An overview of evaluation in the VAW sector

CELESTE KOENS AND PETER NINNES

This guide provides a brief overview of evaluation concepts, frameworks and skills, with key pointers to planning, data collection and analysis, and reporting and uptake.
For more detailed information on these topics see the BetterEvaluation Rainbow Framework.[1]

What is evaluation?

Evaluation is a process for deciding how well a project or initiative went. It allows you to track and learn from the experience of implementing a program. It also provides you with information about how well the intended project outcomes were achieved.

Many practitioners and service providers already observe which practices or processes work well and which outcomes are being achieved. Evaluation provides an opportunity to document such observations in a systematic way in order to make judgements about program effectiveness and future program development.[2]

Evaluations will typically occur at key points throughout the program, for example halfway through the program and at the end of the program. Monitoring, on the other hand, is an ongoing process of collecting data to ensure the program is on track with its activity implementation and achieving intended outcomes and goals. Evaluations can draw on the monitoring of program activities. Monitoring is also used to identify and troubleshoot any challenges that arise between formal evaluation exercises.

About the Evaluation Quick Guides

ANROWS's Evaluation Quick Guides series focuses on aspects of evaluation relevant to the violence against women (VAW) sector (comprising the domestic and family violence and sexual violence sectors). These Quick Guides provide succinct tips, advice and examples of applying evaluation concepts, frameworks and skills, as well as links to useful resources. These Quick Guides are intended for use by practitioners as well as by independent evaluators who may need to become familiar with the particular sensitivities of evaluation in the VAW context.

THE QUICK GUIDE SERIES

- An overview of evaluation in the VAW sector
- Participatory and empowerment evaluation in the VAW sector
- Feminist and intersectional approaches to evaluation in the VAW sector
- Ethical evaluation in the VAW sector
- Putting together an evaluation team in the VAW sector

Why is evaluation important?

Evaluation can be used to:[3-4]

- determine if program goals have been met

- measure the intended and unintended outcomes of the program

- improve the program activities and processes

- inform decisions about a program and future programs (e.g. financial and resourcing decisions and applications)

- inform discussions about policy and practice

- foster accountability and report back to funders, participants and clients.

How to do evaluation

Many evaluators in the sector promote participatory and empowerment approaches and feminist and intersectional approaches to evaluation. These approaches:

- centre the needs of the services and their clients

- often involve ongoing consultation with stakeholders about all aspects of the evaluation

- help to prevent your values and perspective from dominating those of others

- ensure more diverse perspectives are heard.

Planning

- Develop a program logic or framework at the beginning of your program. The program logic sets out what you plan to do, what resources you need, the anticipated results and the desired outcomes. Ensure evaluation is incorporated into this model. If your organisation doesn't already have its own program logic template, see the Australian Institute of Family Studies' (AIFS) guide on how to develop a logic model, which includes examples and templates. See also Table 4 (p. 39) in *Evaluation readiness, program quality and outcomes in men's behaviour change programs* [5] for an example program logic that supports evaluation planning.

- Develop a more detailed evaluation plan. AIFS provides a guide on developing the evaluation plan, including identifying the evaluation purpose and audience, selecting the evaluation design, deciding what to measure and how to measure it, evaluation questions, data sources, timelines, data analysis and disseminating the findings. The AIFS site also provides examples and templates for evaluation plans.

- Try to match the scope of your evaluation activity with the size or scale of your program.

- Revisit your funders' evaluation requirements and ensure you have incorporated them into your program logic and evaluation plan. If you are unsure, ask them for guidance. When developing your indicators, make sure you will be able to measure them when you come to do your evaluation.

- Consider any ethical issues involved in your proposed evaluation. This should be an ongoing process throughout your evaluation. See the *Ethical evaluation in the VAW sector* Quick Guide, the National Health and Medical Research (NHMRC) guidelines and the Australian Evaluation Society guidelines.

- Decide who is going to do the monitoring and evaluation (see the *Putting together an evaluation team* Quick Guide).

Designing outcome and process measures

In evaluation, "outcomes" refer to the short-, medium- or long-term impact of your program. "Processes" refer to how the program or project is delivered. When we say "measures", we mean the way you are going to collect data to find out if the processes have been done or the outcomes achieved. See the NSW Council of Social Services' Measurement and evaluation: Glossary of terms for more definitions of evaluation terms.

When planning your program, it is important to ensure you select appropriate processes (e.g. activities) as well as outcomes, and ways you are going to measure them—that is, "process and outcome measures". These are usually documented in your program logic or other project planning documents. The evaluation then uses data from these measures to find out the extent to which the processes have been undertaken and the outcomes achieved.

Everyone has their own pre-existing knowledge, assumptions and lived experiences which inform their understanding of social issues and how change happens. It is important to critically interrogate and challenge these assumptions throughout the course of the evaluation, especially when identifying outcomes and their measures. Gathering information from a diverse range of stakeholders can help to improve the relevance and suitability of process and outcome measures. For example:

- A program with the goal of reducing the incidence of violence may set an outcome that victims/survivors leave abusive relationships. However, advocates in the sector would argue that this is an inappropriate outcome because it places responsibility on the victims/survivors rather than the perpetrator of the violence to prevent the violence.[6] This doesn't respect a victim's/survivor's agency or choice (they may choose to stay with their partner).
- A program that supports victims/survivors in crisis may use outcomes that focus on a reduction in calls for help as a positive outcome, due to the assumption that it means there is a decrease in the amount of abuse. However, service providers may argue that an increase in calls demonstrates an increased awareness of the type of support services available and increased sense of trust between clients and the service.[6]

It is important to focus on what can be measured, such as:

- increases in client knowledge and skills (usually measurable in the short term)
- changes in client attitudes and behaviour (these are usually only measurable in the medium or long term).[6]

"Targets" are the level we are hoping to achieve for an outcome or process. They are usually numerical. Try to make them realistic for the activities and timeframe of your program. Targets can be written in a form which identifies the proportion (or percentage) of people who demonstrate a particular outcome.[6] For example:

PROPORTION (or percentage)		PEOPLE		PARTICULAR OUTCOME
Seventy-five percent	of the	participants in the workshop	will	correctly identify all the listed behaviours that represent family violence
Eighty-five percent	of	survivors working with family violence counsellors	will	understand their right to safety
Eighty percent	of	our clients attending three or more support sessions	will	report feeling less depressed

Data collection and analysis

What data do you already collect?

