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Exploring Advocates' Perceptions of Rural and Urban Sexual Assault Survivors' Experiences Seeking Civil Protective Orders

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**Exploring Advocates' Perceptions of Rural and Urban Sexual Assault Survivors'
Experiences Seeking Civil Protective Orders**

A Master's Thesis Presented in
Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

By

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Abstract

Civil protective orders (CPOs) are one of the most utilized legal remedies that exist for sexual assault survivors. While they are available for every survivor in Illinois, a survivor's community context can impact their experience petitioning for a CPO. Prior research with domestic violence survivors suggests that the rurality and urbanicity of a community may impact a sexual assault survivor's experiences seeking a CPO, but little research has been conducted with sexual assault survivors specifically. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of rape crisis center advocates from rural and urban counties across the state of Illinois to determine how community context (i.e., rurality and urbanicity) impacts a sexual assault survivor's experiences seeking a CPO. As part of a mixed methods participatory evaluation of survivors' needs and experiences relating to the civil legal system nine focus groups were conducted with 45 total rape crisis center (RCC) advocates to understand their perceptions of survivors' experiences with the civil legal system. Utilizing analytic induction, this study found that advocates perceived that rural and urban survivors' experiences attempting to obtain a CPO differed. Advocates described a variety of consequences rurality had on survivors' experiences such as rural RCCs and advocates being stretched thin and unable to do as much advocacy at the courthouse as urban advocates, rural counties being slower at adopting and implementing laws related to CPOs and sexual assault, and rural courthouses not having CPO specific courts like their urban counterparts. Advocates also discussed the differences in barriers and facilitators for rural and urban survivors obtaining a CPO. Advocates perceived urban RCC's ability to assist clients with transportation and provide them with referrals to lawyers outside of legal aid as

facilitating survivor's ability to connect with the civil legal system and obtain a CPO. On the other hand, rural advocates felt that confidentiality concerns served as a barrier for survivors' engagement with the civil legal system. Finally, both urban and rural advocates emphasized the importance of community outreach as a facilitator, but they describe different behaviors and goals for their outreach. The findings of this study suggest that rurality has a significant impact on sexual assault survivors' experiences, and rural survivors may experience unique challenges to obtaining a CPO that urban survivors do not. These findings emphasize a need for continued research on the influence of community context on survivor's help seeking experiences and a need for greater standardization of systems across community contexts.

Introduction

Sexual assault is a pervasive problem in the United States. Approximately 44% of women, 51% of transgender men, and 58% of nonbinary individuals who were assigned female at birth will experience a non-consensual sexual encounter within their lifetime (Breiding, 2014; James et al., 2016). Sexual assault is a widespread problem, affecting individuals across different community contexts, and can be perpetrated by intimate and non-intimate partners. A plethora of research has examined rural and urban differences in domestic and intimate partner violence survivors' experiences (Lee & Backes, 2018; Shannon et al., 2006). Extant literature has not focused on sexual assault survivors broadly, including those harmed by an intimate partner and those harmed by a non-intimate partner. Similar rates of sexual violence have emerged for both rural and urban intimate partner violence survivors (Logan et al., 2007). For instance, 30-40% of rural women have experienced an unwanted sexual experience from an intimate partner (DeKeseredy & Joseph, 2006). Women in urban localities have been found to experience comparably high rates of victimization (Rennison et al., 2012). This evidence suggests that sexual assault remains a serious threat in the United States regardless of locality. While sexual assault rates are similar across different community contexts, such as rural and urban communities, the help-seeking experiences of survivors may differ, particularly for survivors harmed by a non-intimate partner.

Kennedy and colleagues (2012) developed a model for sexually victimized women's help-seeking process of attaining formal help. They argue that in addition to one's social location, community context and geographic location can impact a survivor's help-seeking experience and attainment of effective help. Specifically, within a

community, the availability and accessibility of resources greatly influences the help-seeking process and a survivor's ability to have their needs met by the system (Kennedy et al., 2012). In addition to resources, ecological factors such as the quality, quantity, accessibility, and cultural competency of the community's formal support services, can influence the help-seeking and recovery process following violent victimization (Harvey, 1996). Therefore, it is especially important to understand how survivors' community contexts—in this study, the community's rurality or urbanicity, impact their ability to have their needs met by formal support systems, such as the civil legal system.

There are multiple routes survivors of sexual assault may pursue in order to protect themselves from the person who harmed them. Survivors may choose to obtain protective orders through either the civil legal system or the criminal legal system (Ko, 2001). Civil protective orders (CPOs) allow survivors legal recourse without the person who harmed them being arrested or prosecuted in a criminal court. Both civil and criminal orders are issued at the discretion of judges (Kethineni & Beichner, 2009). Civil protective order hearings are often scheduled within a couple of weeks from the initial filing and can provide survivors with legal protection during the high-risk period following an assault, unlike criminal protective orders, which can be significantly delayed due to busy court dockets (Buzawa & Buzawa, 1996; Ko, 2001). Previous research on protective orders has primarily focused on survivors who experience intimate partner violence and/or domestic violence in relation to civil protective orders (DeJong & Burgess-Proctor, 2006; Logan, Shannon, et al., 2005; Moracco et al., 2010). Few studies look at sexual assault survivors' experiences with civil protective orders aside from their effectiveness (Holt et al., 2003; Russell, 2012) and personal attributes, such as marriage

and cohabitation status of the survivor and person who harmed them or the survivor's race, that relate to an individual obtaining an order (Groggel, 2021; Logan et al., 2007).

When survivors interface with the civil legal system in order to obtain a CPO, different resources can impact their experience within the system. For example, a significant resource available to survivors is the assistance of legal aid or access to low-cost or pro bono lawyers to assist with petitioning for a civil protective order (Lee & Backes, 2018). Having a lawyer (whether paid by the survivor or from a legal aid agency) assist with a domestic violence survivor's narrative account of their victimization is associated with a higher likelihood of the order being granted, suggesting that access to a lawyer is an important resource for survivors interfacing with the civil legal system (Durfee, 2009). In communities with few lawyers and underfunded legal aid agencies, survivors may have a difficult time obtaining representation and legal assistance on their cases and therefore have a harder time having their needs met by the civil legal system. This is especially true for survivors of sexual assault in rural communities, where survivors often report wanting a greater availability of knowledgeable lawyers to aid with civil petitions (Annan, 2011). As shown by this example, it is imperative for researchers to study the ways in which community contexts can impact a survivor's help-seeking experience and their ability to have their needs met by formal support systems.

Survivors Help Seeking

Kennedy and colleagues' (2012) help-seeking model outlines how survivors decide to seek effective help from a formal system (e.g., the civil legal system) concerning their sexual victimization. When survivors decide to seek help from a formal support system, they begin with a needs appraisal process in which they identify their

most salient needs (e.g., physical safety, financial support, access to housing) and consider the availability and accessibility of specific services and systems that will meet those needs. Following the appraisal of their needs, survivors choose whether to interface with the specific services and systems. Finally, once survivors interact with the system, survivors assess the extent to which those services and systems helped to meet their needs.

Survivors may experience the help-seeking process differently based on their community context, that is the unique behaviors, norms, and beliefs of the individuals in a community and the geographic and social structures and institutions in place (Kennedy et al., 2012). Within the civil legal system, survivors may face challenges during different phases of the help-seeking process. Previous literature has examined barriers and facilitators survivors experience when attempting to seek help from the civil legal system, but little research has examined the degree to which community context impacts survivors' ability to have their needs met once they are in the civil legal system. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to understand urban and rural sexual assault survivors' experiences seeking a CPO via the civil legal system from the perspective of rape crisis center advocates.

Literature Review

Civil Protective Orders (CPOs)

Given the prevalence of sexual assault in the United States, advocates and feminist activists have worked to develop resources to minimize the harm of sexual assault and meet the needs of survivors. One such resource is civil protective orders (CPOs). CPOs are meant to safeguard survivors from future violence, and they work to

prohibit contact between the offender and the survivor. CPOs are available to survivors of sexual assault, stalking, and domestic violence.

While CPOs have been available since 1994, they rose in popularity following the passage of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). Prior to VAWA's passage, protective orders were only available to survivors with pending divorce cases (Erez, 2002). VAWA allows for survivors, married and unmarried, to pursue protective orders. Civil protective orders are one of the most utilized legal resources used by sexual assault survivors, with approximately 1.5 million CPOs issued every year in the United States (Sorenson & Shen, 2005; Tjaden, 2000).

CPOs in Illinois

CPO provisions differ across state jurisdictions. In Illinois, where this study was conducted, survivors can file a petition for a Civil No Contact Order (CNCO), Domestic Violence Order of Protection (OP), or a Stalking No Contact Order (SNCO) in response to their sexual assault depending on their relationship to the offender and the nature of the harm they experienced. Notably, CNCOs allow for a survivor to file a petition against a non-intimate partner. A CPO can prohibit the offender from contacting the survivor via telephone or other electronic forms of communication and require the offender to stay away from the survivor's home and places the survivor frequents. CNCO and OP protections in Illinois can also extend to the survivor's children and household family members as well as rape crisis center staff the survivor works with (Civil No Contact Order Act, 2004; Illinois Domestic Violence Act, 1986).

CPO Process

Survivors initiate the process for applying for a CPO via the civil legal system, allowing them to control the process (Groggel, 2021). A petition for a CPO can be filed by the survivor *pro se*, without a lawyer. Typically, after filing a petition for a CPO a hearing is scheduled within a week of the initial filing (Buzawa & Buzawa, 1996). While filing for a CPO a survivor can request that specific provisions and protections be added to their order. Common provisions include requirements for child support, temporary protections for children, and that the survivor has access to certain shared financial resources and transportation (Eigenberg et al., 2003; Logan et al., 2007). Before or during the filing process for a CPO, a survivor may choose to seek out and obtain legal representation. Survivors unable to afford their private practice lawyers may choose to contact a legal aid organization. Most legal aid agencies have funds benchmarked to support survivors of sexual and domestic violence (Lee & Backes, 2018). Outside of legal aid, survivors may also search for private practice lawyers who will work *pro bono*, without pay. Lawyers can provide a myriad of services to survivors but are often most utilized to represent the survivor in court and to offer legal advice through the CPO process (Bejinariu et al., 2019).

