Advocates into a Multidisciplinary Team

The successes detailed here provide guidance for other jurisdictions that are considering addressing cold case or current sexual assault investigations and prosecutions (or other types of interpersonal violent crime). The Task Force continues to be successful at prosecuting cases, in some cases decades old, never-tested SAKs. As we detail in this report, part of the success of this Task Force can be traced to the victim-centered approach members have structured into the process and protocols, which is championed by the victim advocates and consistently reinforced by leadership. Our research highlights the utility of including victim advocates as full team members and the ways in which their participation affects investigations and prosecutions.

## Methods

This study began in 2017—four years into what will likely be approximately a 10-year initiative. Over the course of 11 months between April 2017 and February 2018, the Begun Center research team conducted a qualitative research project that included different types of interviews, participant observation, and archival research (for further explanation of our methodology, please refer to Appendix A for a full list of exercises and questions).

### The Interviews

We conducted more than 50 hours' worth of interviews with victim advocates, investigators, prosecutors, and supervisors (a total of 29 unique individuals; some people were interviewed more than once). Only victim advocates and investigators were eligible for the third set of encounters. (See Appendix A for a breakdown of how many participants remained constant throughout their eligible waves and how many cases were unique individuals).

In this paper, we focused on assessing changes in behavior and attitudes of prosecutors and investigators *as a class* rather than any one person's change over time. In addition to conducting these interviews, we used participant observation by attending meetings, trainings, and informal gatherings. This helped us contextualize what we were learning in these interviews.

Because almost a full year elapsed between the first interviews and the last, we are able to assess the extent to which working beside victim advocates for long periods of time resulted in significant changes in both behavior and attitude (average time lapse between first and second interview: almost seven months). We used our observations (in the form of participant observation) of interactions to test the validity of these hypotheses and found they seemed sound.

This qualitative research involved three “encounters” discussed in detail below.

### First Encounter

The first set of interviews was based on a set of exercises involving free-lists and flashcards with the names of every member of the Task Force. Participants were first asked to list all victim-centered behaviors they could think of, and then they were asked to list barriers faced by the victim in pursuing a cold case. Then, participants were asked to sort team members into piles via flashcards in any way that made sense to them. This tested the overall conceptualization of how

the organization was structured. The second task involved ranking individuals based upon their perceived victim-centeredness. Lastly, we asked participants to create a hierarchy of who on the Task Force had the most say over whether or not a case moved forward. Twenty-one of these interviews were conducted between April and July 2017. These results are discussed in detail in Section 2 regarding the integration of advocates in the Task Force.

## **Second Encounter**

The second encounter of interviews relied more on traditional interviewing techniques. One or two researchers on the team conducted one-on-one interviews based on an interview schedule with room to expand on answers. These interviews covered victim-centeredness, the role of victim advocates on the Task Force, the overall goals of the Task Force, and processes that involve victims. We conducted seventeen of these interviews between November 2017 and January 2018.

## **Third Encounter**

The third encounter of interviews relied on triangulation to understand the process of victim notification. We felt it would be unethical for us to observe victim notifications, as this time is usually tense and can be triggering for the victim. Instead, we interviewed investigator-victim advocate pairs within 48 hours of notification. Investigators and advocates were interviewed separately, and then their accounts of the encounter compared for similarities and differences. We conducted interviews for six encounters for a total of 12 interviews for this portion of the research. All of these interviews were conducted in February 2018.

## **Analysis**

All interviews were transcribed and coded using an iterative coding process. Free lists and pile sorts (the types of exercises used in the first encounters) were further analyzed using FLAME (Free-List Analysis under Microsoft Excel, an open-source add-in that is used in cultural domain analysis). Traditional interviews were coded using grounded theory analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1997) that informed the triangulation interview coding. Triangulation interviews were coded using the constant comparison method. Changes between Encounter 1 to Encounter 2 for prosecutors and supervisors and changes between Encounter 1 to Encounter 3 for victim advocates and investigators in terms of specific



attitudes and behaviors were also measured. The findings detailed in the following Sections (1 through 4 are based on data from all three encounters.

# 1. Assessing the Impact of Victim Advocates on the Sexual Assault Kit Task Force

## Introduction

Research on how the presence of victim advocates impacts the overall functioning of the Task Force is important because the successful incorporation of victim advocates into MDTs can have a strong, positive influence on victim involvement and judicial outcomes. These findings improve our understanding of the unique ways that victim advocates can influence MDTs in not just team dynamics and victim-centeredness, but also in their approach to investigation and prosecution of cold cases of sexual assault. Because no two jurisdictions are the same, the following key findings intentionally focus on that which is most relevant for other jurisdictions to incorporate victim advocacy on multidisciplinary teams in a variety of settings successfully.

## Key Findings

Using iterative coding of the three encounters, we found three key three ways that the presence of victim advocates influenced the overall functioning of the Task Force and furthered the mission of the Task Force.

- **Shifts in Attitudes and Behaviors**  
Victim advocates' inclusion on the Task Force resulted in measurable shifts in behaviors and attitudes towards victim-centeredness in all roles. The shifts in attitudes and behaviors among team members showed an orientation towards victim-centeredness that can be traced in large part to the formal and informal training victim advocates provided.
- **Impacts on Investigations**  
Victim advocates also impacted investigations by performing the work necessary to keep victims engaged in the process. Victim advocates generally had a positive impact on investigations by maintaining close contact with the victim, thereby ensuring engagement, and freeing up investigators' time.

- **Impact on Prosecutions**

Victim advocates played an important role in prosecution, particularly in cases that went to trial. Because this can be the most stressful time for victims, it is not uncommon for victims to disengage at this point in the process. Therefore, the victim advocates' support of victims made it easier for the victim to participate in prosecutions.

## Shifts in Attitudes and Behaviors

**Defining justice.** In an MDT, often there are competing missions among the disciplines. However, we found that the members of the Task Force were invested in the idea of “getting justice,” although the disciplines defined that goal differently. For victim advocates, “getting justice” involved the victim being able to move on with their life. For prosecutors, “getting justice” meant protecting the community by removing offenders from the public. For investigators, “getting justice” involved getting the “bad guy.” Through dialogue and working together closely, each group was able to see how all three goals could be seen as “getting justice.” Importantly, this shift led to the team members being able to see “getting justice” from each other’s perspective and not just their own.

On the Task Force, there was almost unwavering support for the idea that a sexual assault was never the fault of the victim. Even in cases where people expressed doubt about the merits of the case, Task Force members practiced expressing to victims that the sexual assault was not their fault. This demonstrated that a unified front could have a positive impact, even if there had not been similar shifts in attitudes.