- Think about what data you already systematically collect in your work and what you can learn from it. What can you learn about your program goals, activities and objectives from your program logic?

- Depending on your service, you may collect routine administrative data on:
  - client demographics
  - referrals to other services and types of services
  - immediate, medium-term and long-term needs of clients and how your service responded
  - feedback forms or satisfaction surveys.

Ethical practice: if using administrative data for your evaluation, ensure all data is handled with care and that no identifiable details are included when evaluation data is compiled. Ensure that clients understand how the data will be used and give them opportunities to opt out.

What data do you need that isn't already collected?

- Who do you need that information from and how will you get it? Data may be collected from, for example:
  - clients
  - colleagues
  - other experts you work with or partner organisation staff
  - funders or policymakers.
- Do you need approval from a research ethics committee or do you need to incorporate special ethical procedures to maintain participant safety? For more information refer to the NHMRC's *Ethical considerations in quality assurance and evaluation activities* and the *Ethical evaluation in the VAW sector* Quick Guide.
  - How will you gather the data? Can the data be collected via a written survey or is it better to do an interview?
  - Note that some data collection methods, such as focus groups, may not be appropriate when working with people with lived experiences of violence.
  - See Rutgers' *Choosing a data collection method for survey research* for pros and cons of written surveys and interviews.
- How can you ensure your data collection approach is trauma informed? See Wilder Research's *Trauma-informed evaluation tip sheet for collecting information* for some suggestions on trauma-informed data collection.
- Are there existing data collection tools that can be adapted to your program?

- Consider who owns the data, especially when the data is collected from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. For more information, see Principle 4 (pp. 6–7) in the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies' (AIATSIS) *Code of Ethics*.

How to analyse the data you collect

Your data analysis method depends on the type of data you collect.

- *Quantitative* data (numbers) are often generated from questions that ask for a numerical response (e.g. "How many times in the past year have you accessed our service?") or use a rating scale (also known as a Likert scale, e.g. "On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is highly dissatisfied and 5 is highly satisfied, how satisfied are you with the service you received today?").
- *Qualitative* data (words) are often generated from open-ended questions (e.g. "As a service provider, what is the most challenging aspect of your job?").
- Sometimes qualitative data can be quantified, especially in cases where common themes arise (e.g. a post-workshop questionnaire may ask "What are the top three things you learned from this workshop?" If everyone attended the same workshop, the frequency of common learning that is identified by multiple people can be counted).

Data analysis resources:

- If you collect quantitative data, you may want to identify some basic descriptive statistics, such as percentages, averages or weighted averages. Some online survey software, such as Survey Monkey, might do these calculations for you.
  - See the Cottage Health Evaluation Toolkit (p. 5) for a brief summary of different quantitative data analysis techniques.
- If you collect qualitative data, you want to read the responses to identify themes. The process of identifying these themes is often referred to as "coding". Sometimes you expect these themes to occur (deductive coding) and sometimes the themes might surprise you and say something you weren't expecting (inductive coding).
  - The Tobacco Control Evaluation Centre has a useful resource on how to do qualitative data coding, including an image (see p. 4) which shows what qualitative data coding may look like on longer texts.

The impact of your own values and biases

When undertaking an evaluation, you will unconsciously apply your own values and biases to the process.

- It is often valuable to undertake the process with others who may bring different perspectives to the evaluation. See the *Feminist and intersectional approaches to evaluation in the VAW sector* Quick Guide for more information.
- It is common for researchers or evaluators to have a co-evaluator do their own analysis of the data to see if similar or different themes are identified.
- Some participatory and empowerment approaches encourage the evaluation participants to be involved, and inform decisions about what is of value, during the data analysis process (see the *Participatory and empowerment evaluation in the VAW sector* Quick Guide.)

Reporting and uptake of findings

Traditionally, evaluation findings are communicated in an evaluation report, which
may contain:

- an executive summary that brings all the key elements of the report together at the front
of the document
- an introduction that presents the aims and objectives of the evaluation and provides a
brief outline of the content of the report
- a background section explaining the context within which the program emerged and
was conducted, including a summary of the intervention being evaluated
- a methodology section that presents the evaluation framework, the focus population
and how participants were engaged
- a presentation of the key findings
- a discussion of the key findings, especially explanations of and reasons for the findings
- a conclusion that includes a series of recommendations or follow-up activities
- appendices containing supporting material.

Alternatively, you may present your evaluation findings in other written, visual or verbal ways,
including:

- presentations (to your workplace or clients, within your networks or at conferences)
- posters, fact sheets or infographics
- virtual stories or digital stories
- building the findings into other projects (if relevant).

See the BetterEvaluation webpage on developing reporting media for more ideas.

Remember, when reporting your findings, you need to ensure participant and client safety.
Never release pictures, personal anecdotes, names or voices of clients without their informed
consent. See the *Ethical evaluation in the VAW sector* Quick Guide for more information.

Where possible and safe, it is important that the results of your evaluation are communicated
back to the participants. This helps to acknowledge their participation and demonstrates the
positive results or benefits of the evaluation.

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Endnotes

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Suggested citation

EVALUATION QUICK GUIDES:

Participatory and empowerment evaluation in the VAW sector

CELESTE KOENS AND PETER NINNES

This guide introduces participatory and empowerment evaluation approaches and provides some pointers on how to apply these approaches to evaluation in the sector.