While survivors have the option to file for a CPO *pro se*, research has shown that having a lawyer present increases the likelihood a CPO will be granted (Bejinariu et al., 2019). Lawyers are especially useful for helping a survivor design a written narrative describing the abuse/violence that took place that is then filed as a part of the CPO application. Judges often prefer narratives that mirror legal reports containing precise descriptions of the abuse rather than a conversational story (Trinch & Berk-Seligson,

2002). Narratives written by lawyers, tend to focus on events that can be legally classified as domestic violence or sexual assault whereas narratives written pro se focus on general details (Durfee, 2009). In one study assessing CPOs for domestic violence survivors, narratives that provide only general details were granted 39% of the time whereas, narratives that contain specific legal details were granted 74% of the time (Durfee, 2009).

When filing for a CPO, a survivor has the option to file for an emergency order of protection or a plenary order of protection. An emergency order is intended to provide protection for the survivor faster than a plenary order. Emergency hearings are held more quickly than a plenary hearing. Judges will grant emergency orders if the survivor is able to show that there is a credible threat from the offender. Emergency orders can be granted for a minimum of a week and a maximum of 21 days. When filing for an emergency order, the offender is not legally required to be informed. The emergency hearing can be conducted *ex parte*, in the interest of only one side. Typically, when an emergency order is granted a hearing for a plenary order is scheduled for a date before the order expires (Civil No Contact Order Act, 2004; Illinois Domestic Violence Act, 1986; Stalking No Contact Order Act, 2010).

Plenary orders allow for the survivor to receive protection for a longer period than emergency orders. Plenary orders do not require that the survivor has received an emergency order, and they can be initiated at any time. Plenary orders – if granted – can last for a period of up to two years, and survivors may petition the court to extend the order as the expiration date approaches. After a petition for a plenary CPO is filed, the offender is notified by the sheriff's office. The offender does not have to be present at the plenary hearing, but they are invited to attend with or without a lawyer. While the

offender does not have to be present for the hearing, the survivor must be present to have their case heard. If the offender does not attend the hearing, a plenary order will be automatically granted (Civil No Contact Order Act, 2004; Illinois Domestic Violence Act, 1986; Stalking No Contact Order Act, 2010).

Unlike criminal protective orders, CPOs require a lower burden of proof. Within the civil legal system, survivors only need a “preponderance of the evidence” instead of “proof beyond a reasonable doubt” (Lucken et al. 2015; Weissman, 2007). In Illinois, the survivor must be able to prove that the offender engaged in a sexual act, not limited to rape, without the survivor’s consent, to obtain a CNCO (Civil No Contact Order Act, 2004). To obtain an OP, the survivor needs to be able to prove that they were physically or sexually harmed or threatened by the offender (Illinois Domestic Violence Act, 1986). Similarly, to obtain an SNCO a survivor must be able to prove that the offended committed two or more acts of stalking (Stalking No Contact Order Act, 2004)). In the civil legal system, judges have the sole authority to determine if this level of evidence is met, and to grant, deny, or extend a CPO.

Empowering Legal Remedy

Civil protection orders are often considered to be a more empowering option for survivors than pursuing a criminal protective order or conviction for sexual assault (Bennett Cattaneo & Goodman, 2010; Eigenberg et al., 2003). The majority of reported sexual assault cases do not lead to a prosecutor filing for charges and those that are filed are subject to lengthy wait times (Ko, 2001; Wentz, 2020). If a survivor attempts to file for a criminal case, there is no guarantee the case will be heard or that the survivor will receive protection (Fields, 2017).

Because CPOs only require a “preponderance of the evidence” rather than “proof beyond a reasonable doubt”, they are more available for survivors who have not previously disclosed their assault. Survivors must only be able to prove that the assault happened “more likely than not” rather than “beyond a reasonable doubt”. Criminal cases often require a police report or a forensic medical exam to confirm a sexual assault took place. A CPO does not require that the survivor has contacted formal supports who can corroborate their assault (Durfee, 2009). Similarly, a CPO does not require a survivor to have a lawyer represent them. This can help make a CPO more attainable than a criminal conviction for survivors who are financially dependent on the offender (Bejinariu et al., 2019).

The initial filing for a CPO is in the complete control of the survivor, and they may choose to do so at any time. Whereas in the criminal justice system, a state’s attorney or prosecutor oversees the initial filing. By allowing the survivor to decide when to initially file for a protective order, they are given back control of the situation (Bejinariu et al., 2019). Filing through the criminal justice system is associated with arrest and no-drop prosecution policies, that may take away the agency of the survivor (Durfee, 2009).

Outcomes and Effectiveness of CPOs

Approximately 50 to 75% of CPO petitions are granted (Durfee, 2009; McFarlane et al., 2004). Despite most survivors being successful in receiving a CPO through the civil legal system, some survivors are not. This is typically due to either judicial decision-making or the survivor withdrawing their petition. In fact, prior research has found that the judge who hears the case is the only significant factor pertaining to the likelihood a

CPO will be granted (Ford et al., 1995). Research on judicial decision-making has primarily focused on different judges (Ptacek, 1999), petitioners (Lucken et al., 2015), and case characteristics and attributes (Agnew-Brune et al., 2017; Durfee & Messing, 2012; Fleury-Steiner et al., 2016; Lucken & Rosky, 2016). However, one study analyzed the role of place in judicial decision-making (Groggel, 2021). Survivors of intimate partner violence (IPV) who file CPO petitions in urban communities are significantly more likely to be granted a CPO than survivors in rural communities (Groggel, 2021). This suggests that community context, in this case, the rurality and urbanicity of a community, can impact the likelihood a CPO is granted for sexual assault survivors.

When survivors are not granted CPOs, they often experience negative consequences as a result. One study found that IPV survivors who do not receive CPOs are more likely to experience revictimization than survivors who do obtain a CPO (Gist et al., 2001). This is particularly salient for IPV survivors whose petitions are denied via judges rather than through survivors withdrawing their petitions (Gist et al., 2001). Additionally, domestic violence survivors whose petitions are denied may face other legal consequences such as loss of child custody (Wallin & Durfee, 2020). For survivors who withdraw their petitions, they often attribute this to the CPO process being “too much of a hassle” (McFarlane et al., 2004).

For those who are granted CPOs, CPOs are found to be effective in preventing the revictimization of survivors of intimate partner violence, (including sexual assault and other forms of violence committed by an intimate partner and/or household member). IPV survivors who are granted CPOs often have less contact with the offender and experience lower levels of physical and sexual violence than survivors who are not

granted orders (Messing et al., 2017). Literature suggests survivors of IPV, but particularly sexual assault within IPV, report a vast array of psychological benefits to receiving a CPO such as reduced post-traumatic stress disorder and depression symptomology and an overall increased sense of safety and security than before they had the order (Bennett Cattaneo & Goodman, 2010; Wright & Johnson, 2012). Similarly, CPOs are also found to significantly reduce stalking and domestic violence survivors' fear of the person who harmed them (Logan & Walker, 2009). In addition to providing therapeutic benefits, receiving a CPO is also associated with IPV survivors feeling an increased sense of empowerment (Bennett Cattaneo & Goodman, 2010). IPV survivors reported feeling validated by the court acknowledging their victimization and the offender's wrongdoing (McFarlane et al., 2004).

Despite evidence suggesting that CPOs can be effective in reducing revictimization, several studies have found that half of offenders violate CPOs granted against them for domestic violence and stalking cases (Logan & Walker, 2009; Logan & Walker, 2010). Contrary to Logan and Walker's (2009, 2010) findings, a meta-analysis of 32 studies on CPO violations for stalking cases found that 60% of CPOs are not violated (Spitzberg, 2002). Another meta-analysis of 150 CPOs found that 56% of survivors of intimate partner violence did not experience CPO violations during an 18-month period following the initial application for a CPO (McFarlane et al., 2004). Survivors who experience CPO violations often experience a significant decrease in the severity of violence suggesting that even when violated CPOs remain an effective tool for protecting survivors (Logan & Walker, 2010). This is especially true for domestic

violence survivors living in rural counties, as more survivors in rural counties report CPO violations than survivors in urban counties (Logan, Shannon, et al., 2005).

Enforcement of CPOs can vary greatly across jurisdictions within and between states (Logan, Shannon, et al., 2005; Logan & Walker, 2009). For example, one study found that CPOs filed against intimate partners were enforced at greater rates in urban counties than in rural counties (Logan & Walker, 2009). Survivors in rural counties reported more CPO violations than survivors in urban counties, however, CPO violations in rural counties led to fewer arrests, prosecutions, and convictions for violations. This is perhaps due to a disparity of resources available to rural and urban localities. In rural localities for example, there are often less police available to enforce CPOs and more distance for police officers to cover (Logan & Walker, 2009).

The Impact of Community Context

Communities have unique characteristics that impact survivors' ability to seek out and obtain effective help that meets their needs. Each community has unique features, such as their geography and their social structures. Different community-level factors such as community norms and access and availability of resources can shape a survivor's experience interacting with a formal support system (e.g., the civil legal system) (Kennedy et al., 2012). This suggests that when interacting with the civil legal system, whether during the initial petitioning for a CPO or hearing to receive a CPO, a survivor's community context may impact their experience within the civil legal system and the likelihood their CPO is granted.

