

Introducing the Sexual Assault Resource Analysis (SARA) Project

- By The SARA Project

The Sexual Assault Resource Analysis (SARA) Project was formed in 2008 with funding from the Crime Victim Services Commission (CVSC) of the Michigan Department of Community Health (MDCH). The federal Violence Against Women (VAWA) and Department of Justice Reauthorization Act of 2005 prompted the creation of a broad set of new programs and legislative changes in the State of Michigan, including the SARA Project. The SARA Project provides state policy makers with information on the current status of sexual assault services throughout the state of Michigan, provides recommendations for improving services aligned with emerging best practices, and acts as a liaison between different state agencies and between the state and practitioners. The SARA Project team is led by Dr. Rebecca Campbell, a professor at Michigan State University, and is staffed with people experienced in violence against women intervention, advocacy, research, legal issues, prevention, medical expertise, and program evaluation.

The first task undertaken by the SARA Team was the systematic analysis of the availability of sexual assault medical forensic exams statewide and identification of local support services for sexual assault victim/survivors. Hospitals with emergency services in every county were contacted, as well as community-based Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) programs. Services were mapped and gaps identified to assist in determining where resources might be focused. That same year, work began on identifying and evaluating existing sexual

assault training curricula and online training resources available to medical personnel, law enforcement, and advocates. This work resulted in a complete report in September of 2009, along with a separate volume of the online training review and recommendations.

After having identified and reviewed online sexual assault trainings, the SARA Project focused their attention on in-person trainings across the state. Recognizing that sexual assault trainings are provided by various state agencies and organizations, the SARA Project collected data on all sexual assault trainings hosted in 2008 and 2009 for advocates, medical personnel, prosecutors, and law enforcement across the state of Michigan. This information was used to create maps illustrating the location, frequency, and intensity of trainings. The maps, along with the raw data, revealed that there is little coordination between agencies providing training, resulting in training gaps around the state. The SARA Project used this information to provide recommendations for future trainings. These future trainings included recommended in-person sessions as well as online training sessions. The online training sessions had been previously reviewed and catalogued by the SARA Project. The complete online training review, and additional resources, can be found at the SARA Project homepage: <http://psychology.msu.edu/vaw/SARA/>.

Continued on next page

The data on sexual assault trainings and medical forensic exam availability suggested that rural areas could benefit from additional sexual assault training. Specifically, the maps on sexual assault training revealed that many rural areas did not have access to trainings while the maps on the availability of medical forensic exams revealed that rural areas frequently did not offer this service, perhaps as a result of inadequate training. To attend to this gap, the SARA Team, in collaboration with CVSC and the Michigan Domestic Violence Prevention and Treatment Board (MDVPTB) of the Michigan Department of Human Services, developed and piloted one-day intensive trainings for medical personnel and advocates in rural areas. The training focused on patient-centered care for victims of sexual assault and how to conduct a medical forensic exam. Two one-day trainings were conducted in rural areas of Michigan with full attendance. Evaluations indicated great satisfaction with the instruction given and the content of the trainings.

This year (FY 2010-2011), the SARA Project is focusing on the evaluation of Michigan's new sexual assault forensic evidence collection kit. The kits have been revised to reflect recent changes in Michigan Law and as a means to improve evidence collection and services to victims of sexual assault. The revisions of the kit are a result of a collaborative effort between the forensic division of the Michigan State Police, the Michigan

Domestic Violence Prevention and Treatment Board of the Michigan Department of Human Services, the Crime Victim Services Commission of the Department of Community Health, and a variety of frontline service providers. The new kits will be distributed to rural and non-rural hospital and community-based sexual assault nurse examiner (SANE) programs once they become available this year. The SARA Project will work with medical providers and lab personnel to evaluate the usability and utility of the kits. This evaluation will inform any future revisions and the development of a statewide protocol for the treatment of sexual assault victim/survivors.

Each year the SARA Project builds upon its previous accomplishments to expand on what is known and determine what more we need to know if sexual assault survivors are to be provided the best possible post-assault care and perpetrators are to be held accountable for the crimes they committed.

For more information on the SARA Project, please contact Julie Hagstrom, project director, at 517-353-5980 or at jhagstro@msu.edu.

The SARA Project is a multidisciplinary team funded by the Michigan Department of Community Health Crime Victim Services Commission to provide resource and policy analysis on services for sexual assault victims throughout the state of Michigan.