What are participatory and empowerment evaluations?

Participatory and empowerment evaluations are increasingly popular methods for stakeholder engagement in evaluation.[1] In evaluation of VAW services, stakeholders will often be service providers or clients, but may also include funders or external partners. Evaluators traditionally have the power to direct evaluation decisions. Participatory and empowerment approaches encourage varying degrees of decentralising power from evaluators to stakeholders:

- Participatory evaluation involves the evaluator and stakeholders working in partnership to undertake the evaluation. Often the evaluator begins the process and shares control over time.

- Empowerment evaluation is a type of participatory approach in which the stakeholders undertake the evaluation and the evaluator acts as a coach to support them in this process. This approach acknowledges that program stakeholders are in the best position to determine how to meet program goals and evaluate accordingly.[1]

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Why do participatory or empowerment evaluation?

Participatory evaluation

- Evaluation in the VAW sector requires a unique understanding of the context of violence and the sensitivities necessary when engaging clients or participants. Service providers will often have specific expertise in trauma-informed practice and handling disclosures of violence.[2] Service providers also often work directly with victims/survivors of violence and may already be familiar with their desired outcomes and the intended outcomes of the service. Encouraging participation of service providers is a way for their expertise, perspectives and understanding to inform the evaluation.

- Involving a diverse range of stakeholders in participatory evaluation may result in a greater sense of agency or empowerment for the stakeholders.

- Good practice approaches in the sector involve partnering with the victims/survivors to ensure their safety and wellbeing. In a similar way, encouraging participation of clients in evaluation, when safe to do so, is a way for clients' perspectives and understanding to inform the evaluation.

- Using models of evaluation that include service providers and clients may minimise delay in translating findings into improved practice.[3]

Empowerment evaluation

- Various forms of VAW are caused by the unequal distribution of economic, social and political power.[4]

- Domestic and family violence at an individual level can manifest as a partner or family member exerting their power over an individual through psychological, sexual, economic and physical abuse.[5]

- Since VAW is a process of removing power from the victim/survivor, support services work to re-establish their power, agency and self-determination.[5] Consequently, empowerment evaluation is a process that aligns well with the approach and values of such services.[2]

- Empowerment evaluation can also:
  - enhance advocacy, since program staff may use their results for advocacy and institutional change
  - lead staff to develop new insights about a program
  - provide learning that allows organisations to review roles and program constraints.[2]

How to do participatory and empowerment evaluation

Participatory evaluation

- If you have an external evaluator, they will promote involvement of stakeholders at multiple levels (program staff and management, funders, clients etc.) in the evaluation.

- The evaluator may consult with these stakeholders in all stages of the evaluation, from the design to the report writing and dissemination of the findings, or the evaluator may involve these stakeholders in certain parts of the evaluation (e.g. getting the perspective of funders during data collection and when reporting).

Participatory evaluation in the sector

- The evaluators should respond to the needs and concerns of participants in the setting being evaluated (e.g. service provider staff, victims/survivors). The participants' information needs are just as important as other stakeholders' (e.g. funders, external partners) needs.

- Engaging VAW service providers as participants reduces resistance to evaluation findings because program staff will have greater buy-in and sense of ownership over the data that informs decisions and recommendations.[6]

- The evaluator is a learner, responsible for finding out the stakeholders' perspectives and ensuring all voices are included and heard.

- The evaluator also acts as a teacher, reflecting back to stakeholders their vision of the program and how it might change.

- Participatory evaluation requires patience and strong communication to get diverse voices to participate, especially victims/survivors. This can take time and needs to be factored into the evaluation design.

- It is better to engage participants throughout the process rather than just at a key moment in the evaluation. Engaging stakeholders from the beginning of the process and consistently throughout the process demonstrates that their knowledge and expertise is valuable to the evaluation, and they are then more likely to support the process.[6]

Empowerment evaluation

In empowerment evaluations, program staff and service users are the ones who are empowered. Empowering program staff involves building the capacity of staff to undertake evaluations.[3]

Common capacity-building activities for empowerment evaluation include:
- formal training and resource development on topics such as:[2-3]
  - evaluation frameworks
  - planning evaluations
  - developing program logic models
  - developing or adapting data collection tools and undertaking data collection
  - data analysis

- writing evaluation reports or communicating findings
- translating findings back into your program design
• support tailored to the specific needs of the organisation at key phases of the evaluation (e.g. when designing an evaluation plan or data collection tools).

The role of the evaluator in empowering program staff is to:

• train program staff to conduct their own evaluations

• serve as a coach throughout the evaluation process

• provide technical assistance throughout the evaluation.[2]

In some approaches (e.g. David Fetterman's), the empowerment starts from the beginning of planning a program, when staff are thinking about:

• how the program fits in with their organisation's mission

• the actions that will help the organisation fulfil that mission

• the strategies for each program action

• how to measure the success of the strategies.[7]

Many VAW services use an empowerment approach in their service provision. Similar principles of empowerment can be applied to the evaluation of service provision. For example, an evaluation could involve:

• asking clients about the way they think about their experiences of violence and of service provision, and reflecting on the language clients use to describe those experiences

• developing program and evaluation process and outcome measures by asking clients what they value in a service, what they would like to get from a service (outcomes), how they would like the service to be offered (process), and how those can be measured.[8]

Further reading:

• ANROWS's Quick Guide on putting together an evaluation team

• *Evaluation for Improvement: A Seven-Step Empowerment Evaluation Approach For Violence Prevention Organizations* provides guidance on how to hire an empowerment evaluator

• VicHealth's *Preventing violence against women. Doing evaluation differently: A five step guide for funders, evaluators and partners to build capacity for evaluation, learning and improvement*

• Ohio Primary Prevention of Intimate Partner Violence & Sexual Violence's *Empowerment Evaluation Toolkit*