Urban and Rural Differences

One factor that is greatly studied in intimate partner violence and protective order literature is rural versus urban contexts. The experiences of rural and urban survivors seeking CPOs may differ given their community contexts (Logan, Shannon, et al., 2005). Previous research has focused on urban and rural differences in the availability and accessibility of effective help for domestic violence survivors, particularly focusing on domestic violence survivors and their ability to obtain protective orders (Logan, Shannon, et al., 2005). Logan and colleagues (2005) found that domestic violence survivors living in rural communities are less likely to have emergency CPOs granted than survivors living in urban communities and that CPOs are enforced to a lesser extent in rural communities. Additionally, rural survivors of partner violence faced unique barriers such as confidentiality concerns and limited access to resources that urban survivors did not report (Logan, Evans, et al., 2005). This suggests that sexual assault survivors may experience differences in their engagement with the civil legal system depending on the rurality and urbanicity of their community.

Several studies have examined the availability of specialized services for sexual assault, domestic violence, and intimate partner violence. It has been consistently found that rural communities have less specialized services and providers (e.g., advocates, lawyers, and mental and physical health providers) than urban communities (Eastman & Bunch, 2007; Peek-Asa et al., 2011; Zielewski & Macomber, 2008). When sufficient low and no-cost services do not exist, survivors with low economic power, or those whose funds are held by the person who harmed them, may not be able to have their needs met by the system (Bach et al., 2021). In rural communities, domestic violence survivors are

more likely to have unmet needs than urban survivors due to differences in funding for services designed for domestic violence survivors (Iyengar & Sabik, 2009). This evidence suggests that rural and urban sexual assault survivors may have different experiences petitioning for and utilizing a CPO through the civil legal system. Below different factors that potentially impact sexual assault survivors' experiences seeking a CPO are discussed.

Availability of Specialized Services and Providers. Rural areas tend to have fewer resources available to survivors overall than urban communities (Edwards, 2015). Rural services and resources are associated with not only high costs, but a lack of quality service providers as well (DeLeon et al., 2003). Urban areas tend to have more services and resources available to survivors than rural areas, which can lead to urban survivors utilizing more resources overall than rural survivors. With greater options of resources, urban survivors are more likely to rely on the help of other supports like Alcoholics Anonymous and police rather than rape crisis centers and legal services (Shannon et al., 2006).

Lawyers. Lawyers in rural and urban areas can provide invaluable support for survivors, through donating their time and legal expertise to survivors who are unable to afford representation. Pro bono lawyers are far and few between, forcing survivors to rely on legal aid or lawyers for a fee (Daigle et al., 2019). Access to lawyers can greatly vary between urban and rural communities. Urban communities, in general, tend to have more lawyers than rural communities, and more lawyers that specialize in the legal needs of survivors (Pruitt et al., 2018). For survivors in rural communities, there is not only a lack of accessible lawyers, but there is a greater chance the lawyers available have represented

abusers in the past, which can discourage survivors from working with them (Statz et al., 2022). Similarly, some survivors of rape within the criminal justice system prefer to work with lawyers who are women, however, in rural communities, it can be challenging to find lawyers of the survivors' preferred gender to work with (Logan, Evans, et al., 2005).

Legal representation can greatly impact the likelihood a CPO is granted and survivors' feelings about their experience within the civil legal system. Survivors report that having legal representation allowed them to feel fully heard by the court (Hefner et al., 2021). This evidence suggests that legal representation can greatly impact a survivor's experience in the civil legal system and the likelihood their CPO is granted.

Police. While filing a police report for CPOs is not necessary, police are utilized for enforcing CPOs. They can serve as the first point of contact for some survivors who report their sexual assaults. In rural communities, survivors have previously noted the long police response times are a significant barrier to obtaining effective help in response to their sexual assault (Logan, Evans, et al., 2005). Urban survivors are more likely to utilize the police than rural survivors, and urban survivors are more likely to be referred to rape crisis centers and legal services by police (Shannon et al., 2006).

Funding for and Availability of Advocates. Sexual assault survivors commonly work with rape crisis center advocates for a variety of reasons including court accompaniment, safety planning, meeting survivors' extralegal needs (e.g., emotional support, referrals to other social support services), and centering the survivor as the decision-maker in the CPO process (Costello & Durfee, 2020). Advocate aid and support during the CPO process has been found to marginally increase the likelihood a CPO will be granted (Durfee, 2009). Without sufficient funds to pay rape crisis center advocates,

the benefits of advocates may be minimized. For example, without adequate funding for advocates to cover a specific geographic area, outreach can be affected. This is particularly salient in rural communities that typically have less access to grants and public funds to support rape crisis centers and advocacy services (Eastman & Bunch, 2007; Eastman et al., 2007; Swindell & Kercher, 2009). Advocates will often attend court proceedings with survivors. Having an advocate present is associated with an increased likelihood that a CPO will be granted (Bejinariu et al., 2019). However, without adequate funding advocates may not be able to fully support each survivor they work with (Costello & Durfee, 2020; Johnson et al., 2014; Maier, 2011).

Geographic Isolation and Transportation. The services and resources that do exist for rural survivors are often spread thin across large geographic areas. Geographic isolation can contribute to rural survivors facing unique barriers to seeking and obtaining effective help (Annan, 2011). Survivors are often required to travel back and forth between rape crisis centers, courthouses, and lawyers' offices while attempting to obtain a CPO, particularly if they initially file for an emergency order and then later for a plenary order. Rural survivors often have greater service needs than urban survivors, particularly related to transportation (Grossman et al., 2005). In some areas, particularly rural localities, a lack of public transportation may impact a survivor's ability to receive the help they need. Domestic violence survivors in rural communities often cite a lack of transportation options as a substantial barrier to accessing support services (Logan, Evans, et al., 2005).

In geographically isolated and dispersed areas, long travel times serve as a barrier to accessing services (Annan, 2011). Rural survivors often travel three times as far as

urban survivors to access services in relation to their assault (Peek-Asa et al., 2011). Transportation challenges are not limited to rural survivors. Survivors who live within urban localities also face issues, particularly survivors living in poverty. Despite the presence of public transportation in urban communities, high costs can prevent economically disempowered survivors from accessing transportation (Macy et al., 2010). These transportation challenges can make it difficult for survivors to navigate the civil legal system and have their CPO granted.

Small Networks and Community Norms. Rural communities are often characterized by small social networks and close connections between community members, particularly if the rural community is geographically isolated. Small county and population size coupled with the close proximity of friends and family can result in rural survivors facing unique privacy concerns. Previous research has found that in the context of mental health care, rural clients assumed they confidentially would be breached (Helbok, 2003). Within the criminal justice system, rural survivors also reported confidentiality concerns as a barrier to connecting with the criminal justice system (Logan, Evans, et al., 2005).

In addition to fears about confidentiality, rural survivors have expressed that community norms that endorse victim blaming negatively impacted their help-seeking process (Annan, 2011). One study found that more rural survivors reported withdrawing their petition for a CPO than urban survivors in part due to mistreatment by court staff and legal system actors (Logan, Shannon, et al., 2005). The extent to which victim blaming and rape myths are the norm in a community, can not only impact survivors' disclosures but also their experience interacting with civil legal system actors.

Interorganizational Collaboration within Communities. Morenoff, Sampson, and Raudenbush (2001) suggest that preventing and responding to violence within a community is primarily achieved through social relations enmeshed in complex networks of inter-organizational and interpersonal relationships within geographically bounded spaces (i.e., communities). Rural communities often have different social structures and networks than urban communities, which may affect interorganizational collaboration.

Despite the general assumption that urban areas have more resources and are therefore better at responding to the needs of survivors, one study found that the specialized service providers in rural areas experience fewer bureaucratic burdens than non-rural areas (Annan, 2011). This is perhaps due to rural communities being more tight-knit than urban counties, and rural communities having smaller social networks that allow for greater communication between service providers (Annan, 2011).

Collaborations between organizations and systems that respond to the needs of survivors are an effective tool for streamlining service delivery for survivors (Levine, 2018). Survivor advocates and rape crisis centers can serve as important stakeholders in creating collaborations and social networks between different survivor support services. This has been studied primarily with respect to their collaborations with sexual assault nurse examiners and police (Wegrzyn et al., 2022). Advocates have reported that they go out of their way to establish relationships with other organizations and providers with the hope that collaborations will lead to better outcomes for survivors (Long, 2018). Within the criminal justice system, advocates have played an important role in fostering social networks and intervening on survivors' behalf to make sure their needs are being met (DiNotto et al., 1989).

However, sometimes by challenging other providers, negative, combative relationships develop. For example, due to issues of control and power exhibited by law enforcement, advocates, particularly in rural communities, tended to perceive the police as unwilling to work with them and excluding them from interviews and court proceedings (Rich & Seffrin, 2013; Sudderth, 2006). Similarly, police have reported not wanting to work with advocates as equal partners and desiring to maintain sole control over the survivor's case (Carmody, 2006). Low trust between police and advocates has negatively impacted survivors as the two providers are unable to work together effectively in the context of the criminal justice system (Murphy et al., 2011).

Previous research has not examined how rural and urban contexts differ related to advocates efforts to coordinate with other sexual assault service providers in the context of the civil legal system. However, the differences in rural and urban social networks suggest that advocates ability to form social networks and work collaboratively within the civil legal system to support survivors during the CPO process may operate differently in rural versus urban communities.

Rationale

The impact of community context, whether the result of different geographic factors or social structures, has been shown to play a significant role in survivors' help-seeking experiences and their ability to have their needs met (Kennedy et al., 2012). Previous research has shown that rural and urban contexts can greatly impact a domestic and intimate partner violence survivors' experiences. Despite rates of sexual assault being equivalent across rural and urban communities, outcomes for survivors can differ (Edwards, 2015).

