

**Community Based Advocates' Uses and Perceptions of Academic Research on Gender-
Based Violence**

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

Academic knowledge production is shaped by colonialism and other systems of power and oppression embedded in Western academia, and is often inaccessible for non-academic audiences. This inaccessibility exacerbates the gap between academic research and community-based advocacy and activism. The disconnect between academic research and frontline work is particularly evident in the gender-based violence (GBV) services sector. While the challenges associated with mobilizing GBV research are well documented in existing literature, little attention has been given to how advocates working in the GBV sector perceive and use GBV research, and what changes they think could make academic research more accessible. To address this gap, this multi-method qualitative study examines how advocates in community GBV organizations perceive and utilize research on GBV. The study draws on insights from semi-structured interviews with 12 advocates in community GBV organizations in Southwestern and Eastern Ontario and an analysis of online content shared by six community GBV organizations across the province. Using theoretical insights from institutional ethnography and decolonial critiques of academic knowledge, this study investigates the barriers advocates experience accessing and using academic research on GBV and how these barriers can be overcome. This study reveals the complex relationship that advocates have with Western academic knowledge on GBV and provides insight into how academics can disseminate more accessible research to target audiences outside of academia. Drawing on the insights from advocates, this study offers recommendations for academics to produce more accessible forms of knowledge. This study also provides an example of an alternative form of knowledge dissemination through two infographics that highlight the barriers advocates face accessing and using academic research on GBV and how academics can mitigate these barriers.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Academic research is largely inaccessible for non-academic audiences (Fahlberg, 2023; Anderson & McLachlan, 2016; Badley, 2020). This inaccessibility contributes to the disconnect between academic research and community-based advocacy and activism (Pennell & Maher, 2015). These issues are particularly evident in gender-based violence research, where the challenges associated with mobilizing this knowledge are well established in existing literature (Wathen, 2022; Wathen et al., 2011). Gender-based violence (GBV) is a pervasive issue in Canada and a growing area of research (Collier, 2022; Wathen, 2022; Boucher, 2021; Beres et al. 2009). However, measuring successful knowledge mobilization is a complex and time-consuming process (Wathen, 2022). For instance, due to varying definitions and understandings of GBV among stakeholder groups, it is difficult to assess if GBV research has led to meaningful changes (Wathen, 2022). Additionally, as Wathen (2022) argues, expecting traditional modes of knowledge dissemination in academia, such as conferences and publications, to reach the targeted audiences outside of academia is often inadequate. While the challenges of mobilizing GBV research have been documented in existing research, little attention has been given to how advocates working in the GBV sector perceive and use GBV research, and what changes they think could make academic research more accessible. This study takes up this challenge.

Academic knowledge is produced within and shaped by broader systems of power, including racism, colonialism, sexism, and other systems of oppression (Smith, 2005; Go, 2016, Connell, 2010; Collins, 2019; Fahlberg, 2023). Within this context, academics experience pressures to produce particular forms of academic knowledge and to disseminate that knowledge in particular forms and venues, such as scholarly journals (Badley, 2020). These pressures impact academics' style of writing (Badley, 2020). For example, following academic

conventions, many academics embed complex jargon, abstract concepts, and theories within their writing (Badley, 2020; Billig, 2013). Badley (2020) argues that this style of academic writing may be considered by non-academics as “bullshit” (p. 248) and presents barriers to understanding academic research for non-academic audiences. In addition to the inaccessible writing style evident in academic articles, many academic journals require costly subscriptions which further excludes non-academics from accessing and utilizing academic research (Fahlberg, 2023). These barriers exclude important audiences, such as community activists and advocates, from using academic research in their work. Billig (2013) argues that the inaccessible nature of academic research also hinders possibilities for social change, because social change and action arise from everyday conversations, debates, and compromises.

There is increasing recognition of these barriers and their impacts. For example, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) (2023), a federal granting agency that offers funding for social science and humanities research, now encourages researchers to consider the accessibility of their research and its impacts for audiences who can benefit from it. As SSHRC (2023) contends, it is important to ensure that community organizations, activists, and everyday people who actively confront and experience social inequalities, can utilize academic research to work towards meaningful changes. Despite these recent moves, structures in academe, such as promotion and tenure committees, still promote and reward traditional forms of knowledge in academia, such as publications in scholarly journals (Wathen, 2022). The lack of incentivization for academics to disseminate more accessible forms of knowledge outside of academia contributes to academic research remaining out of reach for many non-academics (Wathen, 2022). This issue is particularly significant within the context of research on GBV.