• For an example of an empowerment evaluation in the primary prevention sector, see VicHealth's *Trends in evaluation: Preventing violence against women,* Paper 1 (*Evaluation capacity building in the Respect, Responsibility and Equality program: Report on Stage 1 [2008–10]*), and Paper 2 (*Evaluating preventing violence against women initiatives: A participatory and learning oriented approach for primary prevention in Victoria*)

Endnotes

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Feminist and intersectional approaches to evaluation in the VAW sector

CELESTE KOENS AND PETER NINNES

This guide provides an introduction to feminist and intersectional frameworks and reflective questions and guidance on how to incorporate these concepts into evaluation of programs in the sector. For more information on concepts relevant to feminist and intersectional program design and evaluation see:

- Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria's *Guiding Principle 1: An Intersectional Feminist Approach*

- Multicultural Centre for Women's Health's (MCWH) *Intersectionality Matters*

- The Equality Institute's *Preventing and Responding to Family Violence: Taking an Intersectional Approach to Address Violence in Diverse Australian Communities*

- Kimberlé Crenshaw's Ted Talk on *"The Urgency of Intersectionality"*

What are these approaches?

Feminist evaluation involves:[1]

- examining structural inequities related to gender

- advocating for social change

- responding to the social and historical contexts in which the evaluation occurs

- mainstreaming intersectionality.

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Intersectionality is a way of understanding how simultaneous experiences of multiple types of oppression and inequality compound experiences of discrimination for certain groups of people. These experiences of inequality result from overlapping histories of, for example, patriarchy, sexism, colonialism, religion, racism, homophobia, transphobia and classism.[2-5]

Why employ these approaches?

Different people's experiences of family violence and accessing support services can vary significantly as a result of their experiences of oppression and discrimination. Discrimination and oppression could be based on gender, age, ethnicity, class, ability and geography, to name a few, which interact with dominant power structures to create unique and complex experiences of violence and support.[6] For example, there is a growing body of literature on the experiences of migrant and refugee women, who are in Australia on temporary visas, trying to access support services in the sector. Many of these women report fear of deportation or losing their children if they leave an abusive relationship.[7] This demonstrates how gender and migrant status intersect with government policies on migration to uniquely impact these women's experiences of accessing services.

It is important that program evaluations take into account these unique experiences and explore and challenge the power structures that cause them.

Possible ways to do feminist and intersectional evaluation

Examining structures of gender and intersectionality are important first steps that need to be built into your program and evaluation design and revisited throughout the program. This is done through including a process of reflecting on your social position (your "positionality") and the dominant power relations and narratives related to the issue you are addressing.

Reflexive practice

Reflexive practice involves thinking about your own situation, social position (positionality), assumptions, identity and power, and how they impact your work. Below is an assortment of questions you may ask yourself when you do reflexive practice as part of feminist, intersectional evaluation.

Thinking about positionality:

- Reflect on how you are privileged and/or disadvantaged by sociohistorical power relations, such as colonialism, racism, sexism and patriarchy (for glossary definitions of these terms, see pp. 83–87 of *Prevention of violence against women and safer pathways to services: Ten research insights from the Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Projects with Action Research*). Reflect on how you may unconsciously be facilitating and reproducing power structures that oppress or exclude others from services.[1] For example:

  - Am I, or people like me, represented in decision-making forums (in policymaking, in leadership at work, in the funding organisation that supports us)?

- Are the narratives that I can relate to or empathise with often shown in the news, television, movies or popular culture? Why do I relate to or empathise with these narratives? Do I sometimes assume that these narratives are representative of all people? Whose experiences are missing in these narratives?

- Do I ever get treated as a representative of all people who share an aspect of their identity with me? Have I ever asked someone with a different identity to me to speak for all people in their group? What are the consequences of doing this (e.g. failure to recognise the diversity of lived experiences among people with similar identities, risk of further excluding people with unique intersecting identities)?

• What assumptions have I made about the nature of VAW, the drivers of violence, the social groups that perpetrate violence and the social groups that experience violence? For example:

- Am I assuming that violence only occurs in heterosexual relationships, without taking into account other types of sexuality? (See, for example, *Developing LGBTQ programs for perpetrators and victims/survivors of domestic and family violence: Key findings and future directions*.)[8]

- Am I focusing entirely on gender inequality as a driver of violence without taking into account the possible compounding impact of factors such as colonialism (history of oppression) or discrimination (based on, for example, race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, disability)? (See, for example, *Telling life stories: Exploring the connection between trauma and incarceration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women*.)[9]

- Am I focusing only on the nuclear family when the extended family may be a more powerful influence?[10]

- Am I assuming that violence against women takes similar forms in all population groups, or have I considered differences in experiences of violence?[11]

• What assumptions do I make when I talk and think about people who have experienced violence? Do I frame them as victims or do I focus on their strengths and agency? Do I allow them to create their own narrative or do I try to fit them within prevailing narratives?

• How do my pre-conceived ideas about people from different cultures, ethnicities, migrant status, sexual orientation or identity, age or ability impact the evaluation and my interaction with participants?

• How will culture and power affect the evaluation? For example, if, as an evaluator, I am from a different cultural or linguistic group to the participants, how might this impact on participants' willingness to criticise their own cultural practices or members of their own community?

• How do these assumptions impact the evaluation and my interactions with people who perpetrate or have experienced violence?

• What can I do to minimise the impact of my assumptions on victims/survivors and on the evaluation?

Thinking about power relations and the dominant narrative:

• Reflect on how we talk about VAW in our country, sector or organisation. How was this narrative developed and who is dis/advantaged by this narrative? For example:

- How has the issue of VAW been framed historically (public vs. private issue, causes and drivers)? Who benefits from this? How and why has it changed?

