

Women who Experienced IPV and Received Civil Legal Services Report Improvements in Economic Self-Sufficiency

Background

The majority of research on legal responses to intimate partner violence (IPV) focuses on criminal justice system responses. More recently, researchers have examined coordinated community responses (CCRs) to IPV but absent from most studies of CCRs is mention of *civil* legal services.

Civil legal services can partially address economic issues by helping woman who experience IPV obtain temporary child support through a civil protective order or a higher child support payment or a more equitable distribution of marital property in a divorce settlement.

Project Overview

Drs. Carolyn Hartley (University of Iowa School of Social Work) and Lynette Renner (University of Minnesota School of Social Work), in collaboration of Iowa Legal Aid, examined the effects of receiving civil legal services on women's economic self-sufficiency. Using a sample of women who experienced IPV and were receiving assistance from Iowa Legal Aid with a civil protective order or a family law case, they examined changes in women's:

- total monthly **income**, including wages, child support, social security, etc.,
- **program assistance** use (measured by six options, including housing, utility, phone, food bank, subsidized day-care, other donations (range: 0-6),
- reported **difficulty** living off their current income (measured on a 5 point scale from *not at all difficult* [1] to *extremely difficult* [5]), and
- reported **adequacy** of resources (e.g., Physical Necessities and Shelter, Child care, Intra-family Support) to meet their family's needs as measured by the Family Resource Scale [FRS]; range: 35-175).

Women were first interviewed shortly after their case was taken by Iowa Legal Aid (N=150); then, again at six months (n=112) and one year (n=85). The findings below include data from all women who participated in these interviews.

Findings

- Women's total monthly **income** significantly increased by an average of \$253 per month over one year.
- Women's **program assistance** use significantly decreased over one year from a mean of 1.09 programs used to a mean of 0.87 programs used.
- Women's report of the **difficulty** living off their current income significantly decreased over one year from a mean of 3.47 to 2.94.
- The **adequacy** of women's resources to meet their family's needs significantly increased (Total FRS score increased from 118.8 to 125.2).

Conclusions

The women who experienced IPV and received assistance from Iowa Legal Aid for a civil protective order or a family law case reported improvements in their economic self-sufficiency over one year of time. These improvements were seen regardless of whether women received assistance with a civil protective order or a family law case.

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This project was supported by Award No. 2010-WG-BX-0009, awarded by the National Institute of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice.