OBJECTIVES: This commentary seeks to highlight the benefits of community-based participatory research (CBPR) and promote its use in the violence field. Community perspectives remain underrepresented in the CBPR literature despite the emphasis on equitable partnerships and shared ownership in the research process. Method: Informal interviews were conducted with 10 community partners to understand their perspectives on using and participating in research. Results: Several recommendations for strengthening academic-community research partnerships emerged from the community partners’ responses. They were: (a) conduct research that is useful to communities, with a focus on evidence-based practices and cost-benefit analyses; (b) involve community partners early in the development of research questions to ensure that local needs are addressed; (c) engage in frequent and open communication and maintain transparency about research goals and roles and responsibilities of each partner; (d) provide benefits to communities during the research process to promote professional development and build capacity; and (e) disseminate findings quickly, using outlets accessible to communities, and translate into strategies for practice. Conclusion: Although the recommendations require significant investments of time and resources by all partners, use of CBPR can contribute to increased development of innovative and sustainable violence prevention programs, services, and policies that are uniquely informed by scientific evidence and community expertise. By emphasizing partnerships with communities, CBPR helps to reduce the gap between research and practice and facilitates the inclusion of community strengths and resilience as valuable components of violence prevention and intervention.

Keywords: community-based participatory research, academic-community partnerships, interpersonal violence, resilience, prevention
The current commentary had several goals. The first goal was to briefly describe CBPR and how it has been applied to the study of violence and related resilience. The second goal was to understand the perspectives of our community partners on using and participating in research. The third goal was to provide recommendations, based on the community partners’ responses, for strengthening academic-community partnerships for violence research. In this paper, we used several terms interchangeably. When we referred to communities and community partners, we included community leaders, professionals, service providers, advocates, other stakeholders, members, and organizations.

**Community-Based Participatory Research**

Multiple academic disciplines and fields have developed partnership approaches to research, and refer to them using different terminology (Israel, Eng, Schulz, & Parker, 2005). For example, the term, “community-based participatory research,” is often used in the public health field. In the social science literature, other terms are widely used, such as “participatory research” and “participatory action research” (PAR; Israel et al., 2005). All of the approaches emphasize a commitment to conducting research that shares power and decision-making with local people and communities, engages them in the research process, and results in benefits to community members (Israel et al., 2005). CBPR may be described as a type of PAR that focuses on research conducted by or with communities. PAR places greater emphasis on the role of individuals (study participants) in different stages of the research process aimed at producing social action (Banks et al., 2013). It is possible that the participants belong to preexisting communities, but that is not the prominent feature that defines PAR.

**Applications of CBPR to the Violence Field**

CBPR is particularly valuable in the study of violence and resilience because it emphasizes an ecological approach to health which includes individuals, families, and social networks as well as the larger contexts of community and society (Israel et al., 2005). CBPR helps to identify and address systemic and structural processes that are beyond individual control but impact the success of intervention and prevention efforts. This point was raised in the commentary by Shaw and colleagues in their discussion about researcher-practitioner partnerships (Shaw, McLean, Taylor, Swartout, & Querna, 2016). Major funding agencies, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, advocate for the use of the social ecological model for understanding violence and developing strategies for prevention (http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/overview/social-ecologicalmodel.html).

CBPR may impact multiple determinants of violence and resilience by involving diverse partners and organizations in all stages of the research process, including the translation of findings to practice and policy. A research investigation may contribute to improvements in organizational structure and capacity, community advocacy and resilience, public policy, and societal norms (Oneha, Magnussen, & Shoultz, 2009). For example, community-based organizations may be able to implement data-driven policy change because they understand the community’s priorities, have the authority to take ownership of the problem, and have a history of local activism for change (Wallerstein & Duran, 2006).

Another benefit of CBPR is that it helps to engage and empower communities that have experienced a history of violence, discrimination, and oppression. Some communities may be resistant to participate in research that may further promote negative stereotypes. Ethnic minority communities, in particular, may experience distrust of academic institutions because of past exploitation by researchers (Pitaway, Bartolomei, & Hugman, 2010; Shoultz et al., 2006; Yick & Berthold, 2005). Traditional research investigations prioritize the needs and interests of the academic partners rather than address health issues that are important to the community (Magnussen, Shoultz, Hansen, Sapolu, & Samifua, 2008). In contrast, CBPR facilitates collaborative and equitable involvement of all partners and promotes a colearning and empowering process that addresses social inequalities (Israel, Schulz, Parker, & Becker, 1998).