**Perception of victim advocacy role.** Although victim advocates were valued as individuals and their contributions were acknowledged, they could often be seen as “guides for the victim” and ancillary to the Task Force itself. Victim advocates have specialized training and a particular skill set but were not often seen as the “professional” peers of others on the Task Force, likely because the skill set, and perspective was so different from that of the other disciplines on the team (law enforcement, prosecution). The phrase “*stay in your lane*” was often used to critique victim advocates who some investigators thought were overreaching. On the other hand, the idea of staying in your lane was also often used by supervisors to reduce tension between the different disciplines and was not solely focused on victim advocates, but rather was meant to encourage everyone to value everyone else’s contribution.

It is important to note that the victim advocates on the Task Force were justice-based, rather than community-based, meaning that they are employed by the criminal justice system. For example, community-based advocates might recommend a victim not to testify if they felt testifying would be too damaging for the victim, while justice-based advocates might focus on the strength the victim's testimony provides to the case. Therefore, community-based advocates may share some of the same goals as their justice-based counterparts, including bringing the perpetrator to justice, but their role in meeting those perspectives might and do vary. In summary, it is important to understand the differences between community and justice-based advocates because it may influence the way the Task Force members perceive their actions and motivations.

**Supervisors and hiring process.** The victim advocacy team, particularly the supervisors, worked to overcome prejudice towards advocacy as a whole on the Task Force. They were credited with succeeding in shifting the overall attitudes of members towards cooperating with victim advocates and being open to acting more victim-centered. One of the best examples of the attitude shift was when supervisors (Task Force supervisors and the Victim Advocate supervisor) began incorporating questions about victim-centeredness and prior work with victim advocates into the hiring process for new prosecutors and investigators.

Furthermore, Task Force leadership demonstrated their support for victim advocacy by allocating resources so that victim advocates had reasonable workloads, which allowed them to provide more support to the victims, such as being present at the time of notification and during trial preparation. These services can considerably improve a victim's ability to remain engaged in the process, and with this increased attention from victim advocates, there is also increased potential to positively impact investigations and prosecutions. *These behaviors by supervisors/leadership are the embodiment of the shift in behavior and attitude towards victim-centeredness of the Task Force, and a demonstration of the ability of supervisors to have a more systemic influence on an MDT.*

## **Impacts on Investigations**

Overall, investigators showed the most variation in how they perceived victim advocates. Investigators were also the largest and most heterogeneous group, being drawn primarily from several law enforcement organizations and having the widest range of previous experience with victim advocacy. Many investigators expressed surprise at how willing victims were to cooperate when they had the

help of a victim advocate. Most appreciated the work performed by the victim advocates (“handing tissues and giving hugs”).

**Adopting victim-centered behaviors.** Investigators also showed the biggest shift in their *behaviors* towards victims (in contrast to shifts in attitudes). A few investigators expressed doubts about the veracity of victims’ stories but reiterated that they tried to use victim-centered behaviors. A specific example of this shift was how investigators changed their interviewing techniques with victims. Many of them said their only prior experience was with interviewing suspects, and they appreciated learning how to interview traumatized victims. These skills were also learned and/or reinforced in the several trainings the Task Force provided for their staff. These trainings included trainings from the Sexual Assault Kit Initiative training and technical assistance provider and from Task Force victim advocates.

In these cases, specific language was helpful for investigators, particularly as they started developing their own victim-centered approach. For example, investigators would say such things as “I can never understand what happened to you,” “I am sorry for the delay,” or “I’m sorry that happened to you.” Furthermore, investigators were quick to adopt other behaviors, such as changing the tone of voice they used with victims or softening their body language.

**Real-time feedback.** The integration of victim advocates on the Task Force was particularly effective in achieving these behavior changes. Victim advocates were present at most notifications and initial interviews, and therefore, could give real-time feedback to the investigators they worked with and model victim-centered behaviors. *One informal mechanism for this was the “after-interview” car ride as the team returned to the office.* This acted as a natural debriefing period, and the setting encouraged investigators and advocates to discuss the interview that just occurred. Advocates often made it a point to praise investigators for positive behaviors and suggest alternatives for phrases or actions that might seem less-than-victim-centered.

**Change over time.** Some investigators were honest about the fact that they doubted the efficacy of victim advocates at the beginning of the project but, over time, could see how much easier it was to work with victims with an advocate at their side. Most investigators who had been on the Task Force for any length of time showed that changing behaviors could lead to changed attitudes. One investigator stated, “Being victim-centered means, at least to me, that we be

empathetic and respectful and patient, and allow the survivor and/or victim to maintain their dignity throughout this process.”

## Impact on Prosecutions

**Advocates as allies.** Among prosecutors, the most obvious shift occurred in attitudes towards victim advocates. Although a couple had previous experience working with victim advocates prior to working on the Task Force, some prosecutors felt victim advocates could potentially derail court proceedings. At the time of the research, all prosecutors expressed seeing victim advocates as allies. Prosecutors noted that victim advocates did particularly well with maintaining contact with victims during trial preparation and supporting victims’ emotional needs. Many felt that this support increased the likelihood of victims agreeing to testify in the first place and actually showing up for trial.

**Victim participation.** Supervisors expressed particular interest in making sure victims did not back out on the day of trial due to anxiety and/or trauma. This could cause the case to be closed with prejudice, meaning that it would be impossible to prosecute the offender for this offense again. It is worth noting, however, that no prosecutor had had that experience. In one case, early in the existence of the Task Force, a judge issued a continuance in a case when a victim did not show up. The victim decided not to go to court due to a sick child and no one to care for the child. When the prosecutor of this case explained this experience to us, they used it as an example of how victim advocates can support victims by meeting needs prosecutors may not otherwise know about.

**Caseload support.** Many prosecutors expressed that they felt more capable of managing more cases when they were not solely responsible for maintaining contact with the victims and keeping them apprised of where their cases were in the process. Because of the way the court system works, trial dates would be set and postponed, sometimes multiple times. Working with an advocate allowed prosecutors to keep victims engaged while focusing on the technical aspects of the case.

## Conclusion

Overall changes observed on the Task Force after the inclusion of the victim advocates included: shifts in attitudes and behaviors, impact on investigations, and impact on prosecutions. In all roles, measurable shifts were seen towards victim-centered behaviors and attitudes. This work is important because victim

advocates are being asked to shift from outsider/grassroots positions into positions that are incorporated within the larger criminal justice system. In addition to the influence of the formal and informal training victim advocates provided, victim advocates also impact investigations by keeping victims engaged in the process and freeing up investigators' time. Finally, victim advocates especially benefited cases that sought to go to trial by supporting the victim through the process.