The prevalence of GBV in Canada is evident in media stories and Canadian statistics (Statistics Canada, 2024; Guye, 2025; Ireton, 2025) and has inspired a wealth of academic research on the topic (e.g. Bumiller, 2008; Boucher, 2021; Quinlan, 2017; Wathen, 2022; Mehrota et al., 2016; Lehner & Allen, 2009; Ullman & Townsend, 2007). Current statistics suggest that approximately every six days one woman is killed by their intimate partner (Collier, 2022; Statistics Canada, 2021), and one in three women have experienced unwanted sexual behaviour in public (Statistics Canada, 2019). Studying GBV entails the exploration of violence against women and people across the gender spectrum, including non-binary and transgender individuals (Collier, 2022). GBV is based on power and control and cannot be addressed without confronting broader structural inequalities (Collier, 2022). For instance, GBV disproportionately impacts groups of people who experience intersecting systems of oppression such as racialized and Indigenous gender minorities (Canadian Women's Foundation, 2022) and 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals ("Courage to Act", 2019). Despite the known prevalence of GBV in Canada, measures to mitigate GBV have not been particularly successful, which is evident through statistics that show rates of GBV have not decreased in the past decades (Wathen, 2022; Government of Canada, 2019). Mobilizing academic research on GBV is important to ensure that research can be accessed and used by policy makers, community organizations, and other target audiences outside of academia (Wathen, 2022). This highlights the importance of addressing the challenges associated with GBV knowledge mobilization (Wathen, 2022).

Community feminist anti-violence organizations play a crucial role in confronting GBV, supporting GBV survivors, and GBV activist work (Boucher, 2021). Here, I define community GBV organizations as community-based sexual assault centres and domestic violence shelters that provide services for survivors of GBV and engage in various forms of GBV advocacy.

Advocates working in community GBV organizations have intense workloads due to the various forms of work these organizations are engaged in (Beres et al., 2009; Burnett et al., 2016; Ullman & Townsend, 2007). For instance, community GBV organizations offer direct support services for survivors, deliver public education about GBV in their communities, provide crisis intervention for survivors, and campaign for social and political change (Beres et al., 2009). As this study will show, community GBV organizations have a complex relationship with academic research on GBV due to the tensions between the pressures to engage with academic research on GBV and the lack of accessibility of this knowledge. Thus, it is important to ensure that research knowledge concerning GBV is accessible and can be utilized by community organizations and result in meaningful changes. Using Dorothy Smith's (2005) theoretical work on texts and decolonial critiques of academic knowledge from Go (2016), Fahlberg (2023), Connell (2010), and Collins (2019), this multi-method qualitative study explores how advocates in community GBV organizations perceive and utilize research on GBV. This study draws on insights from semi-structured interviews with 12 advocates in community GBV organizations in Southwestern and Eastern Ontario and an analysis of online content shared by six community GBV organizations across the province. Identifying the types of research that inform the work of community GBV organizations and the barriers to utilizing academic research can help address the challenges associated with GBV knowledge mobilization. The study concludes with recommendations on strategies to make GBV research more accessible for non-academics.

Research Problem

Despite existing literature exploring the inaccessibility of academic research and the challenges associated with mobilizing research on GBV, the perceptions and use of academic research on GBV by advocates in community GBV organizations remain underexplored. Given

the key role that advocates in community GBV organizations play in GBV activism and advocacy, their perceptions and uses of academic research are crucial to understand. Exploring how advocates in community GBV organizations perceive and use academic research on GBV provides insights into the inaccessibility of academic knowledge. Making academic research on GBV more accessible to community GBV organizations can help mitigate the challenges with mobilizing academic research on GBV and lead to positive changes for survivors of GBV.

Using a multi-method qualitative approach, involving, this study explores how advocates in community GBV organizations perceive and utilize academic research on GBV. The inaccessible nature of academic research prevents important audiences outside of academia from accessing and utilizing this knowledge (Fahlberg, 2023; Wathen, 2022). Moreover, the mobilization of GBV research is complicated by the inaccessible nature of traditional avenues of presenting academic research, and inconsistent uses of GBV research by stakeholder groups (Wathen, 2022). Taking up these themes, this study investigates the forms of research GBV organizations are using and the challenges that they experience utilizing and accessing academic research, and provides recommendations about how these challenges can be overcome.

Research Questions and Methodological Approach

Drawing on insights from semi-structured interviews with advocates in community GBV organizations in Ontario and content analyses of online content shared by six Ontario GBV organizations, this study explores the overarching research question: How do advocates in community GBV organizations utilize and perceive gender-based violence research? The following sub-questions helped to answer the overarching research question that this study answers.

- 1) What forms of gender-based violence research are community GBV organizations utilizing, if any?
- 2) What challenges community GBV organizations face accessing and utilizing academic research on GBV?
- 3) How can these challenges be mitigated?

Together, these questions provide insights into the complicated relationship that advocates in community GBV organizations have with academic research on GBV. This study makes valuable contributions to existing literature exploring challenges with mobilizing GBV research and the pressures that community GBV organizations are facing, and provides recommendations to mitigate the challenges that community GBV organizations experience using and accessing academic research that can be used by academics engaged in GBV research.