- Do the media and public discourse talk about VAW among certain groups of people differently from others? How does this inform our individual opinions, program and evaluation design and funding decisions?
- Does our sector focus on particular drivers of VAW (such as gender inequality) as more prominent than others (colonisation, racism etc.)? Who decides this and whose voices or experiences are left out? How does this impact on my practice and clients?
- Who is left out of the discussion? Whose knowledge is valued? Who benefits?

This reflective practice can help you to identify how knowledge about the VAW sector is produced, who benefits and who is not included, and where you can focus your efforts to address potential inequality and disadvantage in your evaluation.

Since evaluation is concerned with producing and using knowledge about what is working and who is benefiting from the program, undertaking these reflections is of immediate importance to how you plan, conduct and respond to your evaluation.

Evaluation methods for feminist and intersectional approaches

There is no fixed list of methods for feminist and intersectional approaches to evaluation. However, some aspects to consider in feminist and intersectional approaches relate to removing barriers to participation, ensuring cultural safety, collecting data, analysing and interpreting data, and sharing findings.

Removing barriers to participation

You can promote inclusive practices by removing social and physical barriers to participation.

Each individual will know best what their needs are. When working with participants, ensure you ask them what they need to fully participate in the evaluation.

Table 1 sets out some examples of how you could do this safely in the context of evaluations in the sector.

TABLE 1: KEY ACTIONS TO REMOVE BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION

Location/ environment	• If face-to-face evaluation activities are required, ensure they occur in a safe, comfortable and easy-to-access location. Make sure you seek guidance from participants on:
	  - the most suitable location for them. For example, participants in regional and remote locations may choose to travel further to a neighbouring town so they can maintain their privacy
	  - any physical accessibility needs such as ramps, lifts, audio cues and visual cues
	
	• Undertake online surveys or feedback forms with care.
	  - If circulated via email, you risk exposing participants to further violence from an abusive partner who may be monitoring their correspondence
	  - In some regional or remote locations, internet is not easily accessible or reliable
	  - Some online survey software store their results on servers based overseas. This may be a breach of Australian privacy laws when collecting personal and sensitive information

Communication	• Prioritise the safety of participants—especially if contacting them outside of the service (e.g. via telephone, email or in some other location such as courts)
	• Ensure communication is accessible:
	  - Will you need an interpreter or translator? Ensure the translator understands the necessary safety procedures and confidentiality. Make sure the interpreter/translator is not a client's family member or carer, or from their immediate community, as this may compromise the client's comfort, safety, confidentiality and privacy. You should use a NAATI-qualified interpreter. If necessary, contact telephone translators or video/remote interpreting for Auslan
	  - Written questionnaires or reports: consider whether documents are screen-reader compatible or provide a version as a Word document to make it accessible. Is there an easy English option? See also the Web Accessibility Guidelines

Labour/financial	• Some women are prevented from participating in evaluations due to work and care responsibilities. Strive to always provide access to a crèche facility for children or be inclusive of children's presence in the evaluation. You may also need to be flexible with the time and location, depending on the preference of the participant • Transport costs—to encourage participation, bus fares or taxi vouchers may assist people in attending consultation activities • Lunch or morning/afternoon tea—providing a meal can assist people with insecure incomes to participate • See also NHMRC guidance on remuneration or compensation

Cultural safety

To promote greater understanding of how these various intersections and consequent experiences relate to your evaluation, you need to facilitate a respectful, safe and inclusive environment for diverse groups of people to share their ideas and knowledge.

Cultural safety is about creating such an environment in which shared knowledge is valued and diverse experiences of discrimination and oppression are acknowledged. This facilitates a culture in which members of diverse communities can feel comfortable sharing how various intersections affect their attitudes to and experiences of violence against women and support services.[4] Participatory evaluation methods can be designed in consultation with diverse stakeholders to include culturally appropriate ways of sharing knowledge.

When thinking about cultural safety, service providers and organisations may reflect on:[4]
• What does cultural safety mean to the community members involved in the evaluation?

- How do concepts of gender equality translate in the evaluation process?
- How can the evaluation create, normalise and mainstream progressive spaces to share stories and support and build capacity and leadership?
- How can the evaluation connect with diverse and marginalised sectors or communities?
- What are the power hierarchies within the evaluation team and among the evaluation participants—does everyone feel safe to have honest conversations?
- How can we include diverse participants in all the steps of the evaluation in order to address power imbalances?

For an example, see the _Cultural Safety Principles and Guidelines_ that were designed in collaboration with service providers participating in ANROWS's "Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Participatory Action Research Project, 2018–2020".

Collecting data

Your evaluation will probably include a range of data collection methods. Quantitative methods will produce numerical data which can then generate averages and other descriptive statistics (percentages, averages etc.).

However, quantitative data may not fully capture the range of service providers' experiences, nor the nuances of clients' experiences of violence and service provision that an intersectional approach values.

To capture the wide range of experiences of violence and service provision, use methods that allow participants in the evaluation to tell their story. These could be one-on-one interviews, focus groups (where safe to do so), or art or other visual means for participants to describe and explain their experiences. These methods of data collection can break down power dynamics between evaluator and participant, and can shift the creation of knowledge back to the people you are working with.

Case study methods may be particularly useful for understanding or bearing witness to not only participants' stories that fit the expected pattern, but also those that generate new insights into participants' experiences of violence and service provision.

Where possible and safe, it is important that the results of your evaluation are communicated back to the participants. This helps to acknowledge their participation and demonstrate the positive results or benefits resulting from the evaluation process. Ensure when you collect your data that you explain to participants how the data will be interpreted, used, stored and shared. See the _Ethical evaluation in the VAW sector_ Quick Guide for more information.

Analysing and interpreting data

By engaging in the critical reflexive practice outlined above and removing barriers to participation, you may find you have collected information from a diverse range of participants. For more guidance on data analysis, see also the _Overview of evaluation in the VAW sector_ Quick Guide.

Your data analysis will be richer and more representative of your sample of stakeholders if it captures the whole range of their views.