For any successful integrations, it is important that all members recognize the professional capabilities of advocates as peers with their own subject matter expertise. This new approach to cold cases (including victim advocates), repairs some of the damage done, whether inadvertently or due to lack of resources or for some other reason, by the police when they shelved these SAKs without testing them. Their integration into an MDT relies on leadership, allowing victim advocates the opportunity to be leaders within the group. Integration is necessary for victim centeredness to remain grounded across groups. When seeking system change, in this case, shifting investigations and prosecutions to be more inclusive of the victim and their wishes, it is important to reinforce, in large and small ways, how advocates add value and share the same mission as the larger Task Force.

As Section 2 will demonstrate, integrating victim advocates into a multidisciplinary task force is not an easy or quick task. It requires a deeper understanding of the perspectives held by each member of the Task Force on both their roles and how their roles relate to one another.

## 2. Integration of Victim Advocates into a Multidisciplinary Team

### Introduction

In this Section, we present our findings on how and to what extent the victim advocates were integrated into the Task Force. The strengths and challenges of multidisciplinary teams (MDTs) stem from the fact that they are, at their core, multidisciplinary. Inherent differences and professional belief systems can influence behavior and even be a source of conflict.

In order to understand the full impact of victim advocates on the team as a whole, we first had to understand the holistic functions of the entire Task Force. We also explicitly asked people how they felt about victim advocates being part of the team and observed how people behaved in meetings, trainings, and social settings. We also took note of ways that other team members resisted integration, resulting in tension. Exercises were used to delve deeper into perspective, belief systems, and unchangeable differences. By asking the participants to reproduce relationships in physical space, we could begin to explore people's various understandings of how the multidisciplinary team was structured, how it worked together, what was shared and what varied between people in the same and different roles.

Other jurisdictions stand to learn from the Task Force's experiences about how victim advocates can add to their success and how to handle expected tensions. Successful integration requires a full understanding of the "lanes" of each profession, and how they can influence perception and behavior on the team. By deeply exploring and acknowledging beliefs about professionalism and the criminal justice process, MDTs can improve team cohesion and act to fully integrate and benefit from victim advocate inclusion on cold case investigations.

**Pile-sort exercises.** One of the most revealing methods we used to answer our research questions involved having participants layout notecards on which were written the names of all members of the Task Force. *This exercise helps reveal tacit (unspoken) beliefs about who has the power or how a process flows.* This technique is referred to as creating a "mental model," which the research team used to derive the unique professional perspectives on Task Force from each



participant. (For a visualization of one of the anonymized results of this exercise, see Appendix B). The participants were instructed to lay out the cards three times, each arranged with the following directive:

1. In any order
2. By who on the team displayed the most victim-centered behaviors
3. By who has power in deciding how far a case goes

As people living in the United States who read English, we tend to place more valuable or more significant objects or concepts towards the top of the space in exercises like this. We also tend to prioritize objects or concepts going from left to right, usually with ourselves on the left, if we are included in the sort. For relationships, we tend to group people together whom we perceive as closer to one another, though role affiliation may override that tendency. After arranging, the researchers talked with participants about why they arranged their groups the way they did.

## **Key Findings**

The series of exercises revealed the following themes about victim advocacy on the Task Force:

- **Unique professional perspectives on the Task Force**  
Pile-sort exercises revealed differences in perception of process and proximity between advocates, investigators, and prosecutors.
- **Observable integration**  
Outside of the pile-sort exercises, we witnessed other signs of integration into the overall Task Force. This was observed as changes in informal protocol, victim advocate-led trainings, informal conversations, and support from leadership.
- **Challenges to integration**  
While victim advocates integrated successfully overall, some resistance remained. Challenges stemmed from differences in discipline, resistance to advocate presence, and misunderstandings regarding community-based victim advocates vs. justice-based victim advocates.

## **Unique Professional Perspectives on Organization**

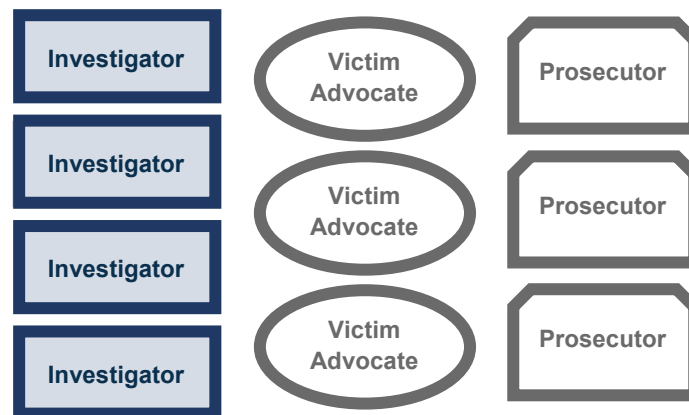
The people who were interviewed were in their workspace and knew about the research we were conducting. Therefore, in the encounter where participants

were asked to free-sort notecards with all team members' names, it was unsurprising that most people immediately grouped their coworkers by role rather than by other types of relationships.

**Role relationships.** Most participants organized their coworkers according to their role (discipline). Even when given little or no instruction, there was variation in the relationship of those roles to one another.

As shown in the example in Figure 1, investigators typically placed the victim advocates, collectively, between their own group and the prosecutors. This demonstrates how investigators may perceive their professional proximity to advocates vs. prosecutors or how they perceive the process of each case from their standpoint.

**Figure 1. “Modal” responses to pile-sort exercise for investigators**



However, advocates were most likely to place the investigators between themselves and the prosecutors, as shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 2. “Modal” responses to pile-sort exercise from advocates**