As I will discuss further in Chapter 2, this study makes several empirical, methodological, and theoretical contributions to existing research concerning the inaccessibility of academic research and the challenges with mobilizing academic research on GBV.

Empirically, my study contributes to existing research aiming to mitigate the research-practice gap in the GBV sector and academia more broadly, and provides insights into non-academics' perceptions of academic knowledge and recommendations on strategies to make research more accessible for target audiences outside of academia. Theoretically, my study offers a unique perspective by drawing on Smith's (2005) work on texts, institutional discourses, and the de-legitimization of feminist knowledge, and placing it in conversation with decolonial critiques of Western academic knowledge production and the de-legitimization of non-Western knowledges (Fahlberg, 2023; Connell, 2010; Go, 2016; Collins, 2019). Methodologically, my study

contributes to existing research by uniquely combining an analysis of interview data from advocates in community GBV organizations with unobtrusive data from social media content disseminated by community GBV organizations.

Analytical Perspective

This study uses Smith's (2005) theoretical discussions of texts, institutional discourses, and the de-legitimization of feminist knowledge, and decolonial critiques on academic knowledge from Fahlberg (2023), Connell (2010), Go (2016), and Collins (2019) regarding Western epistemic hierarchies and the impacts of colonialism and other systems of oppression on academic knowledge (Fahlberg, 2023; Connell, (Fahlberg, 2023; Connell, 2010; Go, 2016; Collins, 2019). Smith (1987; 2005) argues that institutionalized forms of knowledge exclude the perspectives of women and marginalized groups. Thus, the knowledges of women and marginalized groups are de-legitimized and are not represented in dominant systems of knowledge (Smith 1987; Smith, 2005). As I discuss further in Chapter 3, Smith (2005) illustrates that texts produce institutional discourses that are disconnected from people's lived experiences. She argues that texts play a major role in producing institutional discourses that subsume people's experiences and identities into institutional categories and procedures that regulate people's actions (Smith, 2005). Thus, Smith (2005) contends that as texts produce and reproduce institutional discourses, they obscure people's lived experiences and perspectives, and often do not reflect people's lived experiences.

Fahlberg (2023), Connell (2010), Go (2016), and Collins (2019) argue that non-Western knowledges are excluded from knowledge production processes in Western academia. These scholars illustrate that within Western academia, the knowledges and perspectives of non-Western people and academics are de-legitimized and are perceived as inferior to the knowledge

Western academics. Fahlberg (2023), Connell (2010), Go (2016), and Collins (2019) highlight that colonial systems of oppression are embedded in Western academic knowledge production.

As I describe more in Chapter 3, insights from these theoretical perspectives guided my collection and analysis of data for this study by drawing my attention to the questions of if and how research texts shape and coordinate the work of advocates in community GBV organizations. In this study, I view academic research on GBV as reflecting particular institutional discourses about GBV that are disconnected from the lived experiences of frontline workers (Smith, 2005). This understanding of academic research allowed me to explore the disjunctures between academic research on GBV and frontline work, and how these disjunctures can be mitigated. I also include decolonial critiques on academic knowledge from Fahlberg (2023), Connell (2010), Go (2016), and Collins (2019) that illustrate Western epistemic hierarchies and colonial systems of oppression embedded in Western academic knowledge production. These critiques of Western knowledge production are relevant for this study because I am focusing on the use of GBV research in a Western context, and the production of knowledge in Western academia. As my study explores, there are interesting tensions in this context that advocates in Ontario face around the pressures to use Western forms of academic knowledge with its inaccessible nature. Using decolonial critiques on academic knowledge allowed me to build on Smith's (2005) work and explore how colonialism and other systems of oppression contribute to the inaccessibility of academic knowledge and its disconnect from people's lived experiences.

These theoretical ideas helped guide my analysis of the barriers advocates face accessing and utilizing academic knowledge on GBV and the disjuncture between academic research on GBV and the experiences of frontline workers. These theoretical perspectives strengthened this

study's analysis on the inaccessibility of academic research by exploring the systems of oppression embedded in academic knowledge production, and the exclusion of the experiences and voices of advocates as sources of knowledge in academic research on GBV.

Outline of Chapters

In Chapter 2, I provide context for the study that follows by examining the background literature related to the pressures that community GBV organizations are experiencing stemming from neoliberalism, underfunding, and the COVID-19 pandemic. I also review literature regarding the barriers to accessing academic research and strategies to address them, and the challenges of mobilizing GBV research. In this chapter I discuss the theoretical, empirical, and methodological contributions this study makes to existing literature on these topics.

In Chapter 3, I outline the methodological approaches I utilized in this study to explore how advocates in community GBV organizations perceive and utilize academic research on GBV. This chapter discusses the theoretical perspectives this study drew on in the collection and analysis of data and expands on the value of using elements of Smith's (2005) theoretical work in conjunction with the decolonial perspectives of Fahlberg (2023), Connell (2010), Go (2016), and Collins (2019). This chapter also discusses how my social location and positionality may have shaped this research. Finally, in this chapter, I discuss the recruitment process, access challenges, data collection, and data analysis methods utilized for this study.