In addition, CBPR facilitates a shift from a long-standing focus on risks and deficits related to victimization and perpetration to an emphasis on strengths and resilience. Because of its investment in long-term commitments, CBPR aims to build on the strengths and resources within the community (Israel et al., 1998). Protective factors and resilience are best identified by local leaders and organizations that are closely tied to the community. Researchers who are from outside the community may be less aware of them or may not understand them fully.

Despite the potential for CBPR to advance the study of violence and inform the development of strengths-based interventions, there are few applications of CBPR in the field compared with uses of nonparticipatory research methods. Existing applications of CBPR focus on violence measurement development (Hausman et al., 2013; White, Yuan, Cook, & Abbey, 2013), diverse populations (Falconier et al., 2013; Moya, Chávez-Baray, & Martínez, 2014; Nicolaïdis et al., 2010; Scott et al., 2013; Shoultz, Magnussen, Manzano, Arias, & Spencer, 2010), youth violence prevention (Le et al., 2011; Leff et al., 2010; Snider, Kirst, Abubakar, Ahmad, & Nathens, 2010), and faith-based interventions (Kataoka et al., 2006). The body of CBPR literature on resilience is even smaller, and mostly limited to indigenous populations (Goodkind, LaNoue, Lee, Freeland, & Freund, 2012; Mohatt et al., 2008; Tsey et al., 2007). Such gaps in the literature support the goal of this commentary to promote greater use of CBPR principles in future violence research.

**Interviews With Community Partners About Research**

While the CBPR literature provides researchers with valuable guidelines, tools, and lessons learned, we were interested in giving a voice to community partners and their unique perspectives and experiences with research. We felt that such knowledge could be used to establish stronger academic-community partnerships and motivate more violence scholars to incorporate CBPR principles in their research programs. From June to July 2015, we invited several community partners to participate in informal interviews. We contacted a variety of professionals, including practitioners, administrators, and advocates, with whom we had previously worked on research and nonresearch projects. We aimed to include organizations that were diverse with regard to services provision, target populations, and location in the U.S. To increase the likelihood that interviews would be completed in a timely manner, we invited the partners to respond to the questions in person, by telephone or email. Three of the six interviews were...
completed by email. Those who were contacted but did not com-
plete an interview either had a schedule conflict or did not respond
to the invitation. One group of individuals wanted to obtain guid-
ance from administrators prior to their participation, but did not receive it within the time frame allotted for conducting the inter-
views.

Six interviews were completed with a total of 10 community
professionals. For some of the participating organizations, group
interviews were conducted with multiple professionals. The pro-
fessionals were diverse and included an executive director of an
urban American Indian health organization; two program special-
ists from a nonprofit organization addressing domestic violence
and sexual assault among Native American women; an executive
director and forensic interviewer from a children’s advocacy cen-
ter; a director, program coordinator, and evaluator of a behavioral
health clinic; a counselor who was also a director of a county
school family resource center; and a clinical supervisor at a resi-
dential treatment facility. All community professionals received
the same set of interview questions that were developed for the
project. The questions addressed their use of research, interests in
participating in research, past research experiences (positive and
negative), and suggestions for researchers on how to improve
collaborations with communities. Responses that were provided
in person or by telephone interviews were either audiotaped and
transcribed or were recorded with notes taken by the interviewer.

Based on reviews of the responses, we identified five major
recommendations for strengthening academic-community partner-
ships for violence research (Table 1). They were: (a) conduct
research that is useful to communities, with a focus on evidence-
based practices and cost-benefit analyses; (b) involve community
partners early in the development of research questions to ensure
that local needs are addressed; (c) engage in frequent and open
communication and maintain transparency about research goals
and roles and responsibilities of each partner; (d) provide benefits
to communities during the research process to promote profes-
sional development and build capacity; and (e) disseminate find-
ings quickly, using outlets accessible to communities, and trans-
late into strategies for practice. In the following sections, we discuss
each recommendation in depth and provide illustrative quotations,
when available.