Thus, when you (and the evaluation team or stakeholders) analyse and interpret the data, try to go beyond looking for common themes. Look for experiences of violence and service provision that challenge your existing theory (i.e. your ideas about how things work or why things are the way they are). This can help you think about whether your service provision is meeting the diverse needs of all of your clients.

If your data draws on and represents a diverse range of participants' experiences, you may not immediately understand all the implications for practice. Questions will remain unanswered. There will be ideas to follow up and further avenues to explore. You may find you engage in a continual cycle of learning, in which you ask questions and arrive at some answers along with further questions for inquiry.

Sharing the findings

It's important, where safe to do so, to share the findings of the evaluation with participants and other relevant stakeholder groups.

If presenting the findings to an organisation, meeting or conference, include a diverse range of evaluation participants in preparing and delivering the presentation.

Ensure the presentation is in a format (e.g. language) that is accessible to the stakeholders.

Endnotes

[1] Brisolara, S. (2014). Feminist theory: Its domains and applications. In S. Brisolara, D. Seigart, & S. SenGupta (Eds.), *Feminist evaluation and research: Theory and practice* (pp. 14–39). Guilford Publications.

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Ethical evaluation in the VAW sector

CELESTE KOENS AND PETER NINNES

This guide provides an overview of key ethical considerations to take into account when evaluating in the sector. For more detailed guidance, see:

- the National Human and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC) *National statement on ethical conduct in human research 2007*
- the NHMRC's *Ethical considerations in quality assurance and evaluation activities*
- the Australian Evaluation Society's *Guidelines for the Ethical Conduct of Evaluations*
- the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies' (AIATSIS) *Code of Ethics*
- ACON's ethical guidelines for working with LGBTI communities
- the Federation of Ethnic Community Councils of Australia's ethical guidelines for working with aging CALD communities
- *The Evaluation Guide: A guide for evaluation of men's behaviour change programs for men who use domestic and family violence,* pp. 46–51 focuses on ethics for evaluation of men's behaviour change programs

What is ethical evaluation?

In general, ethics is about what is considered right or morally acceptable.[1] Ethics in research or evaluation is a process of assessing the risks and benefits of evaluation activity to avoid causing any harm to participants or evaluators.

About the Evaluation Quick Guides

ANROWS's Evaluation Quick Guides series focuses on aspects of evaluation relevant to the violence against women (VAW) sector (comprising the domestic and family violence and sexual violence sectors). These Quick Guides provide succinct tips, advice and examples of applying evaluation concepts, frameworks and skills, as well as links to useful resources. These Quick Guides are intended for use by practitioners as well as by independent evaluators who may need to become familiar with the particular sensitivities of evaluation in the VAW context.

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Why is ethical evaluation important?

Ethical evaluation is important for maintaining the safety of your clients and staff. Evaluation with people who have experienced or perpetrated violence poses significant physical, psychological, social and financial risks to the participants, evaluator, organisation or program staff.[2-3] Evaluating prevention programs also poses ethical risks, since evaluators need to understand how to manage disclosures, the risk of vicarious trauma and appropriate use of data, among other things. Risks need to be identified and any potential harm mitigated. See also the *National Risk Assessment Principles for Family and Domestic Violence*.

How to do ethical evaluation

Will you need a formal ethics review?

All evaluations should be undertaken in an ethical manner. However, the requirement for a formal, external, ethical review of the evaluation methods varies depending on the nature of the evaluation.

Formal ethics review involves submitting your evaluation or research proposal to a human research ethics committee (HREC) to demonstrate that you have reflected on and mitigated risks. Ethics review and approval is a peer-review process that can ensure the integrity and quality of your evaluation.

Aspects of an evaluation that can require a formal ethics review

A formal ethics review may be necessary in the following instances:
- where the activity potentially infringes on the privacy or professional reputation of participants, providers or organisations
- secondary use of data—using data from quality assurance (QA) or evaluation activities for purposes other than its original purpose
- gathering information about the participant beyond routine data collection
- testing of non-standard protocols or equipment
- comparison of different groups
- randomisation or the use of control groups or placebos
- analysis of minority/vulnerable groups' data, separated out from the data collected or analysed as part of the main QA/evaluation activity.

When an evaluation may not require a formal ethics review

According to the NHMRC, formal ethics review may not be necessary in cases where:[4]
- the data is part of standard operating procedures or uses standard tools
- the data collection is for maintaining standards or identifying areas for improvement in the place in which it is collected
- the data is not linked to individuals.

Where to seek ethics review and approval

If you identify any aspects that require formal ethics review, you may need to apply to an HREC.

- HRECs may be associated with universities, hospitals or government institutions or may be private organisations. Private HRECs often charge a fee for their service.
- Consider partnering with a local university to undertake a participatory evaluation. Through this partnership, you may be able to apply for ethics approval from that institution's ethics committee. You may also gain access to a researcher or evaluator who can support the evaluation process.

The Australian Institute of Family Studies has developed a resource on *Demystifying ethical review,* which includes some useful examples.

Protecting participants

If you don't identify any of the aspects requiring formal ethics review, you are still required to ensure mechanisms are in place to protect yourself, your clients and anyone else who may be involved in evaluation activities. This may include program staff, victims/survivors and policymakers or funders. The NHMRC identifies a number of governance measures and precautions you should consider. Some of these are shown in the left-hand column in Table 1. In the right-hand column are relevant examples for the sector. See the NHMRC's *Ethical considerations in quality assurance and evaluation activities* for the full list.