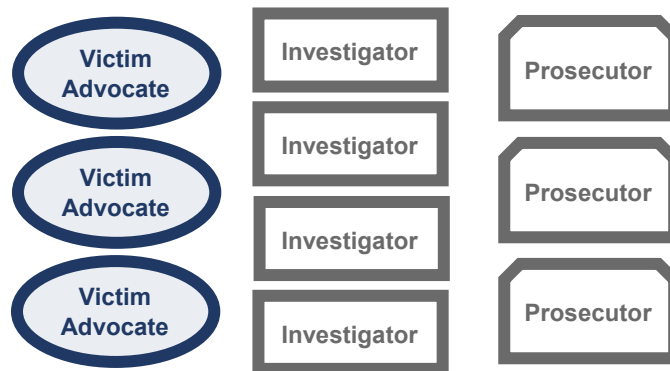
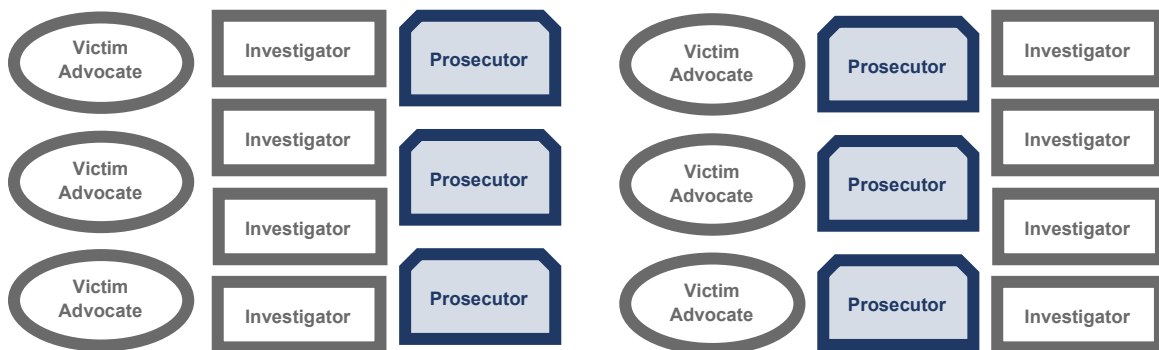


Figure 3 shows two examples of responses from prosecutors. About half of the prosecutors put themselves between advocates and investigators, and about half put investigators between themselves and advocates, indicating different perspectives on who serves as mediators in a situation. It also reveals conflicting beliefs about which groups are more professionally similar or close (as reflected in the physical proximity of the cards).

**Figure 3. Two “modal” responses to pile-sort exercise from prosecutors**



The fact that each group tended to orient prosecutors on the far right speaks to a couple of possibilities:

- **Perception of process.** The prosecutors are located at the end of the “process” of a case progression in the criminal justice system and are the final decision-makers.
- **Proximity.** Neither the victim advocates nor the investigators placed the prosecutors in the middle between the groups. This indicates both groups saw their own group as being unmediated in their relationship to prosecutors. This may imply everyone felt equally separate from the prosecutors.

It is also worth noting that only one of the supervisors had an entirely different configuration in the free sort exercise. This person sorted according to who had been on the Task Force the longest to who was the easiest to work with.

**Contribution to case progression.** The professional perspectives shifted when participants were asked, “Who has the most say in whether or not a case goes forward?” Often, Task Force participants only included supervisors and the city prosecutor as groups of people with the power to move the case. When another group was mentioned, it was the county prosecutors. Individuals in all roles excluded victim advocates as decision-makers on whether or not a case would move forward. Each class of individual responses had one or two exceptions in which victim advocates were included, although generally at the bottom or to the far right of the page. This shows that while they exercised different perceptions of organization and proximity, everyone was very clear about who made final decisions concerning cases.

When considering victim-choice and how the perception of decision-making power influences what roles are valued on a team, this difference is important to note for the successful integration of victim advocates onto a cold case MDT. In the interviews, many participants shared that their conception of victim-centeredness and respecting a victim’s wishes is often based on whether a victim has a say in their case going forward. Many respondents stated that the victim’s wishes should be respected, and victim advocates were often seen as representing the victim’s desires. Moreover, while many team members said that victims and victim advocates influence whether or not a case goes to trial, and when asked to visualize who has the power in the decision-making process, victim advocates are often excluded. However, it should be noted that in the criminal justice system, cases are investigated and prosecuted on behalf of the

state, not the victim. So, while victim wishes should ideally be considered, they are not the determining factor in whether a case proceeds or fails to proceed in the criminal justice process.

This is important for MDTs addressing cold cases because these investigations are often closed due to a lack of victim participation. However, when a victim advocate is embedded in a team like the Task Force, victims are offered more support and therefore continue to stay involved. Although a victim advocate's role is not in investigative or prosecutorial decisions, victim advocacy plays a significant and unique role in the criminal justice system and to Task Forces such as this. Understanding how different roles perceive each other's contributions can improve their ability to work together.

### Observable Integration

**Formal protocol.** Outside of the pile-sort exercises, we observed other signs of integration of victim advocates into the overall Task Force. Formal protocols required investigators to take a victim advocate with them for victim notifications and interviews. However, having established protocols increased Task Force members' accountability towards including victim advocates from the beginning of the investigation, and at the time of victim notification. This has shown to become a promising standard of practice for improved interactions with victims.

**Victim advocate-led trainings.** Other formal avenues of integration included offering the entire Task Force trainings led by members of the victim advocate group and including advocate notes on the shared electronic records of each case. Victim advocates, as a class, are the relative newcomers to these types of MDTs and have the greatest potential to seek systematic change. *When they led trainings, Task Force members recognized them as peers with their own subject matter expertise.* Victim advocates were also able to tailor trainings in real-time to respond to the unique circumstances being faced by a cold case Task Force in Cleveland at this historical moment. Since the victim advocates were part of the team, they also put updates in the Prosecutor's Office case management system. Including victim advocates' notes in the case management system allowed other members of the Task Force to see the type of work advocates were performing and information about the victim's engagement with the process.

**Informal conversation.** Outside of the formal realm, there were many indications of how victim advocates were integrated into the Task Force. For many members of the Task Force, approaching sexual assault cases from a

victim-centered perspective was a new way of thinking and advocates modeled what that looked like in real-time, during interviews, on follow-up calls, and generally in the shared space.

As discussed in Section 1, simply sharing space in a multidisciplinary team creates opportunities for natural alliances that transcend discipline boundaries (for further discussion, see Luminais, Lovell, and Flannery, 2017).

One informal space for this modeling that we identified was the car ride back from a victim notification or interview. There is no formal mandatory debriefing period, but this would occur organically when victim advocates and investigators shared a vehicle before and after a remote interview with the victim. In this low-stakes setting, investigators seemed more open to suggestions from victim advocates and, in fact, would often ask directly how they had done in regards to being victim-centered. Interviews that were conducted at the office did not have the benefit of this debrief period, and advocates felt less satisfied with those interviews.

**Influence of leadership.** Through interviews and participant observation, we found that when the leadership verbally reiterated the importance of including victim advocates, investigators tended to more closely adhere to protocol and include the advocates. As the Task Force took on new leadership and the supervisors balanced the shifting requirements of investigations, prosecutions, media coverage, grant reporting demands, and personnel changes, victim-centeredness and the role of victim advocates were given more or less prominence in meetings and trainings.

## Challenges to Integration

Overall, we find that victim advocates have been successfully integrated into the Task Force. However, there remained some resistance to their presence or resistance to what they represented, particularly for investigators. These tensions likely stem from differences in the disciplines.

**Differences in discipline.** A few investigators were resistant to the ideas of bringing victim advocates with them when trying to track down a victim for notification or interviews and consistently failed to do so. Investigators voiced concerns about the safety of bringing advocates in the field with them, when investigators were not able to ensure their safety, especially in certain neighborhoods. Advocates voiced frustrations because many of them came from social service backgrounds where they had served those same neighborhoods

without any kind of police protection. Investigators, particularly those who were retired and/or veteran police officers, felt responsible for the safety of the advocates, who they saw as civilians. Victim advocates acknowledged the sincere feeling, but some questioned whether certain investigators were using this as an excuse to avoid bringing advocates with them.

Other reasons for not following the notification protocol that required victim advocates to be present included not having enough cars available, victim advocates not being available due to court, or that the investigator was going to be out all day long. Again, some of these posed practical barriers to adherence to protocol but, at times, were perceived as excuses for not following protocol.

**Resistance to advocate presence.** Investigators also at times protested the victim advocate's presence while still technically following protocol by turning on their voice recorders before a victim answered the door. Because advocates are not allowed to speak on the recording (so as to avoid being included as part of the discovery process and/or being called to testify by the defense), this prevented them from introducing themselves or otherwise interacting with the victim until after the initial interview ended, even though they were physically present. There was nothing in the protocol about when recording should start or how to introduce the victim advocate, so investigators felt they were not violating the letter of the protocol, even if those actions violated the spirit of the protocol. When supervisors were made aware of these behaviors, they reminded investigators that they were supposed to be following protocol and the importance of including the victim advocate.

**Community-based versus justice-based advocacy.** As stated in Section 1, differences in the roles of community-based advocates and justice-based may influence the Task Force members' perception of their actions and motivations. Part of this resistance on the part of investigators can be traced back to prior experiences with or opinions formed about community-based victim advocates. Traditionally, the relationship between community-based advocates and law enforcement has been contentious. Some investigators carry those attitudes with them and do not understand the important differences between justice-based and community-based advocates. Justice-based advocates (like those on the Task Force) have, ideally, the same mission as the larger team. However, they are not confidential resources for the victim in the same way as community-based advocates are.

While Task Force advocates are there to support the victim, the ultimate goal is to get as close to a conviction as possible. If the victim absolutely cannot stand

the idea of testifying, the advocate, investigator, and prosecutor will work diligently to try to get a plea without the victim's participation. This is in contrast with community-based advocacy, which generally supports a victim's right not to participate in the process at all. The experience of the Task Force shows that when victims feel supported from the beginning, they are more likely to stay engaged, which ultimately makes a conviction more likely.

**Speaking up in Task Force meetings.** Lastly, victim advocates mentioned that they often did not often speak up in meetings that included the entire Task Force. Some victim advocates said they remained silent for fear of having their concerns dismissed. Some felt that when they did speak up, they were talked over, or their question would be tabled for discussion later. Advocates reported working around this by funneling their concerns to their supervisor and asking her to speak on their behalf. As a result, the Task Force changed how they conducted their meetings. They only had full Task Force meetings once a month and a "victim advocate" meeting once a month (meetings with only victim advocates and leadership).

## Conclusion

The research findings presented here highlight the need for technical and practical guidance on how to put the guiding principles into practice. Simply inserting another jurisdiction's victim advocacy approach will likely be unsuccessful, as there is no one-size-fits-all approach to victim advocacy. Barriers and strengths need to be identified and described, along with recommended workarounds for barriers. For example, if victim advocates are employed Task Force members, possible strengths include frequent communication, access, and increased transfer of disciplinary knowledge. Possible barriers could be decreased likelihood of bottom-up communication on behalf of the victim, and a possible workaround could be frequent meetings between the victim advocate supervisor and Task Force leadership to discuss concerns regarding victim participation in prosecution.

These strategies for integration speak to how to best balance the sometimes convergent, sometimes divergent, discipline-specific missions and cultures of doing what is best for the victim and the community in this complex environment. However, as presented in Section 3, some aspects of this integration revealed themselves only through examination change over time. In Section 4, we provide actionable recommendations based on these findings from our research to



provide guidance to cold case MDTs that could be transferrable across jurisdictions.

## **3. How Long-Term Involvement of Victim Advocates Influence Multidisciplinary Task Force Culture**

### **Introduction**

Little research has been done to understand how training on victim-centeredness impacts law enforcement over time. Lonsway, Welch, and Fitzgerald (2001) note that simulations are more effective than lecturing, but even simulations given over a brief period only result in behavioral changes, not cognitive changes. Furthermore, the authors note that there is a large amount of knowledge loss over time, particularly for classroom-only training. Beyond the work Lonsway et al. (ibid.) have done, there is little scholarly research on the effectiveness of training law enforcement.

Some organizations, such as End Violence Against Women International (End Violence Against Women International (EVAWI), offer evidence-based training modules on investigating intimate partner sexual assault (End Violence Against Women International, 2012) or the different roles victim advocates can play (EVAWI), 2017). The National Victim Assistance Standard Consortium (2011) also offers a curriculum aimed at victim assistance programs in providers that do not directly address law enforcement that might be useful, and the Office of Victims of Crime offers online training (2019). These sources do not describe whether they have been evaluated for efficacy, so this work contributes to the literature by presenting current practice along with an evaluation of how it works in the real world.

### **Key Findings**

Our key findings reiterate that attitudinal or cultural change is difficult to achieve. However, given a long(er)-time frame, when working closely with and being trained by victim advocates in a shared space, we found that even investigators who initially seemed disinterested in the concept of victim-centeredness began not only acting in victim-centered ways but also espousing beliefs of how victim-centeredness can aid in investigations and prosecutions. Integration into an MDT can be a remedy for knowledge loss or lack of attitudinal changes created by short-term training.

In addition to the exercises and interview encounters explained in the methodology, we measured changes from Encounter 1 to Encounter 2 for prosecutors and supervisors and changes from Encounter 1 to Encounter 3 for victim advocates and investigators in terms of specific attitudes and behaviors (see Appendix A for Encounters). We observed interactions through participant-observation to test the validity of these hypotheses.