In Chapter 4, I explore how advocates use research on GBV in their work and their level of engagement with academic research on GBV. The chapter begins by tracing the emergence of the feminist anti-violence movement and grassroots feminist anti-violence organizations in North America from the late 60's to the early 70's and outlines how the growth of neoliberalism in the 1970's impacted the mainstream feminist anti-violence movement and community GBV

organizations (Bumiller, 2008; Boucher, 2021). Drawing on interviews from advocates in community GBV organizations and an analysis of social media content disseminated by community GBV organizations, this chapter explores the intense workloads of advocates in community GBV organizations and the pressures facing community GBV organizations. This analysis provides context into the limited capacity that advocates in community GBV organizations have to engage with academic research, and the complex relationship advocates have with academic research on GBV.

In Chapter 5, drawing on interviews with advocates, I explore the barriers that advocates in community GBV organizations experience accessing and utilizing academic research on GBV. This chapter discusses the inaccessible nature of academic research, and the systems of power and oppression embedded in knowledge production processes in Western academia. This analysis highlights the exclusion of the experiences and knowledge of advocates in community GBV organizations in academic knowledge production on GBV. This chapter outlines four major barriers advocates experience accessing and utilizing academic research on GBV.

In Chapter 6, from the perspectives of advocates who I interviewed, I outline recommendations for academics on ways to mitigate the barriers that non-academics, specifically advocates in community GBV organizations, experience accessing and utilizing academic research on GBV. This chapter also discusses some of the professional pressures that academics experience, which may limit their capacity to engage with accessible forms of knowledge dissemination. The recommendations offer insights into how GBV researchers, and academics more broadly, can make their findings more accessible and useful for target audiences outside of academia.

Finally in Chapter 7, I reflect on the findings of this study and the contributions this study has made to existing research regarding the inaccessibility of academic research and the challenges associated with mobilizing academic research on GBV. Based on the recommendations of advocates I interviewed, this chapter also provides an example of an alternative form of knowledge dissemination by disseminating the key findings of this study through two infographics. Finally, this chapter outlines the limitations of this study and opportunities for future research to explore the barriers that advocates in community GBV organizations experience accessing and utilizing academic research on GBV, and how these barriers can be mitigated.

Chapter 2: Background

Introduction

This study explores how advocates in community GBV organizations in Ontario perceive and use academic research on GBV. Existing research on the pressures that community GBV organizations are experiencing has focused largely on the impacts that neoliberal politics, underfunding, and the COVID-19 pandemic have had on the work of community GBV organizations (e.g. Bumiller, 2008; Boucher, 2021; Quinlan, 2017; Boucher, 2023; Quinlan & Singh, 2020). This study contributes to this literature by exploring how these pressures shape advocates' capacity to engage with academic research on GBV in their work.

Existing literature on the accessibility of academic research has focused on the barriers that non-academic audiences face accessing and utilizing academic research (Anderson & McLachlan, 2016; Badley, 2020; Burawoy, 2005; Hartman et al., 2023), and why academic knowledge is inaccessible and disconnected from people's lived experiences (Go, 2016; Fahlberg, 2023; Collins, 2019; Smith, 2005). Little attention has been given to how non-academic audiences perceive the accessibility of academic research. This study helps fill this gap in the literature by exploring the perspectives of advocates in community GBV organizations regarding the barriers they experience accessing and utilizing academic research on GBV. To address the research practice gap in the GBV sector, scholars have investigated the challenges with mobilizing academic research on GBV and strategies to address them. However, the perspectives of advocates in community GBV organizations concerning how the challenges with mobilizing academic research on GBV can be mitigated are largely missing from this literature. This study contributes to this research by exploring advocates' recommendations to make

academic research more accessible to community GBV organizations and overcome challenges with mobilizing this research.

In this chapter, I chart three areas of literature that this study contributes to. First, I briefly chart literature on the diverse pressures that community GBV organizations are experiencing, which has focused on the challenges that community GBV organizations are experiencing stemming from neoliberal politics, funding shifts and cuts, and the COVID-19 pandemic (Bumiller, 2008; Boucher, 2021; Quinlan, 2017; Boucher, 2023; Quinlan & Singh, 2020). Then, I examine existing literature on the critiques and limitations of academic knowledge (Fahlberg, 2023; Go, 2016; Collins, 2019; Smith, 2005) and research on the challenges with mobilizing academic research on GBV (Wathen, 2022). I end this chapter with a discussion of the empirical, theoretical, and methodological contributions this study makes to the existing literatures discussed above.