### Conduct Research That Is Useful to Communities

The community partners who participated in this project placed
a high value on research with a strong interest in utilizing it for
securing funding and improving services. One administrator also
described using research in the development of their organizational
core values and major strategic goals. To aid them in securing
funding through grants and contracts, the community partners
sought research that highlighted the significance of health prob-
lems and the impact of their work. For example, one individual
described using research statistics to relay the gravity of the
problem when she testified before Congress about violence against
Native American women. Another stated, “If I can use anything
that is evidence-based research and take a clip of that and use it in
my grants—that is huge.”

Several community partners reported using research to improve
practices at their organizations. They appeared to value two types
of research. One type involved studies that helped them to under-
stand their specific client populations. One individual noted that
there was a need for research that included “less listening to the
professionals and more listening to the community.” The second
type of research valued by the community partners was informa-
tion about evidence-based practices, particularly those that are
feasible in community settings that have competing priorities and
limited resources. They sought research that “can make a tangible
difference with a plan in place to use the findings for positive
change.” However, one partner noted the challenges of balancing
effective practices and financial costs, “There are some practices
that are great, like mindfulness, that you don’t get paid for. You
have to balance what’s a billable service versus what is good
practice and then what is workable in the community, or with our
particular population.” Those concerns were consistent with one
community professional’s recommendation for more health re-
search with cost-benefit analyses.

### Involve Communities Early in the Development of
Research Questions

One area of frustration for the community partners was the
failure of researchers to incorporate community knowledge in the
research process, including in the development of research ques-
tions and innovative solutions for addressing violence within spe-
cific contexts. One individual stated that “many groups in the
community have questions they would love to ask.” However,
several community partners encountered situations where ques-

| Table 1 |
| Recommendations for Strengthening Academic-Community Partnerships |

- **Conduct research that is useful to communities**
  - Community partners use research to improve practice, justify the value of programs, and secure funding.
  - Communities seek research that highlights the significance of violence-related problems and informs evidence-based practices and organizational decision-making (e.g., cost-benefit analyses).

- **Involve communities early in the development of research questions**
  - Engaging community partners early in the research process ensures that local needs are addressed.
  - Community partners have expertise that may be used to create innovative solutions for addressing violence within specific contexts.

- **Engage in frequent and open communication with communities**
  - Face-to-face consultation and other interactions, prior to designing a research study, help build trust with a community.
  - Providing resources, such as trainings and technical assistance, promotes professional development, and builds community capacity.

- **Disseminate findings quickly, using outlets accessible to communities, and translate into strategies for practice**
  - Community partners may utilize data and preliminary findings that are available prior to the end of a study.
  - Using a variety of dissemination outlets, including the media, blogs, webinars, and nonacademic reports, increases access to communities.
Community partners wanted to help ensure that research questions and methods not only addressed local needs but were also ethical. One professional stated, “Make sure what you’re researching is important to the people you’re working with. They’re not subjects or they’re not under a microscope. They’re actual people, and [make sure] that what you’re trying to do has a benefit one way or another.” CBPR facilitates the involvement of communities and recognizes that professionals and organizations have unique knowledge of the concerns, values, and cultural norms of their community. Community expertise may be used to select theories of change that are relevant to a community’s cultural system, as discussed by Chan and colleagues in their commentary paper (Chan, Hollingsworth, Espelage, & Mitchell, 2016).

Engage in Frequent and Open Communication With Communities

The community partners expressed a desire for frequent interaction and open communication during all stages of the research process, including prior to the start of a study and after its completion. Activities, such as face-to-face consultation, prior to designing a specific research project can help develop a trusting relationship that will build a foundation for future collaborations. Some partners spoke of the importance of researchers becoming involved in the greater community, and listening to the members, and not just the leaders and professionals. One individual stated, “Get to know people, value their time and effort, ask them what the needs are.” This may involve getting to know members of all age groups including youth who are often an untapped source for understanding why adolescent violence prevention programs are ineffective, as discussed by Edwards and colleagues in their commentary (Edwards, Jones, Mitchell, Hagler, & Roberts, 2016). The community professionals also noted that continued interaction was essential for maintaining positive relationships beyond a specific project period. One individual said, “Don’t just contact the community when you need something and then go silent until you need them again.” For one partner, the opportunity for frequent interaction was the main reason why she preferred collaborating with local universities instead of those that were out of state.