The following key themes in change over time were observed:

- **Overall Changes in Task Force Culture**  
Both interviews and exercises reveal increased victim-centeredness by all members of the Task Force over the time of observation by the research team.
- **Variation Between Roles**  
Overall, an increase in mutual respect for the different roles was also observed. However, a need for clarification on role distinction emerged through a “stay in your lane” explanation frequented by the Task Force members.
- **Effects of Training**  
The Task Force benefited from both formal training provided by the victim advocates and informal training through behavior modeling of victim-centered approaches by the victim advocates for the Task Force members.

### **Overall Changes in Task Force Culture**

Although the Task Force had been in existence for approximately four years when we began this work, just prior to our involvement in this aspect of the research there was a concerted effort on the part of supervisors and victim advocates to bring more training to the Task Force as a whole.

**Increased victim-centeredness.** In the first encounter, people were asked to list all of the victim-centered behaviors they could think of off the top of their heads. It may have been that this task was unfamiliar to members of the Task Force or that the interviewer was a relatively unknown person, but many people struggled with this exercise. When asked to explain their lists, most people were able to articulate a sense of why victim-centered behaviors were important, but only a few could name more than five or six specific examples. A small number of

people actually named behaviors victims might employ to deal with trauma, such as substance use, instead of behaviors they themselves could practice.

However, towards the end of the study, almost everyone was comfortable volunteering their own specific strategies to put victims at ease, make them feel heard, and respect their boundaries. For example, investigators and prosecutors were particularly conscious of how their tone and word choice affected victims. They made sure to apologize for the delay in testing and used calm tones. Furthermore, people understood how being victim-centered positively impacted their portion of the Task Force's overall goal of seeking justice. Prosecutors saw how partnering with victim advocates allowed them to focus on the legal aspects of the case. Investigators believed having advocates kept victims more engaged in the process.

As one supervisor explained:

*“The role of victim centeredness is critical, absolutely critical in this process. The role of the victim advocates is, how can I say this, the glue that holds everything together.”*

With regards to how this might vary for cold case units vs. traditional sex crime units, one advocate noted the difference between cold case advocacy and “traditional” advocacy:

*With the victims in the cold case, you get a different response a lot of times, especially during initial contact and notification, because they're not expecting you, and they're not expecting that after how many years it's been, up to twenty, why are you bringing this back up? I've moved on, so you may have a few different responses of just not expecting that this is happening or that it's going to happen, whereas the cases that are happening more currently, they're aware this may be the process, that someone is going to call me, and advocate is going to call me, a prosecutor is going to call me, a law enforcement officer is going to call me, and so their trauma may be on the same level, but differently, because they know what to expect if it's explained to them correctly. But the cold case victims, they're just not expecting this.*

## Variation Between Roles

**Role clarification.** Over the duration of this study, supervisors and victim advocates had less change over time than did investigators. The supervisors, as

a whole, were invested in making use of victim advocates on the Task Force from the beginning and had all been trained on topics such as the neurobiology of trauma. Furthermore, the supervisors had the shortest time period between their start and endpoint for interviews (average of approximately 5 months). The victim advocates had spent their professional lives, up to that point, making a case for why their profession was needed and were able to articulate clearly what they might add to an MDT.

In the second interview, prosecutors were comfortable discussing strategies, such as using mirroring language<sup>2</sup> in preparation for trial while at the same time explaining to victims the need for more clinical language at the actual trial. This particular victim-centered behavior struck a chord with many prosecutors. Interestingly, prosecutors became more attached to the “stay in your lane” attitude over time (first appeared in Section 1). This concept was used by supervisors to clarify each discipline’s role in the Task Force.

One prosecutor offered this observation:

*“So, in my role as a prosecutor, my role would be support of a victim and to promote victim advocacy is number one, to know my limits. So, a victim advocate should be assigned to a case and provide certain support to a victim. But, I still think it’s my job as the prosecutor when I meet with a victim to make sure I know what’s going on with him/her and how comfortable they are with the process.”*

In this example, the prosecutor recognizes their own “lane” and its limitations and that, although it is the goal of all members of the Task Force to put victims at ease, the majority of that responsibility rests with the victim advocates.

**Mutual respect.** Initially, investigators were least invested in practicing victim-centeredness (as a group), seeing it as another layer of bureaucracy rather than as an investigative tool. By the end of the research, investigators seemed more open to learning from victim advocates, but this was phrased as “getting advice.” Some investigators continued to view victim advocates as ancillary to the investigation even towards the end of the research, as demonstrated by their willingness to go look for victims without a victim advocate or believing they could

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<sup>2</sup> Mirroring language means using a victim’s words when asking about their attack, for example, a victim might say “it” instead of “his penis” and after clarifying what the victim meant by “it,” the person conducting the interview or having the conversation will use the same language.

replace one victim advocate with another if the original advocate on the case was busy.

One interesting finding from the triangulation interviews was that when investigators and advocates reviewed each other's performance positively, their accounts were more likely to closely match one another's. Mutual respect led investigators and victim advocates to be on the same page when understanding of victim's reactions and motivations.

## Effects of Training

As previously mentioned in Section 1, victim advocates were called upon to provide more training to the Task Force as this research progressed. This training supplemented that which was provided by the Cleveland Rape Crisis Center (the community-based advocacy organization). When victim advocates were in training roles, it encouraged other members of the Task Force to see them as professional peers with specialized knowledge. In one observed training, investigators and prosecutors were encouraged to work through an interview scenario with the victim advocates playing the role of victims. In line with the literature, people were more engaged with an interactive scenario and role-playing than with classroom lectures. This also opened up space for victim advocates to give feedback based not only on the current scenario but also on what they had observed in previous interviews in a low-risk setting.

**Modeling behavior.** Despite this success of these formal training opportunities, we know from the literature that these types of interactions, at best, result in changes in behavior rather than changes in attitudes. However, because the victim advocates are integrated into the Task Force, they are able to model victim-centeredness in real-time and give immediate feedback to investigators and prosecutors in a way that promotes a deeper change. In some cases, particularly with investigators, it was easier for people to incorporate behavioral changes even without embracing the larger tenants of victim-centeredness (attitudinal change). Over time, investigators came to understand what an impact they had on victims and what little changes in behavior could lead to greater participation on the part of the victim in their case and so began endorsing victim-centered behaviors, as observed in the triangulation interviews and in casual conversations and meetings.

**Reframing.** Another important aspect of this cultural change was the way in which victim advocates were able to help investigators reframe the internal

narrative about a victim's motivation. For example, when a victim did not show up on time for an interview, a victim advocate would tell the investigator,

*"It's important to remember to give people the benefit of the doubt and be like oh, she forgot [about our appointment]."*

Many investigators had spent years interviewing suspects and had come to expect antagonism in their interactions with interviewees. Victim advocates' ability to gently redirect and reframe these expectations helped many investigators to actually change their attitudes over time.