Pressures on Anti-Violence Organizations in Canada: Neoliberalism, Underfunding and a Global Pandemic

Existing research on feminist anti-violence organizations highlights the significant pressures that anti-violence organizations in Canada experience (Bumiller 2008; Quinlan, 2017, Boucher 2021, Boucher, 2023, Quinlan & Singh 2020). Neo-liberalism, and the resulting underfunding of anti-violence organizations, and pressures from the COVID-19 pandemic have created a range of challenges for community-based anti-violence organizations (Bumiller 2008; Quinlan, 2017, Boucher 2021, Boucher, 2023, Quinlan & Singh 2020). Amidst these pressures, anti-violence organizations play a crucial and underrecognized role in supporting GBV survivors, and in GBV activist work. This study contributes to this literature by exploring the

working conditions of advocates in community GBV organizations in Ontario and the pressures they are experiencing, and how these pressures shape advocates' capacity to access and engage with academic research on GBV.

Existing literature has explored how the growth of neoliberalism has shaped the feminist anti-violence movement and the work of community GBV organizations. For example, Bumiller (2008) illustrates how feminist movements aiming to address sexual violence have been impacted by neoliberalism in the United States. Through an examination of the emergence of feminist anti-violence movements and feminist anti-violence organizations, Bumiller (2008) highlights the complex relationship between feminist anti-violence organizations and the state. Bumiller (2008) explores how the growth of neoliberalism in the 1970's impacted feminist anti-violence organizations and shifted their work. Using Foucault's perspective of power and governmentality to support her analysis, Bumiller (2008) illustrates how neoliberal politics restrict feminist anti-violence organizations, limiting both their capacity to support survivors and involvement in GBV activism.

Canadian literature has also investigated how the growth of neoliberal politics has impacted the work of community GBV organizations and the pressures they are experiencing. For instance, through a historical study of the sexual assault evidence kit in Canada, Quinlan (2017) draws on interviews conducted with anti-rape activists and illustrates the pressures that feminist anti-violence organizations experienced since the 1980's with the growth of neoliberalism. Quinlan (2017) explores how neoliberal politics and the implementation of government funding for rape crisis centres (RCCs) in Ontario in the 1980's shaped the work anti-rape activists engaged in. Her analysis highlights how the professionalization of RCCs and increased collaboration with medical and legal professionals affected the organizational

structures of RCCs and contributed to the de-valuation of anti-rape activists' knowledge in medicolegal settings.

The funding pressures experienced by community GBV organizations, stemming from neoliberalism are highlighted in Boucher's (2021) study. For instance, Boucher's (2021) policy analysis investigates funding shifts for feminist anti-violence work in Ontario from 1990-2015, emphasizing how neoliberal governance has contributed to increased competition for funding among organizations, and changes in how government funds were distributed. Boucher (2021) argues that feminist anti-violence organizations remain active in advocating for crucial cultural and policy reforms while providing essential supports for survivors. However, she contends that their capacity to persist with this work is at risk due to shifting relations with Canadian governments, limited funding and neoliberal politics.

The pressures that community GBV organizations in Canada are experiencing from underfunding are also illustrated in Beres et al.'s (2009) study. Through a national survey with RCCs and sexual assault centres (SACs) in Canada, Beres et al. (2009) investigate the challenges that these organizations experience in relation to institutionalization in a neoliberal context. Beres et al. (2009) highlight how community GBV organizations and women's social services experienced significant funding shifts and cuts with the election of the Mulroney Conservatives in the 1990's. Additionally, due to a shift to project-based funding, community GBV organizations must allocate more time to fundraising, which limits advocates' ability to support survivors and engage in activist work (Beres et al., 2009).

Some scholars have investigated how existing challenges that community GBV organizations are experiencing, stemming from neoliberalism and lack of funding, were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Boucher, 2023; Quinlan & Singh, 2020; Burd et al.,

2023). For example, Boucher (2023) illustrates that the COVID-19 pandemic and neoliberalism have amplified discourses of resilience for feminist anti-violence organizations. Stemming from neoliberal politics and additional challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic, Boucher (2023) argues that feminist anti-violence organizations must embody organizational resilience survive. Boucher's (2023) findings shed light into the challenges that feminist anti-violence workers experienced from the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, throughout the pandemic workers experienced intense burnout and felt forced to adjust their services. Prior to the pandemic, feminist anti-violence workers were already under-resourced, and the new emergency funding available invoked anxieties regarding its sustainability (Boucher, 2023).

These concerns were further highlighted by Quinlan and Singh (2020), who examine feminist caring labour in Canadian shelters throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Quinlan & Singh (2020) contend that although domestic violence rose in the COVID-19 pandemic, and various types of work were deemed essential, feminist anti-violence workers experienced minimal recognition for their crucial roles in supporting women and their communities. Quinlan and Singh (2020) highlight how the lack of recognition for this caring labour exemplifies “the ongoing devaluation of grassroots feminist interventions that has accompanied the professionalization and depoliticization of the anti- violence movement throughout North America” (p. 573). Quinlan and Singh (2020) argue that framing domestic violence as a public health emergency during the pandemic obscures “its everydayness” (p. 576) and the persistent structural oppressions that fuel GBV, and positions feminist caring labour as an emergency service rather than an essential one (Quinlan & Singh, 2020).

The challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic placed on advocates working in community GBV organizations are also illustrated in Burd et al.'s (2023a) study with staff in the violence

against women (VAW) sector in Ontario. Through in-depth interviews and focus groups with staff and Executive Directors (EDs) of VAW organizations, Burd et al. (2023a) found that staff were experiencing emotional strain while supporting survivors who were experiencing immediate trauma and violence, in addition to stress related to the pandemic. For instance, due to COVID-19 restrictions, the number of beds that VAW organizations could offer women were limited, which resulted in staff feeling guilty and distressed when their organizations did not have the capacity to help women in crisis (Burd et al., 2023a). Some VAW staff also experienced challenges with their self-care routines during the pandemic and had to adapt their self-care routines in ways that aligned with public health guidelines (Burd et al., 2023a).

These issues are echoed in Burd et al.'s (2023b) study exploring the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the care and services of women's shelters in Ontario. Burd et al. (2023b) gathered data through interviews with shelter service users, shelter staff, and focus groups with EDs. Throughout the pandemic, shelter staff experienced barriers to their provision of care and supporting women and children (Burd et al., 2023b). For instance, informal and formal connections play a vital role in building community and healing in shelters, but COVID-19 restrictions hindered these connections (Burd et al., 2023b). The COVID-19 pandemic guidelines and the pandemic overall created challenges for shelter staff to meet the needs of survivors (Burd et al., 2023). For example, Burd et al. (2023b) found that physical distancing guidelines "often prevented staff from meeting face-to-face with clients, something that is crucial in a shelter context" (p. 7). Thus, some staff felt that they could not adequately evaluate the needs of survivors and their ability to provide emotional support to survivors was hindered (Burd et al., 2023b).

Whereas existing literature has charted the lack of resources, devaluation of feminist anti-violence work, and new challenges imposed on feminist anti-violence organizations before, during, and after the pandemic (Boucher, 2021; Boucher, 2023; Quinlan & Singh 2020), this study contributes to this literature by providing insights into the challenges community GBV organizations experience using academic research on GBV. This study extends existing literature on the pressures that community GBV organizations are experiencing in Canada, by investigating how advocates' ability to utilize academic research on GBV is shaped by these broader pressures. This study's Ontario focus empirically contributes to existing literature on the pressures community GBV organizations are experiencing by investigating how the pressures experienced by advocates in community GBV organizations in Ontario shape their capacity to engage with academic research on GBV, which has not yet been explored.

Limitations of Western Academic Knowledge

The inaccessibility and limitations of Western academic knowledge has been the subject of some scholarly attention (Fahlberg, 2023, Go, 2016; Connell, 2010; Collins, 2019; Anderson & McLachlan, 2016; Nyden & Wiewel, 1992; Wathen, 2022). As many scholars have noted, these barriers contribute to the gap between research and practice, which puts this knowledge out of reach for audiences who need it most (Fahlberg, 2023). This body of literature on the limitations of academic knowledge comes from the perspectives of academics. This study builds on this literature by exploring the perspectives of non-academics on the limitations of academic knowledge.

Systems of Power Embedded in Western Academic Knowledge Production

Feminist, post-colonial and de-colonial theorists have offered some crucial insights into the limitations of Western academic knowledge by shining a light on the systems of power and oppression that shape the production of this knowledge (Go, 2016; Fahlberg, 2023; Collins, 2019). As I discuss more in Chapters 3, 5, and 6, these scholars have offered insights into why academic research is often inaccessible and unreflective of lived experiences. For example, Smith (2005) argues that mainstream sociology is disconnected from people's lived experiences because within mainstream sociology, people are often treated as objects to be studied, while sociologists are recognized as 'experts' of knowledge on the social world. As a result, there is a disjuncture between the knowledge that sociologists produce and people's realities (Smith, 2005). Smith (2005) argues that the knowledge that mainstream sociology produces is limited because women and marginalized groups have been excluded from institutionalized processes of knowledge production.

Building on Smith (2005) as well as other scholars, Julian Go (2016) offers a post-colonial critique of social theory, in which he argues that sociology and social theory are embedded with imperialist Western and male-centric standpoints that universalize Western knowledges and experiences and cast them as superior to non-Western knowledges. Go (2016) illustrates how Western social theory generalizes the experiences of Eastern and non-Western cultures in monolithic reductive ways and uncritically applies Western concepts to the rest of the world. Thus, in Go's view, Western sociological knowledge de-legitimizes the knowledges and experiences of non-Western groups and perpetuates Western epistemic hierarchies.