Rural domestic violence survivors are less likely to have their CPO petition granted and are also less likely to have their order enforced to the same extent as urban survivors (Logan, Shannon, et al., 2005; Logan & Walker, 2009). Rural survivors of sexual assault within IPV and DV also face unique challenges in seeking a CPO. These challenges include limited access to specialized services and providers, lack of legal representation, long police response times, lack of public transportation, concerns about confidentiality and privacy, community norms that endorse victim blaming, and tight-knit social networks (Annan, 2011; Logan, Evans, et al., 2005; Logan, Shannon, et al., 2005). Together these challenges can make it difficult for rural survivors to obtain CPOs and to feel safe after experiencing violence. However, little research has examined how the context of a community impacts sexual assault survivors', outside of domestic violence and intimate partner violence, ability to have their needs met when seeking a civil protective order through the civil legal system.

Research on survivors interfacing with the civil and criminal legal system tends to focus broadly on intimate partner violence and domestic violence rather than sexual assault. This narrow focus potentially leaves out the perspectives of survivors who have been harmed by a non-intimate partner. This leaves out the unique experiences of survivors harmed by a non-intimate partner including but not limited to family members, strangers, coworkers, and casual acquaintances. By focusing broadly on sexual assault survivors, this study addressed this gap in the literature. It is imperative that we understand the experiences of all survivors, not just survivors harmed by an intimate partner.

Literature on the experiences of survivors tends to aggregate the experiences of sexual assault survivors within IPV and domestic violence survivors experiences (Lee & Backes, 2018; Shannon et al., 2006). As such, little is known about the experiences of sexual assault survivors who do not experience domestic or intimate partner violence. Despite evidence indicating that sexual assault survivors interact with the civil legal system, research has not examined the unique experiences of sexual assault survivors within the civil legal system (Bouffard et al., 2017).

This study examined the perceptions of rape crisis center advocates from rural and urban counties across the state of Illinois to determine how community context impacts a sexual assault survivor's experience seeking a CPO. Advocates work closely with survivors throughout their cases allowing them unique insight to survivor's experience. Findings from this study will help to illuminate how rurality and urbanicity impact survivors' ability to obtain CPOs. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine how rape crisis center advocates perspectives on how rurality and urbanicity impact a sexual assault survivor's experience seeking a CPO.

Research Questions.

The proposed study used qualitative methodology to analyze nine focus groups comprised of rape crisis center advocates in the state of Illinois to answer the following research questions:

1. How do advocates perceive that survivors' experiences attempting to obtain a CPO via the civil legal system differ across rural and urban contexts?

2. What do advocates perceive to be the differences in barriers and facilitators for rural and urban survivors obtaining a CPO?

By using qualitative research, the researcher was able to capture a deeper understanding of advocates' experiences working with sexual assault survivors who have civil legal needs. To date, there is a lack of research that has examined how community context, that is the rurality and urbanicity of a community, affects sexual assault survivors' experiences seeking and obtaining a CPO through the civil legal system specifically. A qualitative exploration of sexual assault survivors' experiences with the civil legal system and obtaining a CPO is needed to build an empirical base for future research.

Method

Participants

Nine qualitative focus groups were conducted with a sample of 45 rape crisis center (RCC) staff in the state of Illinois to examine legal advocates' perceptions of the civil legal system and sexual assault survivors' civil legal needs. Focus groups ranged in size from four to seven participants. RCC staff members were eligible to participate if they met the following criteria: 1) be 18 years of age or older, 2) speak English, and 3) work or volunteer at an Illinois RCC. Out of the 45 RCC staff members who consented, 44 participated in the focus groups, and 38 responded to demographic survey questions.

Out of those 38 participants, 25 identified as White (65.8%), seven identified as Black (18.4%), seven identified as Latinx (18.4%), and one identified as Native American (2.8%). 34 participants identified as women (89.5%), two identified as men (5.3%), and one identified as nonbinary (2.6%). Most RCC staff members ranged in age

from 18-34 years old (65.8%, $n = 25$) and have served in their role for 4.63 years on average ($SD = 6.65$ years). See Table 1.

Thirty-three participants indicated during the focus groups which rape crisis center they represented and five did not. Therefore, data from these five participants were not included in the study. The researcher researched the county the rape crisis center was in and coded it as rural or urban, using the U.S. Census Bureau's definition of rurality. Rurality is defined as a county that is not part of a metropolitan statistical area (MSA) or as county that is part of an MSA but has a population fewer than 60,000. See Table 1. Based on the county the rape crisis center was in, as well as explicit statements made during the focus groups indicating their community context, 11 advocates (28.9%) were identified as rural and 22 were identified as urban (57.9%).

Procedure

Recruitment.

This study was conducted in partnership with the Illinois Coalition Against Sexual Assault (ICASA), a network of RCCs across the state of Illinois. A member of ICASA sent out an email to coalition members informing the advocates of the present study and inviting them to participate during one of ICASA's regular regional or statewide advocacy meetings.

Focus Group Procedures.

Five focus groups were conducted at five previously scheduled regional advocacy meetings for participant convenience. In addition, a statewide advocacy meeting open to RCC staff across the state of Illinois was held via Zoom, and four focus groups were conducted during that meeting. Participation in the focus groups was voluntary and RCC

staff and the state coalition ICASA were not informed of who chose to participate. Focus groups were conducted after the conclusion of the pre-existing meeting. Staff members who did not wish to participate were allowed to leave without penalty.

At the beginning of each focus group, the moderator explained the purpose of the study and that the research team was independently collecting the data separate from ICASA. All participants were thanked for participating and reminded that the focus groups were confidential. Participants were instructed to not discuss any confidential communications made to them by RCC clients or to disclose anything said by other participants.

Consent forms were distributed to all participants. Participants in the in-person focus groups were provided with physical forms to initial, and the participants in the zoom-based focus groups were directed to a digital form. The consent form detailed the purpose of the study, participation requirements, confidentiality, and the potential risks and benefits of participating. All questions and concerns were answered by the moderator before the start of the focus group.

Following the informed consent process, the moderator audio-recorded the focus groups with the participants' permission. Focus groups lasted on average two hours ($M = 146.11$ minutes; $SD = 15.60$ minutes). Focus groups were conducted by research team members trained in qualitative methodologies and familiar with the civil legal system and sexual assault. Focus group moderators proceeded with interviewing participants using a semi-structured qualitative interview guide (see Appendix A). Moderators asked follow-up probes to clarify participants' answer and obtain more detailed information (e.g., what

types of protective orders (i.e., CNCO, OP, SNCO) and lawyers (i.e., private practice for a fee, pro bono, legal aid) advocates were discussing).

The interview guide was created in collaboration with representatives from the community partner, ICASA, and the research team. The interview questions were developed from Kennedy and colleagues' (2012) model of survivors' processes to attain formal help following sexual assault. The interview guide was designed to assess RCC advocates' perceptions of sexual assault survivors' civil legal needs and experiences in the civil legal system in Illinois. This includes survivors' ability to access and obtain legal representation, barriers, and facilitators to connecting with the civil legal system, and the ability for survivors to have their needs met within the civil legal system. Focus group questions include (see Appendix A for full interview guide):

1. What types of legal representation, if any, do you refer clients to? Why or why not? What are barriers to clients obtaining legal representation?
2. What role does either obtaining or not obtaining legal representation play in how helpful the civil legal system is for a client?
3. What are other barriers to survivors connecting to the civil legal system?
4. For clients that do seek help from the civil legal system, how helpful do you think the civil legal system is at meeting their needs? Why?
5. For those clients that do connect with the civil legal system, what are barriers to getting their needs met?

Following the completion of the focus group, the audio recording was stopped, and participants were invited to fill out physical or digital copies of a closing survey. The closing survey asked participants to report their demographic information, as well as

some closing questions related to their experiences with supporting survivors in the civil legal system.

Focus groups were transcribed verbatim. If participants stated their own or another participant's name, their name was removed from the transcripts. Once completed, transcripts were reviewed for accuracy and corrected by a research team member who did not work on the initial transcription.

Data Analysis.

Analytic induction was utilized to analyze the focus group transcripts. The analyst engaged in an inductive process to closely examine the body of data and develop assertions. Assertions are credible and trustworthy observational statements informed by confirming and disconfirming evidence in the data (Erickson, 1986). Assertions were tested and amended until they were adequately supported by the entirety of the data. This study utilized one analyst. As such, analytic induction is an appropriate method to establish quality, rigor, and trustworthiness, because it allowed the analyst to consider how they may be wrong in their interpretations of the data (Maxwell, 2012).

Analytic induction is comprised of six steps as outlined by Cressey (1953) and Erikson (1986): 1) The phenomena in question is initially defined, 2) a hypothesis or assertion is developed, 3) a single instance is evaluated against the assertions to confirm the assertions, 4) if the assertion is not confirmed by the data, the phenomena or the assertions are redefined to include the instance evaluated, 5) additional instances are tested against the assertions and phenomena, 6) iterative testing of instances against assertions are conducted until there are no exceptions.

The analyst began data analysis by closely reading the focus group transcripts and thematically chunking the data utilizing an open coding process as recommended by Saldaña (2021). Excerpts of the focus groups where advocates specifically state their community context and how rurality and urbanicity impact survivors' experiences were examined (e.g., when advocates referred to their community as city or small town or specifically by name). The emerging initial themes informed the development of the initial assertions that address the phenomena in question. Following the development of the initial assertions, the data was examined for disconfirming and confirming instances. Utilizing peer debriefs with their advisor, the analyst systematically tested and redefined the assertions until only well supported assertions remain.