TABLE 1: ETHICAL GOVERNANCE PROCEDURES

Ethical governance measure[4]	Example
2a)[a] Consideration should be given to whether the proposed QA/evaluation activity poses any risks for participants beyond those routinely experienced in the environment where QA/evaluation is being conducted	Service providers will often be familiar with the types of risk associated with their everyday practices. However, evaluation activities may pose additional risks if: • Clients are being asked to re-tell or re-live experiences of violence that they wouldn't ordinarily do when consulting your service. This may pose psychological harm and cause distress to both the client and evaluator/staff member • Any additional time spent participating in the evaluation may raise suspicion or result in further violence from a partner • The means of contacting clients for feedback or evaluation purposes could put them at further risk (e.g. if an abusive partner is monitoring their telephone, emails or browser history)
2a) Ensuring that consent[b] from participants, where required, is adequate	• Ensure participants are informed about any evaluation activity they may be contributing to, including a discussion of potential risks • Ensure participation is voluntary—for VAW service providers, this means making sure clients understand that they are not obliged to participate and the service they receive will not be impacted by their choice not to participate • Consent is an ongoing process and can be withdrawn at any time • If a client perceives themselves to be in immediate danger or in a crisis situation, they may not be in the right frame of mind to participate, or participation may not be a priority (Paavilainen et al., 2014) • When working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, ensure that you adhere to the principle of free prior and informed consent and respect their right to self-determination
2a) Provision of information to participants including the use of an opt-out approach. The opt-out approach is a method used in the recruitment of participants into an activity where information is provided to the potential participant regarding the activity and their involvement and where their participation is presumed unless they take action to decline to participate	Even when data is being collected as part of everyday activities and service provision, it is important that participants understand how that data is being used. They should be given the opportunity for their data not to be included in evaluation activities. Victims/survivors may choose not to participate for many reasons, including: • They have other priorities pertaining to their immediate safety • They perceive participation as an added risk to their safety
2b) Privacy and data security, including management of data (how it is collected, stored, used and destroyed); who can access data; and confidentiality	Most services will have policies and procedures for safe data storage and management. If not, the NHMRC provides some guidelines in their *Management of Data and Information in Research* document. Consider how you will maintain the privacy of participants throughout the entire evaluation process. You may need to take into consideration additional privacy issues when working with diverse community groups. For example, if you are working with interpreters, ensure they are NAATI-qualified, understand their responsibilities and confidentiality measures and are not a client's family member or carer, or from their immediate community. Ensure you follow the requirements of national and state/territory privacy legislation, for example the Commonwealth *Privacy Act 1988*

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a   Numbers refer to the numbering in the NHMRC statement.

b   There are a range of different templates available online for gaining consent and plain language information forms. See, for example, the University of Melbourne's HREC's templates.

Ethical issues when engaging evaluation participants

Prioritise participant safety

- Ensure that data collection, analysis and reporting processes are carefully managed to ensure the evaluation isn't disempowering to victims/survivors.[3]

- It is important to ensure your evaluation uses trauma-informed approaches. Many VAW service providers will already have a comprehensive understanding of trauma-informed approaches. For specific tips on trauma-informed approaches in data collection activities, see Wilder Research's *Trauma-Informed Evaluation Tip Sheet for Collecting Information*.

- Make sure any evaluation activities with participants occur in a safe and private location. Consider factors about the room size and space (e.g. too small may make the participants feel caged in).[2,5] Give participants an opportunity to suggest the most appropriate location for interviews.

- Ensure privacy is maintained during and after the evaluation. This is especially important when reporting or sharing findings. Make sure no names, photos or voices are used without permission. Also ensure any anecdotes or examples do not provide details that could identify participants. Always seek approval from the relevant participant before publishing any personal anecdotes.

- See the *National Risk Assessment Principles for Domestic and Family Violence.*

Beneficence

- Beneficence is an important principle of ethical evaluation practice. It means that evaluation findings are translated into practical and tangible results for participants. Depending on the type of questions undertaken in your evaluation, these results may:

  - inform improvement in services and practice
  - inform grants and tender applications to secure funding opportunities
  - be shared with participants in accessible formats.

- Addressing beneficence is one means of ensuring that there is a sound justification for the evaluation, including the methods used, each of the questions asked and all the data collected.[2]

Endnotes

[1] National Health and Medical Research Council. (2007). *National statement on ethical conduct in human research 2007 (Updated 2018)*. https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/publications/national-statement-ethical-conduct-human-research-2007-updated-2018.

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Putting together an evaluation team in the VAW sector

CELESTE KOENS AND PETER NINNES

This guide provides key considerations for putting together an evaluation team (including deciding whether the evaluation should be done internally or externally), some points for reflection, key safety considerations and knowledge the evaluator should have.

Deciding on an evaluator

A key question to ask yourself when deciding on an evaluator is who the best person is to lead the evaluation. Table 1 sets out some key considerations about whether the evaluation should be done internally (by program staff) or by an external evaluator.

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TABLE 1: WHO SHOULD DO YOUR EVALUATION?

	Internal evaluator (e.g. conducted by program staff or management)	External evaluator (e.g. an independent consultant or university researcher)
Advantages	• Evaluation can be incorporated from the beginning of the program • staff bring their experience and expertise to the evaluation process • facilitates a process of ongoing monitoring of your program activities	• May have greater evaluation experience or expertise • may be able to assist in navigating ethical evaluation procedures. See the Quick Guide on *Ethical evaluation in the VAW sector*
Disadvantages	• Requires time/resource commitment to systematically collect and analyse data • Staff may need some guidance or capacity-building to assist in the collection and analysis of evaluation data	• May not have the depth of knowledge of your specific program or expertise in the sector • will require additional financing to contract • will be more of a "one-off" initiative unless you have funds for ongoing support
Further steps	Support staff to build their capacity and confidence in monitoring and evaluation, by: • providing time and opportunities to read about the evaluation process, data collection methods, data analysis methods • providing mentorship from senior staff with evaluation experience (if that capacity exists in the organisation) • seeking guidance from your funders or other organisations you partner with • if budget permits, encouraging staff to undertake professional development or training for evaluation. VAW services are often under-resourced and time-poor. Promoting evaluation capacity-building may not be seen as an immediate priority. However, it is a long-term investment that could support your organisation to improve and streamline your processes, demonstrate outcomes and make bids for future funding opportunities. For more information, see the *Overview of evaluation in the VAW sector* Quick Guide	Decide on your procurement process. • Will you do open tender or directly contact individuals or organisations? • Decide on your selection criteria • Consider your decision-making process Before recruiting your evaluator, you may want to identify: • what you want to evaluate (outcomes and impact or processes) • your budget • timeframes of the evaluation • any other specifics of the evaluation, including the different roles and responsibilities of the evaluator and other stakeholders Who to engage as an external evaluator: • peak bodies or sector-specific organisations with expertise in evaluation (for example, ANROWS or Our Watch) • local independent evaluation consultants in your area • university-based researchers • secondment from a related organisation. It is also possible to provide opportunities for students on placements to do part of the evaluation work under the supervision of an academic and the service managers