The limitations of Western academic knowledge are also discussed by Fahlberg (2023) who extends Go's (2016) post-colonial critique to offer a decolonial critique of Western

sociological knowledge¹. Through a case-study of Participatory Action Research (PAR) in Rio de Janeiro, Fahlberg (2023) illustrates how colonial inequalities and epistemic hierarchies are perpetuated in sociological research. For instance, many marginalized groups, including Indigenous people and intellectuals from the Global South, are excluded from higher educational settings and are not represented in Western sociological research, which Fahlberg (2023) argues, hinders the types of knowledge sociological research produces. Additionally, Fahlberg (2023) discusses that beyond exclusion from academic institutions, marginalized groups that sociologists study are often excluded from conversations about the impacts and recommendations of this research, which can cause more harm than good. Fahlberg (2023) argues that research conducted by community organizations without the help of academics is often considered invalid and academic articles are written in complex language which creates barriers for non-academics to understand.

The colonial, racial, and patriarchal systems of oppression and Western epistemic hierarchies in academe are also explored by Collins (2019). Collins (2019) illustrates how scholars of colour and non-Western knowledges have been excluded in Western academia and social theory. For instance, intellectuals of colour experience barriers entering and advancing in academic spaces and their knowledge is de-legitimized in Western academia (Collins, 2019). Collins (2019) highlights the importance of decolonizing knowledge production processes and “imagining new alternatives for transformation” (p. 114).

The Inaccessibility of Academic Knowledge

¹ The term post-colonial theories have been critiqued for framing colonialism as an issue of the past (Collins, 2019). Collins argues that decolonial theories recognize both the historical and current impacts of colonialism.

Some scholars have also explored how academic research is inaccessible and not reflective of people's lived realities (Anderson & McLachlan, 2016; Nyden & Wiewel, 1992; Wathen, 2022). For example, Anderson & McLachlan (2016) highlight the inaccessible nature of academic research through a PAR project in the Canadian Prairies with academics and community members. They illustrate the cyclical nature of PAR through four different cycles of their research project related to "the bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) crisis, or "mad cow crisis" (p. 300), local farming, and sustainable food systems (Anderson & McLachlan, 2016). Anderson and McLachlan (2016) argue that exclusion of marginalized groups and non-academics from academic knowledge production underscores the importance of research methods focused on knowledge mobilization with members of the community. Their study illustrates that transformative research paradigms in academia can combat the value and privileges associated with positivist and scientific research. Anderson and MacLachlan (2016) propose strategies that can help mitigate the inaccessible nature of academic research. For instance, layering is a strategy that attempts to overcome inaccessible academic writing by collaborating with individuals both within and outside of academia to establish how to write in the most effective ways for different audiences (Anderson & McLachlan, 2016).

Nyden and Wiewel (1992) reflect on the importance of community-based research and the challenges it presents, drawing on their experiences conducting community-based research in Chicago. For instance, community organizations and academics have different daily activities and relationships to the research (Nyden & Wiewel, 1992). Nyden and Wiewel (1992) emphasize the need to critically evaluate academic standards that privilege disciplinary focused research and devalue community-based and collaborative research. For instance, they suggest that academics conducting community-based research may experience more challenges achieving publication

than disciplinary focused research. With the formation of trusting relationships, and careful planning to overcome potential obstacles, Nyden & Wiewel (1992) argue that collaborations between community organizations and academics can lead to impactful research that is accessible to activists and organizations that need it.

In the context of GBV research, existing literature has also covered strategies to overcome the challenges associated with mobilizing research on GBV. For instance, Wathen (2022) discusses four lessons that she has learned from extensive experience in partnered GBV work, research, and knowledge mobilization. Wathen (2022) argues that meaningful changes cannot be implemented through producing an academic paper and hoping it reaches important audiences. To mobilize GBV research, it is crucial collaborate with various stakeholder perspectives to produce knowledge and ensure that key findings are accessible for intended audiences (Wathen, 2022). Wathen (2022) highlights how knowledge mobilization is a highly complex process. She argues that “while planning is important, flexibility is key...” (p. 123). Thus, researchers must be willing to shift their focus or priorities and compromise to meet the needs of various partners when funding and policy opportunities arise (Wathen, 2022). Wathen (2022) argues for the incentivization of knowledge mobilization methods within academia and outside of academia, and the inclusion of the lived experiences of people involved in GBV work in GBV research.

Fahlberg (2023), Go (2016), Collins (2019), and Smith (2005) offer theoretical insights into why academic knowledge is often inaccessible and not reflective of all people’s lived realities. Anderson and McLachlan (2016), Nyden and Wiewel (1992), and Wathen’s (2022) work illustrate different ways that academic research is inaccessible and disconnected from people’s experiences, and offer potential solutions to address the inaccessible nature of academic

research. Missing from much of this literature is how people outside of academia perceive the accessibility of academic research. This study contributes to this existing research by exploring how advocates in community GBV organizations perceive the accessibility of academic research on GBV. This study also contributes to the gap in existing research on the barriers associated with accessing academic research from the perspectives of advocates outside of academia.