Erikson (1986) outlined examples of inadequate evidence for assertions. These examples include an inadequate amount or variety of evidence, deficient interpretations of the data, inadequate opportunities for disconfirming evidence, and inadequate discrepant case analysis. Through the iterative process of modifying assertions and retesting them, the analyst can arrive at final assertions that are sufficiently supported by the data. By utilizing a method that encourages seeking out discrepant and disconfirming evidence, the analysis continued until a general explanation for all known instances of the phenomena in question was accomplished.

Throughout the analysis process, the analyst sought to fully immerse themselves in the data through multiple close readings of the transcripts to ensure the adequacy of the interpretation (Morrow, 2005). During the analysis, the analyst kept a detailed analytic journal noting any analytic memos, emerging themes, and an audit trail of the progressive testing of assertions. The use of an analytic journal and audit trail can help address

standards of trustworthiness and rigor and lend credibility to the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Morrow, 2005). A clear audit trail of the data analysis can aid in lending dependability and confirmability to the study as well (Lincoln & Guba, 1986).

To support the credibility of this study, the analyst engaged in peer debriefs with their advisor. Together the analyst and their advisor examined the audit trail. Peer debriefers serve as a mirror to the analyst and reflect the analyst's responses to the data (Morrow & Smith, 2000). Peer debriefers work to critique the analyst's interpretations and allow for an alternative point of view to be examined. They may also offer alternative interpretations of the data and external checks of the analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Because this study utilized one analyst, engaging in peer debriefs allowed for the analyst to engage in critical discussion of the data and phenomena in question thus enhancing the rigor (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Critical discussion can illuminate new insights about the data and allow the analyst to clarify their own interpretations of the data (Saldaña, 2021).

Results

Overview

The main goal of this study was to investigate the ways in which rurality and urbanicity impact survivor's experiences seeking a CPO via the civil legal system. Across 9 focus groups comprised of a total of 44 advocates, 7 main assertions emerged and are described in length below. Advocates perceived that rural and urban survivors' experiences attempting to obtain a CPO differed (research question 1). Advocates described a variety of consequences rurality had on survivors' experiences such as rural RCCs and advocates being stretched thin and unable to do as much advocacy at the courthouse as urban advocates, rural counties being slower at adopting and implementing

laws related to CPOs and sexual assault, and rural courthouses not having CPO specific courts like their urban counterparts.

The differences in barriers and facilitators for rural and urban survivors obtaining a CPO were also analyzed (research question 2). Advocates perceived urban RCC's ability to assist clients with transportation and provide them with referrals to lawyers outside of legal aid as facilitating survivor's ability to connect with the civil legal system and obtain a CPO. On the other hand, rural advocates felt that confidentiality concerns served as a barrier for survivors' engagement with the civil legal system. Finally, both urban and rural advocates emphasized the importance of community outreach as a facilitator, but they describe different behaviors and goals for their outreach.

RQ1: How do advocates perceive that survivors' experiences attempting to obtain a CPO via the civil legal system differ across rural and urban contexts?

Assertion 1: Advocates believed urban advocates were able to do more advocacy in courts than rural advocates, because urban counties had more advocates and RCCs than rural counties. Rural counties had fewer overall advocates and RCCs that served multiple counties and jurisdictions.

Across focus groups, advocates discussed their role in providing advocacy for survivors within courthouses. Advocates working out of urban RCCs described being able to form collaboratives with other advocates and RCCs due to multiple centers working within the same jurisdiction. Rural RCCs were unable to form similar collaboratives because rural counties tend to only have one RCC per county. For example, the saturation of RCCs in urban counties, such as Chicago's Cook County,

allowed for RCCs to use their collective voices to advocate for systemic changes for CPOs. One urban advocate said:

We're part of like collaboratives... [we] get together especially in Chicago... We have other RCCs that have to deal with the same courthouse. And so we collaborate with each other to be like, "Man, this is getting out of hand..." And so on a higher level advocates or RCCs are able to collectively... go to the courts and be like, "Yeah, this is a problem for us, so we're going to need you to fix it." And so that's the other piece that, to me, falls under, you know, that advocacy of what we do as a collective.

Similarly in urban communities, advocates felt that urban survivors tended to have greater access to advocates. For instance, one advocate reported that multiple advocates were able to attend court with one survivor. A different advocate perceived this as empowering the survivor more:

Participant 1: So I think that having advocates there really helps. We did that recently, went to a trial and there were multiples of us, and it gave the survivor that strength to get up there and give her testimony and you know feel strong and, you know, be confident with her head held high.

Participant 2: It's a huge empowerment piece.

On the other hand, some rural advocates reported feeling isolated in their jobs. Unlike urban counties and jurisdictions that typically had multiple RCCs serving them, rural areas tended to have fewer RCCs. Often, rural RCCs would serve multiple counties and courthouses. Advocates reported that this contributed to difficulties in scheduling advocacy meetings and attending court hearings with survivors. One rural advocate

shared that she alone covered five separate counties and that the courthouses within those counties were geographically isolated and dispersed:

Not to mention if they're working with us... we cover five counties. There's one advocate. It might be our fault that we can't get [the survivor] in that day because we're already scheduled with other victims. And, you know, we can say that, but the judges usually don't care. It is what it is, and we don't ever want to hold them back... we can't be everywhere. And especially where we're at, there's courtrooms that are an hour away. Two of our counties is one way an hour. So it's not like, "oh, we'll be right there," you know.

These examples illustrate the effect that geographic dispersion and understaffing has on rural survivors. Advocates across focus groups believed that accompanying survivors to court was helpful for survivors seeking CPOs. However, not all rural advocates were able to attend court with their clients due to the distance between courthouses and the overall lack of advocates available. This finding suggests that rural survivors may not have equal access to advocates and court-based advocacy services when compared to urban survivors.

Assertion 2: Rural advocates discussed that their counties' courthouses were slower at adopting and implementing new laws related to sexual assault and CPOs than urban counties.

Rural advocates shared concerns that their counties and courthouses were not adopting and implementing new laws related to CPOs at the same rate as urban counties. Rural advocates attributed this to the fact that their communities were smaller and less populated than urban areas. They believed urban courts were quicker to adopt new laws

as they came into effect. Decisions to implement laws related to sexual assault were described by advocates as “at the whim” of key court personnel. One rural advocate shared that the judges she works with do not tend to grant stalking no contact orders in particular:

We have judges that will never grant stalking no contact orders just because they don't like them. They didn't like the law. They don't like 'em. And they will say that, “I don't like this law.” So I think sometimes when we're maybe out from more populated areas, judges can say things differently than they might in other environments.

This example illustrates the power that judges have in CPO decision making and how personal attitudes and beliefs can impact their decision making. By not granting certain types of CPOs, like stalking no contact orders in this case, some survivors will not have their civil legal needs met.

This issue is particularly salient in rural courthouses, that may have fewer judges with significant experience and knowledge of protective orders than urban courthouses. One rural advocate shared that a judge overseeing a rural jurisdiction was not as familiar with CNCOs as a judge from a larger, urban jurisdiction:

Yes, in obtaining, you know, these orders – or like I said, my judges don't normally do a CNCO, so when they're going and I mean, it's taking them time to- they're reading through everything to make sure “Okay, yeah am I filling this out?” “Yeah, mhm. Mhm.” To where you go to [county] they're used to, you know, maybe a CNCO. They're like, “Okay. Bam, bam, bam--next case.

In addition to judges, rural and urban advocates discussed the influence their prosecutor had on the entire courthouse, including the civil legal system. Prosecutors are typically not involved with civil court proceedings, but in some instances a survivor can request that a prosecutor files a CPO in conjunction with a criminal prosecution where civil procedures will apply to protective order proceedings. If the criminal prosecution results in a conviction, the protective order can be made permanent (725 ILCS 5/112A, 2018). Advocates emphasized that prosecutors working for smaller, less populous counties are slower to implement changes than urban based prosecutors. One rural advocate felt that their courthouse's prosecutor was not correctly implementing new laws. This quote illustrates the decision-making power that prosecutors have and the influence they have on civil legal remedies, such as a CNCO:

We have the new law that comes in effect about in a criminal case if someone is charged with a criminal sexual abuse aggravated such and such, they can get a CNCO that is permanent. They will never have to see them again; it can be permanent. I've had my state's attorney where I'm like "Hey this is a new law," "I ain't doing that. I'm not doing no"—"It's a law. You can do. It will take you 9.5 seconds to say they were convicted guilty, you know, during the sentencing. I would like to add this CNCO into effect." They just won't do it.

As illustrated by this quote, rural advocates felt that smaller rural counties did not implement and enforce new laws related to sexual assault and CPOs at the same rate as urban counties. Decisions to implement certain laws based on the personal beliefs and decisions of judges and prosecutors in rural communities can unfairly impact survivors based on where they file their CPO petition, resulting in some survivors not having their

civil legal needs met. For some survivors, this could potentially lead to their CPO being denied, as shown by the example of a judge never granting stalking no contact orders.

Assertion 3: Urban advocates reported their counties often had specific CPO courts that ran daily, which allowed urban survivors to have greater access to judges familiar with protective order laws. Rural advocates discussed that their counties did not have specific CPO courts and heard cases less frequently.

Advocates discussed that urban and rural courts differed in the frequency they heard CPO petitions, including emergency orders. Advocates described rural courts as being slower to schedule CPO hearings, and that – unlike urban counties – rural counties usually did not have CPO specific courts. One advocate described how across the several rural and urban communities their RCC covers, the scheduling of CPO hearings for emergency and plenary orders differed:

[County 1] has a certain time where they do their orders, but [County 2], you know, for emergencies they don't get heard every day. They have certain days, like one day a week even if it's an emergency/nonemergency-- where you have [City] who every morning from 8:30-9:30 is order of protections.

This example is especially troubling for rural survivors, because emergency orders are meant to protect the survivor while they are waiting for the person who harmed them to be served with a notice of their petition for a plenary CPO. Waiting to schedule emergency hearings for certain days and not hearing them as soon as possible potentially places rural survivors in greater danger than urban survivors whose cases may be heard as soon as they are filed with the circuit clerk.