Participatory and empowerment evaluations often combine both internal staff and external support in an evaluation team. An external evaluator can support you and your staff to undertake evaluation by providing guidance through the evaluation process and training on necessary evaluation skills.

Although external evaluators are often considered to be more independent and objective, proponents of feminist evaluation and empowerment evaluation approaches highlight that all knowledge is socially constructed and consequently independent and objective evaluation is unobtainable.[1-2] This means that whoever undertakes the evaluation will bring their own values and knowledge to the evaluation. Instead of striving for objectivity, which may never truly be obtained, it is important to undertake reflexive practice and to be open about the assumptions, values and knowledge that evaluators bring to the process.[1]

Key considerations for the evaluation team

Regardless of who does the evaluation, it is important that people involved in and leading evaluations in the sector understand the concepts of positionality, reflexivity, and wellbeing and safety. This will help to promote more equitable, ethical and effective evaluation processes. For more information about positionality and reflexivity, see the Quick Guide on _Feminist and intersectional approaches to evaluation in the VAW sector_.

Positionality

- Anyone involved in the evaluation planning, data collection and analysis should understand how power structures impact on the evaluation and its stakeholders. This can assist in negotiating the unequal power structures that arise in an evaluation.[1] For example:

  - The evaluator typically has the power to decide on the data collection methods, analysis and communication of findings, which can render participants or clients of the service more vulnerable.

  - There may be ways in which an evaluator benefits from power dynamics relating to colonialism, white supremacy, heteronormativity or sexism, and patriarchy. Being aware of positionality means that the evaluator continually reflects on and recognises the ways they are privileged by the status quo and creates space for those who are disadvantaged or excluded by that privilege.[1]
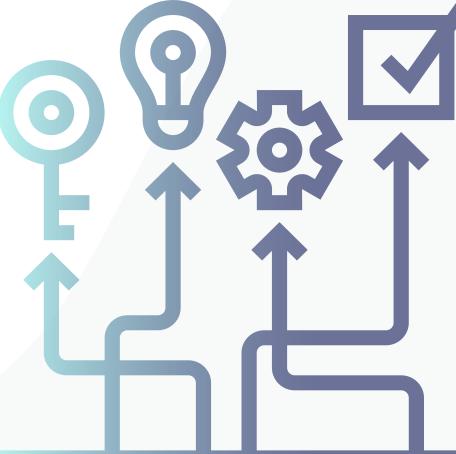
Reflexivity

- Everyone comes to an evaluation with their own lived experiences and knowledge of VAW, the context in which it occurs and the systems that respond to and prevent it.[3]

- People involved in planning and undertaking an evaluation should be conscious of their knowledge, attitudes and assumptions.

- They need to seek out different and sometimes challenging ideas and perspectives.[1,3-4]

  - This may be especially important if the evaluation includes seeking information from perpetrators of violence, as such data collection can lead to conflicting notions of being right and wrong or good and bad.[3]

- Being reflexive allows you to always centre victims'/survivors' needs and perspectives in your evaluation.[a] This can be done through participatory or empowerment evaluation approaches.

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a   For men's behaviour change programs, there are promising approaches of incorporating victims'/survivors' perspectives in program evaluation. See for example _Invisible practices: Intervention with fathers who use violence: Key findings and future directions_.

Wellbeing and safety

- All activities within the sector need to prioritise the wellbeing and safety of clients, staff and evaluators.

- Before undertaking any evaluation activity, ensure that the evaluator and all staff involved understand the concepts of:

  - *vicarious trauma* or workplace-induced stress and trauma—sometimes being exposed to other people's trauma can result in you experiencing your own stress or trauma. 1800RESPECT provides information on workplace-induced stress, how to prevent it, signs and symptoms, and where to get help. They also provide telephone counselling for workers and professionals. Phoenix Australia can provide tailored training for your organisation and staff on trauma-informed workplaces and managing vicarious trauma in your workplace

  - *worker wellbeing* and self-care—employers and staff can work towards looking after employee wellbeing. Black Dog Institute provides some guidance on how workplaces can promote staff wellbeing

  - *handling disclosures*—anyone involved in evaluation activities needs to be aware of the limitations of their expertise. If you or your evaluation team are not qualified to provide counselling for VAW, you need to understand how to sensitively handle disclosures and refer clients to appropriate support. If you are not aware of appropriate services to refer someone to, you could identify relevant services on the 1800RESPECT website. You may also consider undertaking training on how to manage disclosures (for example, DV Alert offers "Recognise, Respond, Refer" training with subsidised positions for front-line workers).

Endnotes

[1] Brisolara, S. (2014). Feminist theory: Its domains and applications. In S. Brisolara, D. Seigart, & S. SenGupta (Eds.), *Feminist evaluation and research: Theory and practice* (pp. 14–39). Guilford Publications.

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Acknowledgement of Country
ANROWS acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land across Australia on which we work and live. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past, present, and future, and we value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, and knowledge.

We are committed to standing and working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, honouring the truths set out in the Warawarni-gu Guma Statement.