

Speaking Up

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IMPROVING THE FEDERAL RESEARCH AGENDA ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

How can the federal government better study violence against women? What steps can federal agencies take to help reduce incidents of domestic and sexual violence? How can changes in the federal research agenda help improve the country's response to abuse? *Advancing the Federal Research Agenda on Violence Against Women*, released last month by the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences, explores these questions and more.

In 2000, Congress asked the National Research Council to develop a detailed research agenda on violence against women. In response to this request, the National Academies appointed a steering committee to review existing research on violence against women. *Advancing the Federal Research Agenda* details the conclusions and recommendations of that committee.

The report offers recommendations on ways to improve the federal research agenda on violence against women. They include:

- Providing new funding for longitudinal studies on violence against women. The report suggests that the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) collaborate on the design and implementation of studies to determine the causes of violence against women.
- Developing a coordinated research strategy to improve data collection on the prevalence of violence against women, to better identify trends and determine the effectiveness of intervention strategies. The report also recommends a new effort to link existing data with clinical research and other findings, including creating a framework for developing standard definitions and protocols.
- Providing funds to support evaluations of prevention and treatment programs. The report concludes that the evaluation literature on the effects of prevention and treatment strategies is "particularly weak," and calls on Congress to provide funds to improve the "chances of effecting long-term reductions in the violent victimization of women." It also recommends that NIH and NIJ develop an "integrated program of rigorous evaluations" of prevention, intervention, treatment and control strategies.

- Integrating future research on deterring violence against women with broader efforts to study the deterrence of criminal behavior generally. The study recommends studying how potential perpetrators make decisions and how they are affected by sanctioning policies, the social stigma for acts of violence against women, and the links between perceptions of risks of sanctions and behavior. It also calls for research on the links between "intended and actual policy" to examine how sanctions and deterrents to violence are generated and implemented, and to study their impact on crime.

Advancing the Federal Research Agenda concludes, "The committee found that, while much has been accomplished, a great deal of work remains to be done. Federal agencies have made a very promising start in carrying out the research agenda... However, because of the comparatively low level of funding that has been available for rigorous studies on violence against women (compared, for example, with drug abuse and other health or behavioral areas), federal research agencies have tended to fund important but less expensive studies instead of developing the research infrastructure required to support studies on causes of violence against women and the impact of interventions... Therefore, top priority for the immediate future should be given to improving definitions and the quality of data in surveys, conducting longitudinal studies of violence against women, and evaluating theoretically sound prevention and intervention programs."

Advancing the Federal Research Agenda on Violence Against Women is available online through the National Research Council web site, <http://books.nap.edu/catalog/10849.html>.