A possible reason that CPO hearings were only scheduled on certain days in rural jurisdictions is perhaps because rural courthouses did not have CPO specific courts like some urban courthouses. Instead, CPO hearings were heard in a general civil court. One rural advocate discussed the consequences of not having CPO specific courts and judges familiar with CPO laws and trauma informed practices:

I think that's where we have problems out in the rural area, because you go to the bigger cities, and they have specific judges that handle OPs. They're going to know and be more specific on how to work with victims and also understand that dynamic or cycle better. And here, like [other advocate] said, she has four judges to choose from, you know, and there's one county that we do—we're able to choose a specific [judge for] the emergency order that we think will be more victim-centered. And we try to get in front of him. But in our other counties, we don't have that choice.

Advocates in both rural and urban areas discussed the benefits of being able to choose which judge would hear a survivor's case, highlighting the importance of knowledgeable judges. Because CPOs are issued at the sole discretion of the judge, a judge's knowledge of CPOs is an important factor, as is the way the judge treats the survivor. Victim-centered and trauma informed judges were preferred across the board over non-trauma informed judges due to their better treatment of survivors and greater knowledge of CPO laws. However, advocates believed rural survivors did not have as much access to trauma informed and CPO knowledgeable judges as urban survivors who had access to CPO specific courts.

RQ2: What do advocates perceive to be the differences in barriers and facilitators for rural and urban survivors obtaining a CPO?

Assertion 1: While both rural and urban advocates identified transportation as a barrier for survivors, urban RCCs often had funding and contracts in place to provide survivors with transportation to court.

Across the focus groups transportation was identified by advocates as a significant barrier to attempting to obtain a CPO for survivors in both rural and urban counties. Survivors travel between courthouses, lawyers' offices, and RCCs while petitioning for a CPO, placing a heavy burden on those without their own private transportation. This is especially salient for survivors living in geographically dispersed communities, such as rural communities, who must travel greater distances between services.

For rural survivors without access to their own private transportation, few transportation options existed. Unlike urban survivors, rural survivors did not have access to efficient or adequate public transportation. In addition, the RCC they were working with did not have funds or a contract in place to provide transportation. One rural advocate discussed the lack of adequate options for survivors in her county:

Well, um for us... I'm in a rural community. We don't have bus services, um--I mean we do. We have this one that it runs, like uh, not--I mean, it's, like, goes all the way 3 towns like twice a day. So it takes hours and hours, so not real bus services... transportation is a barrier I would say, for us. We don't provide transportation to our clients.

This quote exemplifies the need for either adequate public transportation or funds to help provide transportation for survivors. Even when public transportation does exist in rural communities, advocates felt it may not be sufficient for meeting survivors travel needs.

Contrary to what rural advocates discussed, urban advocates shared that some of their RCCs had either discretionary funds they could utilize for providing transportation or that their RCC had a contract with a transportation service, such as Lyft or Uber, to provide transportation for survivors. One urban advocate described that their “organization can assist with transportation. So, if somebody is having a difficult time getting to the courthouse or something [we] can assist with the transportation.” Another urban advocate went on to discuss how her RCC could provide rideshare vouchers when their budget allowed:

I mean, definitely, we try to help as much as possible with um transportation whenever like our budget allows. Sometimes we, we have like Uber vouchers that we can uh give them and stuff like that... I think it's a big help.

As illustrated by the two urban advocates examples, some urban RCCs were able to assist with transportation when their budget allowed for it. Discretionary funding or contracts with rideshare companies can facilitate survivors access to services and the courthouse. Given that survivors face so many difficulties and challenges while engaging with the civil legal system, providing transportation can ease the burden placed on survivors.

Providing adequate transportation to survivors can not only ease travel burdens, but it can especially help survivors who cannot afford to pay for their own transportation and survivors whose vehicle may be in the possession of the person who harmed them. Advocates found that providing transportation was one simple way they could ease the

burden on survivors, and those in rural communities discussed wishing their RCCs had funds or contracts in place to help survivors.

Assertion 2: In urban counties when survivors were unable to obtain a lawyer via legal aid, advocates were able to identify other organizations they could refer clients to for representation and legal advice.

Advocates reported primarily referring survivors to legal aid for representation. Legal aid organizations provide free representation for civil cases to individuals who lack the resources to hire a lawyer, such as those who live at or below the poverty line. However, advocates described survivors being turned away from legal aid as a common experience across rural and urban communities. Unlike rural advocates who tended to describe legal aid as their only option for survivors, urban advocates had other organizations and individuals they could refer survivors to in the event legal aid would not take their case. These other options typically existed in the form of a list of local lawyers or law clinics hosted by community organizations, which facilitated urban survivors access to lawyers. One urban advocate described having a list of private practice lawyers to refer survivors to:

We do have like a list of local lawyers in the area. They don't necessarily work pro bono. But, a lot of times people are at least relieved, like, well, at least, 'cause like, you know, they're like, I don't even know where to start. I don't know what to do. I don't know where to start. I don't know anything. And it's like, well, if I can't get them in contact with [legal aid agency], then at least let me give you this.

Another urban advocate shared the importance of having community organizations outside of government-funded legal aid agencies, and how her rural coworkers did not have these options:

I think also in [large city], we have access to other like legal agencies that really help us with the civil and I think that makes a big difference. Um, also of like what you're working with. When you have just more of a support system, or more resources around you because we have like staff out in [rural county] where it's not that far, but you go to a different county and getting a pro bono lawyer in [rural county], it's really hard. And so the amount of civil that you would do, I feel like it's in direct correlation with the resources you have to make that happen.

These quotes illustrate how rural and urban survivors have different legal options available to them outside of legal aid services. Lawyers have been found to be especially helpful for survivors seeking CPOs, particularly because they are familiar with legal language and proceedings and can speak on behalf of their clients during court hearings. For survivors in urban areas, greater access to legal services can help facilitate the attainment of a CPO via legal representation.

Assertion 3: Rural advocates identified confidentiality concerns as a reoccurring barrier for survivors that affected transportation options, safety of the survivor, and their experiences attempting to obtain legal representation.

Advocates perceived survivors living in rural counties as facing greater confidentiality concerns than urban survivors. These confidentiality concerns manifested in different ways affecting survivors' sense of safety and their experiences obtaining a CPO. For instance, one advocate discussed how in small rural towns, survivors'

confidentiality may be violated if they utilize public buses that stop in front of RCCs. Further, this can pose a safety risk as the person who harmed them may also be able to see the survivor is accessing RCC services.

Confidentiality concerns also manifested within the courthouse, particularly during CPO hearings. One rural advocate described the small-town nature of their courthouse and how everyone tended to know everyone:

hey are having to relive everything in front of everybody in the court room. Um, and our court rooms get a little full sometimes, so I feel like, just being trauma-informed, but also, um, taking into consideration like their feelings and you know, surroundings. Our town is kinda small and it's like everybody knows everybody.

So chances are someone could be in that court room.

Advocates discussed that some judges would ask survivors to recount their assault in detail, and advocates perceived this as potentially retraumatizing for survivors who are forced to disclose their assault in the presence of their neighbors.

The small-town nature of rural communities is also perceived to affect survivors' ability to obtain legal representation. For instance, one rural advocate discussed how in their community one survivor's criminal history was well known and this impacted lawyers' willingness to represent her as they did not think her CPO would be granted.

Confidentiality concerns such as these were not discussed by urban advocates, suggesting that these concerns were potentially a unique barrier for rural survivors attempting to obtain a CPO. Not only can violations of confidentiality impact a survivor's safety, but it may also lead to survivors not wanting to engage in the process to obtain a CPO.

Assertion 4: While both urban and rural advocates discussed the importance of community outreach, urban advocates stressed networking with other organizations and hosting trainings and rural advocates emphasized spreading awareness of RCC services so community members would know where to get help.

Community outreach was discussed across focus groups as an important aspect of advocates' jobs. However, urban and rural advocates tended to discuss different behaviors and goals for their community outreach. For instance, urban advocates discussed community outreach in the context of networking with other RCCs and social service organizations to coordinate their responses to sexual assault. One urban advocate provided an example of how her community utilized a Sexual Assault Response Team (SART), a community-based team comprised of cross-system stakeholders working to coordinate responses to sexual assault survivors:

We are working on that now, trying to get everybody together so we can all be on one accord. 'Cause that's it, we aren't always... in the same place. So, yeah... I'm from the, like, [urban area], and we do, each month, we have a SART team where we get the SANE nurses, advocates, polices, state's attorneys. So yeah. We, that's what we're trying to do. Trying to make it work. Everybody be on the same page.

Urban advocates focus on discussing conducting community outreach to form collaboratives and SARTs is perhaps related to the saturation of RCCs and other social service organizations in urban areas. Through the formation of SARTs and other collaborations, services for survivors can be streamlined and help facilitate survivor knowledge of and access to the civil legal system.

On the other hand, the lack of saturation and proximity of other social services, possibly contributed to rural advocates discussing the importance of community outreach for making community members aware of what a RCC is and what resources are available to survivors. Rural advocates discussed community outreach as specifically getting out into the community and facilitating community members' awareness of available resources and help. One rural advocate discussed how she conducts outreach by leaving cards for her RCC at businesses:

Dropping cards at doctors' offices, everywhere we go. When we are getting our hair done, we're dropping our cards. You know, 'Here's a couple cards,' and people look at the cards and are like, 'Oh, I need this service,' you know?