## **Conclusion**

Contributing to the literature on what law enforcement training works, our findings point to noticeable changes in the Task Force culture over time. These changes were revealed through three data collection encounters. An increase in victim-centeredness by all members of the Task Force and an increase in mutual respect for the different roles was observed. However, the findings suggest similar MDTs would benefit from clarification on role distinction. This was exemplified through the "stay in your lane" explanation frequented by the Task Force members. The Task Force benefited from both formal and informal training provided by the victim advocates. Informal debriefing and behavior modeling of victim-centered approaches by the victim advocates for the Task Force members proved beneficial.

However, it is the long-term nature of these relationships that can produce significant shifts in attitudes and behaviors. As demonstrated by this Task Force, having and reinforcing more victim-centered practices can lead to better outcomes in terms of the investigation, prosecution, and victim satisfaction with the outcomes, which suggests there are also negative ramifications for not being more victim-centered and for not integrating victim advocates into the MDT.

In the final Section, recommendations for MDTs are provided based upon all of the research team's findings presented in Sections 1, 2, and 3.

## **4. Recommendations for Integrating Victim Advocates into a Multidisciplinary Team**

### **Introduction**

The Task Force has been successful at testing and following up on the testing of the sexual assault kits. However, testing kits is just the first step in changing the culture that produced the “backlog” of untested kits. To engender lasting change, jurisdictions need guidance on how to best embed victim advocacy into the process.

In this Section, guidance based upon our research findings is provided to cold case multidisciplinary teams (MDTs) and is intended to be transferrable across jurisdictions. These recommendations address how to balance the sometimes convergent, sometimes divergent, organizational missions and cultures with MDTs. Here, the important organizational differences include: law enforcement’s strong emphasis on hierarchy, prosecutors’ strong emphasis on autonomy, and advocacy’s strong emphasis on egalitarian leadership and/or flat organizational structure. The following recommendations aim to support MDTs to do what is best for the victim and for the community in this complex work environment.

### **Recommendations**

Based on this research, in order to support the integration of victim advocates into a multidisciplinary team, we have six recommendations:

- **Fully integrate victim advocates into the team**
- **Clarify the role of victim advocacy on the Task Force**
- **Employ a victim advocate supervisor**
- **Clarify discipline integration on the team**
- **Recognize the significance of victim participation**
- **Encourage training by victim advocates**
- **Create a space for debriefing**



## **Fully Integrate Victim Advocates onto the Team**

The presence of victim advocates influences the overall functioning of the Task Force in measurable shifts in behaviors and attitudes towards victim-centeredness in all roles on the team. The formal and informal training victim advocates provided resulted in observable changes in the behavior of others on the Task Force. The integration of victim advocates positively impacted investigations by performing work necessary to keep victims engaged in the process, maintaining close contact with the victim, and freeing up investigators' and prosecutors' time. The entire team benefited from victim advocates providing support to victims if/when their cases went to trial, making it less traumatizing for victims to participate in the process. Therefore, Task Forces should actively work to prevent victim advocates from being viewed as an ancillary service because their inclusion resulted in visible increases in the victim-centeredness of investigators and victim participation with prosecutors. Because the inclusion of victim advocates is a new(er) approach in the criminal justice system, leadership must be vocal about their support in order for other members of the Task Force to see the value inherent in including victim advocacy.

## **Clarify the Role of Victim Advocacy on Task Force**

Victim advocates' roles ("lanes") and responsibilities should be made clear and codified into policy. Codification creates objective and measurable behaviors that can be used to determine whether or not victim advocates are being included in meaningful ways. Consistency of expectations, particularly at the beginning, when behavior change is more likely than attitudinal change, should remain constant and set by leadership. This can help to avoid conflict and confusion regarding different priorities and skill sets. The findings also point to the need to codify the importance of including advocates at all appropriate decision points and interactions. It is important that the roles and responsibilities of each discipline on the Task Force are clearly articulated and written down in a document that everyone can access.

## **Employ a Victim Advocate Supervisor**

Victim advocates should have their own supervisor who is at or near the same hierarchical level as team members who supervise prosecutors or investigators. Supervisors can add to team cohesion and implementation of the victim advocates' roles on the team. The findings show that the victim advocacy team supervisor had success in overcoming prejudice towards advocacy as a whole

on the Task Force and in increasing cooperation with victim advocates. This creates greater opportunities for victim advocates to be seen as equal to the other disciplines represented on the team. Supervisors can play a vital role in allocating resources, adjusting workloads, and incorporating questions about victim-centeredness and prior work with victim advocates into the hiring process for new prosecutors and investigators.

### **Clarify Discipline Integration on the Team**

Supervisors from different disciplines should explicitly discuss and reconcile competing management models and present all team members with a clear explanation of how each discipline is integrated into the overall mission of the team. Combining people coming from strictly hierarchical organizations (law enforcement) with people who are used to working with a high degree of autonomy (prosecutors) and people who are used to working in a relatively flat organization (advocates) can create unnecessary headaches. That is only if expectations are not made clear or if leadership has a weak grasp on how each discipline is working towards the overall mission of the team.

Additionally, any examination of an MDT requires a solid understanding of which disciplines are included in the team and the organizational culture of those disciplines. As with most MDTs, organizational culture varies quite a bit between the disciplines. In this Task Force, most investigators came from a peace officer background (typically either retired police or newer peace officers looking for investigative experience or to change careers), and almost all investigators had been hired directly by the prosecutor's office. Therefore, investigators often have the shared experience of working in a rigid hierarchical environment where the chain of command is well-understood and followed. Prosecutors, on the other hand, while still accustomed to functioning within a hierarchy, have more autonomy and decision-making capabilities in their normal work environment. Finally, as an artifact of the outgrowth of rape crisis organizations as a grassroots movement, victim advocates are often accustomed to working in a relatively flat organization where decision-making is ostensibly shared. Considering the styles of organizational thinking, it is easy to trace where tension stems from and how successes are achieved.

## **Recognize the Significance of Victim Participation**

Cold case investigations are often closed due to a lack of victim participation. An MDT can benefit from balancing victim-centeredness through respecting a victim's choices and acknowledging how participation may influence each stage of a victim's case. As this research has shown, the integration of victim advocates resulted in a noticeable improvement in victim-centeredness of investigators and victim participation with prosecutors. MDTs also benefit from acknowledging the unique pressures for increased or maintained victim engagement on prosecutors and investigators. Just as it is important to recognize and respect the unique differences between prosecutors, investigators, and victim advocates. So too, is it important to recognize how victim participation affects each stage of the case. MDTs can work together better when these pressures on the investigator and prosecutor are better understood to victim advocates and vis versa. Coordination between all members can improve victim participation through increased support of the victim at each stage of their case.