Besides frequent interaction, the community partners highlighted the importance of early communication and “transparency” about the research goals and the roles and responsibilities of each partner. One community professional suggested, “Approach the potential community partners to jointly develop the project aims, goals, strategies, etc. Meetings after the fact are ineffective, as discussed by Edwards and colleagues in their commentary.” One individual described initially believing that they could not question the decisions made by the researchers because the researchers had the expertise necessary for conducting the investigation successfully. But later on they realized that their belief was wrong. They recommended that community professionals and organizations be assertive with academic partners and “set up the rules ahead of time, be real clear on what the needs are, (and) what the collection process is.” It was clear that the community partners felt that open communication should be maintained with all organizational staff, not just administrators, because recruitment and data collection was often conducted by other staff. Several partners indicated that past research participation resulted in them doing more work at under-resourced organizations without understanding the reasons for it or the potential benefits for organizational decision-making and practices. By maintaining open communication, organizational staff may provide valuable input on the study design. Moreover, obtaining their buy-in may improve the quality of data and reduce the amount of missing data. By involving staff at all levels of an organization, researchers may ensure that “safety mechanisms” are established to prevent harm to clients and the community. One community professional described having concerns about administering research surveys immediately following the completion of a forensic interview. They preferred choosing a time period when the burden on the client would be reduced.

Provide Benefits to Communities Throughout the Research Process

Although they valued research, the community partners described challenges to participating in studies. Identified barriers included limited time and competing priorities. One individual reflected that research usually takes a long time to get started, delaying the receipt of benefits to the community. Other community professionals questioned how they would balance job responsibilities and requests made by researchers. One partner noted, “Between trying to provide services, and then fund-raising, and then you try to add research, and then community outreach—the bucket can only get so full. So we love to do the research, it is just how much time we have that we can really participate.” Another individual described concerns about the burden on existing staff when they are asked to complete additional responsibilities. Thus, the partners recommended discussions early in the research process, and before budgets are finalized, to address types of compensation, willingness to volunteer time, and hiring extra project staff.

The community partners suggested that the burden of time and labor for a research project may be balanced, in part, by obtaining benefits during the research process. Valued resources included those that promoted professional development and built community capacity. One individual stated, “The research itself might be more long-term in nature, but the teacher needs to get something out of the process in real time, even if it is just some insight about the current social/academic environment and how to apply that to his/her classroom today.” Another individual suggested that researchers share information about effective strategies and programs used by other communities and determine how they may be used within local contexts. This was particularly important when working with ethnically diverse populations, as noted by one partner, because those communities may have their own systems, ceremonies and treatments for healing from trauma that are different from Westernized approaches.

The partners identified other capacity-building strategies that could provide more immediate benefits to their organizations and communities. They included trainings to leadership and “speaking events,” including on topics related to the research process and institutional review boards. Other strategies were to create databases for entering community data and assistance with data analysis. One professional stated, “We’ve got years of data. But who...
has time to sit down and do all of the things you need to do to look at outcomes?’ The need for technical assistance was also raised by community professionals who described receiving technological devices, such as tablets, from researchers that did not always work. The community professionals reported a desire to receive ongoing technical assistance from academic partners to maximize and sustain the benefits of receiving innovative tools. Working with students was also viewed as way to enhance community capacity. One individual indicated that they participated in a “learning collaborative” that required faculty to work with students on research that had a public service component. Some community professionals wanted opportunities to train students on how to use a participatory framework to enhance benefits to communities during the research process.

Findings Quickly, Using Accessible Outlets, and Translate Into Strategies for Practice

Because violence research is an applied field, the ultimate goal is for outcomes to be translated and disseminated to improve strategies and innovations for practice. However, there has been a concerning lack of attention to translation strategies in the violence field, which has likely been constrained by a reliance on a traditional academic publication system (Wandersman et al., 2008). The CBPR process, on the contrary, facilitates consideration of community translation and dissemination by emphasizing that: (a) the meaning of research findings should be understood together with partners, (b) outcomes should be translated in a way that is usable for practitioners and other professionals, and (c) outcomes and practice implications should be shared and discussed via creative models that might not fit traditional academic dissemination outlets.