Another rural advocate discussed why dropping cards off and being out in the community is important for facilitating survivors' knowledge of potential resources:

We do a lot of work connecting with our community. We're in the schools, we're talking. We are at every agency that we can think of—just everywhere. Our faces are everywhere. We're running around, you know. We're just connecting the people, so that if someone in our community hears, uh, somebody has been sexually assaulted they can say, "Go to [RCC]."

As illustrated by the two quotes from rural advocates, community outreach in rural counties manifested as direct outreach to community members, while the example provided by the urban advocate illustrated how community outreach can also manifest as outreach to other stakeholders to collaborate. Both, rural and urban advocates approach to community outreach was described as facilitating survivors' access to resources and

supports suggesting that community outreach in any form is vital for facilitating survivor access to the civil legal system to obtain a CPO.

Discussion

Prior research examining survivors' experiences seeking and obtaining CPOs has broadly focused on survivors of domestic and intimate partner violence (Bouffard et al., 2017; Lee & Backes, 2018; Logan, Shannon, et al., 2005; Shannon et al., 2006). While research has shown that domestic violence and intimate partner violence survivors face unique challenges based on their community context (i.e., the rurality or urbanicity of their community), the experiences of sexual assault survivors outside of DV and IPV have not been widely examined (Edwards, 2015)

Consistent with findings from survivor populations comprised of DV and IPV survivors, this study found that rurality and urbanicity impacts sexual assault survivors' help seeking experiences, specifically within the civil legal system (Logan et al., 2007; Logan, Shannon, et al., 2005). In general, advocates reported several key differences between rural and urban sexual assault survivors' experiences obtaining a CPO. The findings of this study suggest that rurality has a significant impact on sexual assault survivors' experiences, and rural survivors may experience unique challenges to obtaining a CPO that urban survivors do not.

The findings of the present study are consistent with those of previous research, which documented that rural survivors of DV and IPV face a number of challenges to obtaining a CPO, including a lack of awareness of resources (RQ1: Assertion 1 and RQ2: Assertion 4) (Bouffard et al., 2017; Eastman et al., 2007; Grossman et al., 2005; Logan, Evans, et al., 2005). Prior research has documented that awareness of services is a barrier

for survivors engaging in help-seeking with systems, such as the civil legal system (Bouffard et al., 2017; Kennedy et al., 2012). Consistent with prior literature, in this study rural advocates discussed the need to conduct community outreach to increase community member's awareness of advocacy and civil legal services for sexual assault survivors (RQ2: Assertion 4). On the other hand, urban advocates discussed the importance of conducting community outreach to form community wide collaborations to improve system responses and service delivery (RQ2: Assertion 4). Prior literature examining rape crisis center advocacy services has also documented the need for community outreach to form collaborative relationships with systems and other service providers (Wegrzyn et al., 2022). Within this study, for instance, urban advocates discussed collaborating to collectively advocate for survivors treatment at court, complementing previous findings that advocates worked collaboratively to ensure fair treatment for survivors within the criminal justice system (DiNotto et al., 1989).

This study is also consistent with prior research documenting limited availability of resources for survivors in rural contexts (RQ1: Assertion 1 and RQ2: Assertion 2). Prior research has also found that rural survivors experience particular difficulty in accessing lawyers from legal aid. Specifically, other studies have found that rural legal aid organizations tend to receive less funding than urban legal aid organizations and experience challenges with lawyer attrition, which contributes to rural survivors difficulty in accessing legal aid (Pruitt et al., 2018; Pruitt & Showman, 2014). Research has also found that rural advocates describe a dearth of rape crisis centers and advocates in rural communities stemming from a lack of funding, and that in some instances there were counties without rape crisis centers or centers with only one advocate (Carmody, 2006).

Similarly, in this study, advocates felt that rural survivors were likely to experience challenges in accessing resources, such as legal aid (RQ2: Assertion 2) and RCC advocacy in courthouses (RQ1: Assertion 1), due to the limited availability of these services in rural areas and disparities in funding.

Further, literature examining rural survivors' experiences (Annan, 2011; Grossman et al., 2005; Logan, Evans, et al., 2005) has consistently found transportation is a barrier for rural survivors. Likewise, in the current study, advocates discussed transportation as a significant barrier for rural survivors (RQ2: Assertion 1). However, the current study moves beyond prior literature by demonstrating that some urban service providers were able to provide additional help with transportation for survivors.

Furthermore, confidentiality concerns stemming from the small-town nature of rural communities has consistently been found as a barrier for survivors engaging in help-seeking (Annan, 2011; Logan, Evans, et al., 2005). Advocates in this study also felt that rural survivors expressed confidentiality concerns that urban survivors did not (RQ 2: Assertion 3). This was attributed to the small-town nature of rural communities where everyone knows everyone. Advocates felt that confidentiality concerns were more salient for rural survivors than urban survivors, which can possibly contribute to rural survivors expressing safety concerns and complicate their engagement with the civil legal system. For example, in this study, one advocate reported that the bus line in her community posed a safety risk for survivors traveling to the RCC.

While this study reinforces findings from prior studies of domestic and intimate partner violence, it contributes to the growing body of research on sexual assault survivors. In addition, Assertions 2 and 3 (from RQ1) provide new insights into the

experiences of rural survivors engaging with the civil legal system. Uniquely, rural advocates in this study perceived that rural civil courts were not only slower at adopting new laws relevant to sexual assault but that they did not hear CPO cases as frequently as urban courts. These findings can significantly impact rural survivors' experiences seeking CPOs and potentially impact their safety. Advocates discussed that urban jurisdictions tended to have courts that specifically heard CPO petitions and associated these CPO specific courts with having more knowledgeable judges. However, rural advocates reported that their jurisdictions did not tend to have CPO specific courts. Instead, CPO hearings were held in general civil courts, which contributed to advocates perception that some rural courts had judges who were unfamiliar with CPOs and sexual assault related laws. This finding is similar to the study's finding that rural courts did not implement new sexual assault related laws in a timely manner. Decisions to implement new laws were described as at the whim of judges and state prosecutors. Judges and state prosecutors have significant power in courthouses (Bejinariu et al., 2019). While state prosecutors are typically associated with the criminal justice system, they can have an influence on the civil legal system for survivors engaging with both the civil legal and criminal justice system. Together, these two findings suggest that sexual assault survivors living in rural communities may have different civil legal experiences because of procedural and jurisdictional differences.

Limitations and Future Directions

Despite the findings contributing to our understanding of rural and urban sexual assault survivors' experiences seeking CPOs, the present study had several limitations. First, while advocates were asked to report the RCC that they worked at, they did so

anonymously. Therefore, we were unable to ascertain where specific advocates worked. To determine if advocates worked with rural or urban survivors, we relied on advocates describing their communities during the focus groups to identify rurality and urbanicity. Examination of rural and urban differences was a need that emerged from the data as a relevant issue. Our initial goal was not necessarily to understand rural and urban differences but to understand the impacts of community context. As such, the interview guide used did not directly ask about rural and urban differences. However, through focus group discussion advocates began comparing rural and urban survivors' experiences. Future qualitative examinations of urban and rural differences in survivor's experiences should seek to better document participants' community contexts, rather than relying on descriptors in transcripts and include direct questions about rural and urban differences for discussion.

Another limitation is that this study relied on advocate's perceptions of survivors' experiences. Despite advocates being well-suited to report survivors' experiences, understanding survivors' experiences from their own perspective is also important. It is possible that advocates are not privy to all the complexities surrounding a survivor's experiences. Similarly, because this study utilized the perceptions of rape crisis center advocates, this study did not account for survivors' who did not seek services from a rape crisis center. Researchers should be mindful of not generalizing findings of survivors who work with rape crisis centers and an advocate directly to survivors who do not receive services from a rape crisis center.

Any initiatives to enhance survivors' interactions with the civil legal system may be unsuccessful without direct feedback from survivors. For survivors from marginalized

backgrounds, this is especially important. In this study, the majority of advocates identified as White (n= 25, 65.8%). Historically, survivors of color have reported being wary of rape crisis centers that they perceive as White centered (Macy et al., 2010; Wgliski & Barthel, 2004). Further, previous studies have found that the majority of survivors who receive help from rape crisis centers are White and the survivors of color are not as likely to receive services from a rape crisis center (Martin, 2013; Wgliski & Barthel, 2004). Thus, the experiences of survivors of color may have been obscured. To truly understand survivors' experiences with the civil legal system and how rurality and urbanicity impact these experiences, survivor's social location (e.g., race/ethnicity) must be considered as suggested by Kennedy and collages (2012) model of survivor help-seeking. Future studies assessing differences in community contexts should be mindful of this and seek to assess how survivor's social location impacts their experiences in conjunction with community context.

Finally, our study broadly asked about CPOs despite focusing on sexual assault survivors. While it is possible that sexual assault survivors may seek either a CNCO, OP, or SNCO in the state of Illinois, their experiences may differ based on the type of CPO they are seeking. Often survivors of domestic violence or intimate partner violence work with domestic violence advocates and the funding mechanisms for domestic violence and sexual assault differ. Therefore, future studies should seek to examine differences in survivors' experiences seeking CNCOs versus OPs versus SNCOs. For instance, if a survivor's assault takes place within a relationship, they would need to apply for an OP, whereas if a survivor's assault occurred outside of a relationship, they would need to apply for a CNCO. It is crucial that we understand if and how differences in survivors'

experiences emerge based on type of CPO. Our focus on CPOs in general prevents us from developing a deeper, more focused understanding of how survivors' experiences seeking different forms of CPOs differ.