## **Encourage Training by Victim Advocates**

MDTs should take full advantage of victim advocates' expertise to train everyone on the team in victim-centered practices. This will present victim advocates as professional peers with their own skill-specific knowledge area and also help the team overcome challenges as they happen. Working towards a victim-centered team is an ongoing process. There should be support from initial training when hired or Task Force inception to ongoing training to the types of informal training that seem most valuable in this case study. It is recommended to have victim advocates present training that is relevant to the team in real-time that addresses the team's unique context.

Additionally, there should be training on the distinction between justice-based advocates and community-based advocates. In MDTs, particularly ones that are drawing investigators from different law enforcement agencies, people have varying experiences with victim advocacy, and much of the initial resistance to the inclusion of victim advocates was based on prior experiences with community-based advocates. Making this distinction clear early in the onboarding process can alleviate the concerns, specifically of investigators, and can create a more open environment.

## **Create a Space for Debriefing**

Finally, when there is a team approach to victim notification or interviewing the victim, there should be space and time for debriefing between these events. This creates space for feedback on each other's performances or interactions and supports *in situ* training in a low-risk environment. The findings showed that organic debriefing periods in a vehicle before and after a remote interview with the victim occurred between victim advocates and investigators. This was beneficial as it offered a low-stakes setting for investigators to hear suggestions from victim advocates.

## **Conclusion**

MDTs in other jurisdictions can successfully integrate victim advocates when their uniqueness and benefit to the team is accounted for. By fully integrating victim advocates into the team and making their role on the team clear, victim-centeredness may be improved. To address disciplinary and organizational structure differences, employment of a victim advocate supervisor is advisable. Finally, support and encourage training by victim advocates, both formally and informally and allow informal debriefing to encourage learned among the different disciplines, especially victim advocates and investigators.

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## Appendix A - Methodology

**Table 1. Number of participants in each wave, broken down by role**

	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3
Supervisors	4	4	n/a
Victim advocates	4	4	6
Investigators	9	5	6
Prosecutors	4	4	n/a

*Table 1 Supervisors – all 4 individuals remained constant across 2 waves. Victim advocates – all 4 individuals remained constant across 3 waves, with two individuals participating into interviews of wave 3. Investigators – one individual remained constant across all three waves, three individuals participated in waves one and two, and all other cases in the investigator group were unique. Prosecutors – two individuals remained constant in both waves one and two; there were two unique cases in each wave 1 and wave 2 sets.*

**Table 2. The average time between waves**

	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3
Supervisors		W1-W2 – 4 months 25 days	n/a
Victim advocates		W1-W2 – 6 months 24 days	W1-W3 – 9 months 26 days; W2-W3 – 3 months 2 days
Investigators		W1-W2 – 6 months 22 days	W1-W3 – 7 months 29 days; W2-W3 – 1 month 8 days
Prosecutors		W1-W2 – 6 months 25 days	n/a

## Interview Question by Wave

### WAVE 1: (conducted from 4/25/17 to 7/27/17)

- Free list exercise
  - Please list all of the victim-centered behaviors you can think of in 5 minutes.
  - Please list all the barriers encountered by victims during the course of the investigation of a delayed SAK you can think of in 5 minutes.
- Pile-sort exercise
  - Participants were asked to sort index cards with the names of all Task Force members into piles by whatever criteria they chose
- Ranking exercise



- Participants were asked to rank Task Force members (same set of index cards) by perceived victim-centeredness and by influence on how cases proceed
- All activities were audio-recorded, and pictures taken of the pile-sort and ranking exercises. Participants discussed their thought processes for each exercise with the interviewer.

## **WAVE 2: (Conducted 11/12/17 to 1/17/18)**

Conducted as a traditional, one-on-one, semi-structured interview. All of these questions were asked of each participant, but the interviewer was able to ask clarifying or follow-up questions, depending on the individual's answers.

- What is your role in the Task Force?
- How long have you been on the Task Force?
- What is your understanding of victim advocacy?
- What kind of language do you use with a victim at the initial contact?
- What victim-centered approaches do you use?
- What are some victim-centered behaviors you have observed on the Task Force?
- How do different groups employ victim-centered approaches?
- What role do victim advocates play on the Task Force?
- What protocols are in place involving victim advocates?
- Is there ever a reason to deviate from the protocol?
- How has the role of victim advocates changed over time?
- What do you perceive as the differences between justice-based and community-based advocates?
- What would help people get on the same page about what it means to be victim-centered?
- Is there ever any discussion about whether some victims are more or less credible, depending on their status at the time of the assault (prostitute, alcohol or drug user, etc.)?
- Do you feel you have enough training about how to approach and talk to a victim? (More than just training on trauma)
- Have you had experience notifying a victim that the suspect is deceased?
  - Can you tell me more about what that process entailed?

- How did the victim react?
- **Investigators only:**
  - What has been your experience with the victim advocates?
  - Under what circumstances do you request a victim advocate?
  - When would you request a community-based advocate?
  - Have you worked with advocates in the past?
    - How does your current experience compare to your past experience?
- **Prosecutors only:**
  - What has been your experience with the victim advocates?
  - Have you worked with advocates in the past?
    - How does your current experience compare to your past experience?
- **Advocates only:**
  - What motivates you to be physically close to a victim in in-person interviews?
  - How do you coordinate with community-based advocates?
- **Supervisors only:**
  - If you know someone is not victim-centered, how do you handle that?
  - If you believe someone is not victim-centered or struggles with victim-centeredness, what types of responsibilities should that person have?

### **WAVE 3: (Conducted 2/15/18 to 2/27/18)**

This set of exercises was comprised of paired interviews – investigators and victim advocates who had performed a victim notification and/or initial interview were interviewed separately in a semi-structured format and their responses compared to each other for consistency.

- Please describe in detail your most recent encounter with the victim and the victim advocate/investigator you are working with.
- How did the victim respond?
- What was their affect?
- What words did they use?

- Are they willing to go forward or be contacted again?
- What victim-centered behaviors or approaches did you use?
- What victim-centered behaviors or approaches did your partner use?
- How successful would you rate this encounter with the other encounters you have had?

## Appendix B

### Anonymized results of the first pile-sort exercise (no guidance given)