The desire to share in the translation process and to have practice-oriented dissemination strategies was reflected in the comments made by our community partners. For example, they indicated that they would like to receive information about preliminary results when they are participating in research. One person described how her team never obtained any information from the researchers, “I guess that makes me resent it a little bit, like I want to know what [the client] feedback is. I have to… do all the work for it but I don’t get the results.” Sharing data as an ongoing process is also beneficial to researchers because community-based research often produces perplexing findings that may be best understood and clarified by those who work closely with the population. One community professional recommended that researchers “engage community-based organizations and persons affected by research to become readers of the final products” and that they ask, “Do the products reflect the dreams, aspirations, and understanding of the intended beneficiaries?” Community partners may also help researchers consider how findings can be translated into meaningful, usable recommendations for practice. One individual stated, “You don’t want to just drop what you found and walk out the door. ‘Oh, 75% of kids in this community are being sexually molested’ and then you leave. Oh great! [We need] something that you can wrap around it so it’s a solution sort of approach.” Another partner noted, “I have used statistics to describe the magnitude of violence among Native Women…but there is not enough research that impacts Indian country that can ‘really have a story for advocates.’”

The community professionals also expressed a desire for more timely dissemination of research findings through outlets and forums that were most accessible to them. The traditional focus on publication in academic journals takes a long time to reach practitioners, and in some cases, never reaches them at all. Many community organizations lack access to professional journals, especially with the rising costs of subscriptions, and even those with access have insufficient time to review or search for information in them. As one community partner noted, “We are not in the business of research, we are in the business of program development.” Another individual stated, “It is dissatisfying to hear that there has been so much investigation into community issues but no research made public. It makes you wary of going to the trouble to participate.” The partners recommended that researchers work collaboratively with community leaders and organizations to identify creative dissemination strategies that were more accessible for their members. For example, researchers could dedicate more time to translating their work for media, blogs, webinars, and nonacademic reports. One individual suggested, “(Use) something that’s just out there in places that people go and places where they read. Like Facebook, or any kind of social media is a good place for that information.” Community partners also recommended that researchers host formal and informal joint sharing sessions. For example, they might organize luncheons once or twice a year that brings together academic faculty, students, community professionals, and organizations to share information and brainstorm new ideas for collaboration.

Conclusion

The aim of this commentary was to highlight the benefits of and promote CBPR in the violence field based on the unique perspectives and experiences of practitioners, administrators, and advocates. Community perspectives remain underrepresented in the CBPR literature despite the emphasis on an equitable partnership and shared ownership in the research process. As demonstrated among the five recommendations presented in this paper, the community partners shared several insights related to what they seek in research collaborations, much of which may be achieved by applying CBPR principles. Specifically, they wanted findings that will help them secure funding and improve practices; opportunities to be involved in developing research questions; frequent and open communication; benefits during the research process, and quick dissemination of findings, using accessible outlets, and translation into strategies for practice.

The reality is, however, that the challenges of significant investments of time and resources often seem to outweigh the potential benefits of academic-community research partnerships. Even scheduling brief interviews with community partners for this project proved to be difficult due to competing schedules and priorities. It underscored the lack of time that most community organizations have to participate in research activities. It is well-known that researchers also encounter obstacles, including an academic system that undervalues the time commitment necessary to form meaningful, rather than exploitative, community partnerships. Ultimately, promoting CBPR in the study of violence and resilience
will require some major institutional changes. For example, organizations will need to provide environmental supports that give administrators and professionals additional time and resources and flexibility to participate in research collaborations. Academic departments and tenure review committees need to provide recognition and incentives for faculty who dedicate time to establishing academic-research partnerships and addressing the multilayered and complex problem of violence without traditional research approaches.

Despite the challenges, use of CBPR can contribute to increased development of innovative and sustainable violence prevention programs, services, and policies that are uniquely informed by scientific evidence and community expertise. By emphasizing partnerships with communities, CBPR can help reduce the current gap between research and practice in the violence field. It may also shift the field to focus more on community strengths and resilience as valuable components of violence prevention and intervention.

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