Implications For Policy and Practice

Despite its limitations, the study has implications for policy and practice. The findings of this study highlight the need for continued research on how community context impacts rural and urban sexual assault survivors help-seeking experiences, particularly within the civil legal system. To date the majority of research has examined rural and urban differences in the context of the criminal justice system or in the context of domestic and intimate partner violence survivors (Logan, Evans, et al., 2005). It is imperative that we understand the unique needs of sexual assault survivors outside of DV and IPV, and the civil legal system then uses this information to address the different needs of sexual assault survivors. Prior studies have aggregated the experiences of sexual assault survivors with DV and IPV survivors potentially overlooking their distinct experiences (Lee & Backes, 2018; Logan, Evans, et al., 2005; Shannon et al., 2006). However, we should not assume that DV and IPV survivors have the same experiences as those sexually assaulted outside of intimate relationships. Incorporating the viewpoints of sexual assault survivors is essential for any attempts to modify the civil legal system's response to survivors' legal needs.

The findings from this study suggest that there is continued need to build a literature base for sexual assault survivors in rural areas. This study demonstrates that rurality does impact sexual assault survivors' experiences and rural survivors experience unique barriers when compared to urban survivors. For instance, the finding that

advocates perceived rural courthouses as being slower to implement new sexual assault related laws illustrates the need for researchers to consider community context.

Advocates across jurisdictions described how differences in procedures and in individual civil legal system actors' behaviors confused not only survivors, but advocates as well, contributing to survivors' difficulty navigating the civil legal system. Further, inconsistencies across jurisdictions complicated advocates ability to best advocate for their clients and connect them with services that meet their needs, suggesting a need for greater standardization across jurisdictions.

Advocates described several areas in need of standardization. For example, one area for greater standardization across jurisdictions may be providing all survivors the option to attend remote, virtual hearings (e.g., zoom hearings). In this study, advocates discussed how only some courts allowed for remote hearings. Remote hearings may facilitate access to the civil legal system for survivors facing transportation difficulties and particularly for rural survivors where resources are geographically dispersed. Another area for standardization may be in how judges conduct CPO hearings. Advocates described how some judges required survivors to read the narrative account of their victimization out loud at court, while others did not. Further, rural advocates revealed that in some rural courts, emergency CPO hearings were not heard at the same frequency as in urban courts. There is significant need for standardization in the frequency petitions are heard, as discrepancies may lead to rural survivors encountering greater safety concerns than urban survivors whose petitions were heard at a greater frequency. In general, greater standardization may facilitate advocates ability to aid survivors in meeting their civil legal needs.

Advocates also felt that there is a significant need for increased funding for rural rape crisis centers and legal aid organizations that serve sexual assault survivors. Many of the barriers that advocates perceived stemmed from a lack of sufficient funding. For example, advocates discussed that rural RCCs did not have funds to assist with transportation like urban RCCs and they expressed a desire for a similar funding mechanism. Similarly, advocates described a need for legal aid agencies to receive greater funding, as they currently cannot agree to represent all survivors in need of their services due to a lack of funding and understaffing. Increased funding for legal aid agencies may lead to these organizations being able to represent more survivors and survivors with more complex cases. In the absence of increased funding for legal aid agencies, additional funding for RCCs to aid survivors in obtaining their own lawyer may suffice. Further, additional funding for RCCs to provide additional training and technical assistance on writing survivors narrative accounts of their victimization in legal language may help survivors who are unable to obtain their own representation. In turn, these increases in funding may facilitate advocates' ability to help advocate for and meet the civil legal needs of survivors.

Finally, advocates emphasized a need for formal mechanisms for networking with private practice lawyers. Rural advocates often expressed a desire for ways to connect with lawyers in order to create a list of local lawyers that survivors can reach out to. Formal opportunities to meet legal service providers may help increase survivors' access to legal representation, particular for those survivors who are ineligible for legal aid.

Taken together, the overall findings of this study emphasize the need for researchers to better understand how community context differences, in this case rural

and urban differences, manifest for sexual assault survivors outside of the context DV and IPV. This is particularly relevant for rural survivors who advocates perceived as experiencing unique barriers that complicated their interactions with the civil legal system. Further research is needed to continue to understand the unique experiences of sexual assault survivors seeking CPOs within the civil legal system and how community context impacts these experiences.

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Table 1: Advocate Demographics

<i>Advocate Demographics</i>		
Demographics	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Female	34	89.5
Male	2	5.3
Non-binary	1	2.6
Race/Ethnicity		
White	25	65.8
Black	7	18.4
Latinx	7	18.4
Native American	2	2.8
Community Context		
Rural	11	28.9
Urban	22	57.8
Did Not Say	5	13.2

Note. $N = 38$. Advocates were on average 18-34 years old (65.8%, $n = 25$) and have served in their role for 4.63 years on average ($SD = 6.65$ years).

Appendix A: Focus Group Interview Guide

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW

For this focus group, some of you may have similar experiences and some may be very different. Keep in mind there are no right or wrong answers. We are just interested in your honest perceptions.

From past experiences in groups like these we know some people talk a lot, and some people don't say much. I really want to hear from all of you because you've had different experiences. So if you are talking a lot, I may interrupt you and if you aren't saying as much, I may call on you. We have a lot to cover here today and it's just my way of making sure we get through all the questions and that everyone has a chance to talk. For the following questions, we are asking you to think about your experiences working with survivors of sexual assault through your center on civil legal issues during approximately the past 3 years in the state of Illinois. This timeframe begins [insert month/year], so it includes experiences both prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic. We understand that some of you may not have been working with your rape crisis center or in this field for three years and that is okay, just speak to your experience since you began.

note to focus group facilitator: make sure to probe about particular protective orders when they come up (i.e., OP, CNCO, SNCO)

[This list will be on a flipchart for study participants to view:

- Protective orders
 - Orders of Protection (OP)
 - Civil No Contact Order(CNCO)
 - Stalking No Contact Order(SNCO)
- Housing Issues (Safe Homes Act/SHA)
- Employment Issues
 - Victim's economic safety and security act (VESSA)
 - Equal Employment Opportunity Commission(EEOC)
 - Human Rights Act Complaints (HRA)
- Civil lawsuits
- Immigration issues
 - U VISA
 - T VISA
- Title IX or SVHE Act (sexual abuse or harassment in education settings)

1) Here we have a list of civil legal issues survivors may need addressed. :

- a. Thinking of civil legal issues you help survivors address (either with referrals and/or other advocacy), are there any issues missing from this list?
 - b. Which, if any of these issues listed are rarely requested?
 - i. *Probe:* Why do you think that is?
- 2) How do clients you work with learn about the civil legal system and civil legal options? (*Note to facilitators:* options refers to protective orders, civil suits, addressing employment, housing and immigration issues, title IX; addressing sexual abuse and harassment in education, etc.)
- a. What options, if any, are clients aware of before connecting to your agency?
 - b. What options, if any, are clients generally not aware of?
- 3) Next we'd like you to tell us about what it is like helping clients obtain legal representation. To be clear, when we say legal representation, we mean a lawyer formally representing a client on some issue, not just having a meeting or initial conversation. (*Note to facilitator:* This might include things like writing a letter on the survivor's behalf, representing the survivor in a petition to the court or a court hearing.)
- a. What types of legal representation, if any, do you refer clients to? Why or why not? *If not discussed, ask about:*
 - i. Reasons for referring/not referring to a pro-bono attorney, legal aid agency, or paid private practice lawyer
 - b. What are barriers to clients obtaining legal representation?
 - i. *Probe on: Private practice paid lawyer, Pro-bono attorney, Legal aid agency*
 - c. What helps clients obtain legal representation?

Probe on: Private practice paid lawyer; Pro-bono attorney; Legal aid agency

- 4) We would like you to think about the process you go through once you or your client has identified a need that falls within the scope of the civil legal system...We've already discussed barriers to helping them get legal representation.
- a. What are **other** barriers to survivors connecting to the civil legal system (other than what you have already discussed)? (**facilitator notes: these are things related to access or getting the process going e.g., online forms, transit, childcare, etc.**)

What helps survivors connect to the civil legal system (other than what you have already discussed)?

- 5) For clients that do seek help from the civil legal system, how helpful do you think the civil legal system is at meeting their needs? Why?
 - a. How do you think clients feel about the overall process? Why? (*if this was unclear, facilitator could say: e.g., would they recommend that other survivors in a similar situation go through it? Why or why not?*)
- 6) We already talked about some barriers to *connecting* with the civil legal system. For those clients that do connect with the civil legal system, what are barriers to *getting their needs met*? (*facilitator notes if unclear: what makes the system less helpful? e.g., judge engaging in victim blaming, survivor is unable to attend hearing*)
 - a. *Note to facilitator, optional if low on time:* What are barriers you feel you are able to help or provide support with, and what are barriers you feel unable to assist with?
- 7) For those clients that do connect with the civil legal system, what helps get their needs met?
- 8) What role does either obtaining or not obtaining legal representation play in how helpful the civil legal system is for a client?
 - a. *If time:* Are there any circumstances where legal representation is not helpful or necessary in your opinion?
- 9) How does your role in helping clients with civil legal issues differ when the client does vs. does not have legal representation?
 - a. How do you feel about that?
 - b. What, if anything, would you like to change about your role in helping clients on civil legal options?
- 10) *If not addressed already:* Next, I'd like you to think specifically about times you helped clients with a protective order (including CNCOs, OPs & SNCOs). *Note to facilitator: ensure answers address all three and not just OPs*
 - a. How do you feel about the process? (e.g., smooth vs. difficult)
- 11) *Ensure this is asked in all groups:* How, if at all, does the experience of clients attempting to get a protective order differ when both parties have a lawyer vs. the offender has a lawyer and the survivor doesn't?
- 12) Thinking again about all civil legal options, not just protective orders, what are some of the outcomes or impacts of clients' interactions with the civil legal system? In other words, how does interacting (or not interacting with the civil legal system) affect clients?
 - a. *If not covered:* How if at all, does legal representation change the effect of the civil legal system on clients?
- 13) Now to wrap up, we'd like to know what else, if anything, could be improved in Illinois to better help survivors get their civil legal needs met?