The Challenges of Mobilizing GBV Research

Existing literature has explored the challenges with mobilizing academic research on GBV and the difficulties with measuring successful knowledge mobilization. For instance, Fraser (2014) illustrates that the second wave of the feminist movement in Canada, emerging in the 1970's, marked a pivotal period for advancing efforts to address GBV. During this period, with relatively little research on GBV, it was arguably easier to see and track the impacts of GBV research. For example, Fraser (2014) demonstrates that McLeod's (1980) study published the first Canadian statistics on wife battering and victimization surveys emerged in the 1980's and led to GBV becoming a public issue requiring state attention. However, in the context of decades of research on GBV, Wathen (2022) argues that it is challenging to assess the extent to which current GBV research leads to meaningful changes and is accessible to GBV organizations committed to making those changes. This points to the need for research aimed at understanding how advocates in GBV organizations utilize and perceive academic GBV research and the challenges they face accessing it.

The challenges with mobilizing academic research on GBV are illustrated by Wathen (2022) who argues that GBV is a complex social issue that is difficult to address due to a lack of consensus among various stakeholders regarding how to confront GBV, high costs, and gaps and inconsistencies in GBV research. Additionally, it can be difficult to achieve knowledge

mobilization outside of academia, because the intended audiences of academic research may not be reached through academic modes of knowledge dissemination, such as conferences and academic articles (Wathen, 2022). Wathen (2022) illustrates that it is difficult to measure what successful knowledge mobilization is “...because knowledge sharing, uptake, use, and impact are all complex, time-consuming and highly confounded processes” (Wathen, 2022, p. 120). Additionally, the way that research *use* is defined impacts perceptions of successful knowledge mobilization (Wathen, 2022). For instance, Wathen (2022) discusses that much of the existing literature on knowledge mobilization perceives knowledge *use* as something that must be apparent through specific actions or decisions. However, Wathen (2022) suggests that concrete actions are not the only indication of knowledge use and contends that we must find ways to investigate how knowledge is used “symbolically and conceptually” (p. 121) to mobilize research knowledge.

Aside from Wathen’s (2022) study, there is little discussion on specific challenges of mobilizing GBV research in existing literature. The perspectives of advocates working in community GBV organizations regarding the challenges associated with mobilizing academic research on GBV are largely unexplored in existing literature. This study addresses this gap by examining these challenges and potential approaches to overcome them from the perspectives of advocates in community GBV organizations. Missing from existing literature on the challenges with mobilizing academic research on GBV are the perspectives of advocates working in community GBV regarding the accessibility of this research and how the challenge with mobilizing GBV research can be mitigated. This study contributes to this literature by offering insights into the barriers that advocates in community GBV organizations face using academic research and offers recommendations to academics to help mitigate these barriers. Specific

recommendations from advocates in community GBV organizations to mitigate barriers to accessing and utilizing academic research on GBV has not yet been explored in literature addressing the challenges with mobilizing academic research on GBV.

Current Study

This study provides valuable theoretical, methodological, and empirical contributions to existing literature focused on the pressures facing community GBV organizations, the barriers to accessing academic research and strategies to mitigate these barriers, and the challenges of mobilizing academic research on GBV.

This study contributes a unique theoretical perspective to explore the inaccessibility of academic research and the challenges of mobilizing academic research on GBV. Drawing on elements of Smith's (2005) theoretical work in conjunction with insights from decolonial critiques of academic knowledge from Go (2016), Fahlberg (2023), Connell (2010), and Collins (2019), this study provides a unique analysis on academic knowledge from the perspective of non-academics, the inaccessible nature of academic research, and the barriers advocates in community GBV experience accessing and utilizing academic research on GBV. The use of these perspectives together, to explore the inaccessible nature of academic research and challenges associated with mobilizing academic research on GBV expands Smith's (2005) discussions of the de-legitimization of feminist knowledge in academic knowledge production processes to include a recognition of the impact of colonialism in shaping academic knowledge. This study also expands the application of these theoretical perspectives to analyze the barriers that advocates in community GBV organizations experience accessing and utilizing academic research on GBV, and how these challenges can be mitigated.

This study offers methodological contributions to existing literature on the challenges of mobilizing academic research on GBV by combining unobtrusive data from social media content disseminated by community GBV organizations with interview data with advocates in community GBV organizations. Existing research exploring work that community GBV organizations are engaged in and the challenges they are facing has relied primarily on interview data with advocates. I build on this work by drawing on community GBV organizations' social media content to supplement interview data exploring the barriers advocates experience accessing and utilizing academic research on GBV. Departing from existing literature that has drawn on personal reflections on mobilizing academic research on GBV (Wathen, 2022), in this study, theoretical insights from Smith (2005) shaped my methodological approach by drawing my attention to the types research texts community GBV organizations are engaged with. Analyzing social media content shared by six community GBV organizations, strengthened this study's findings on community GBV organizations' engagement with research by investigating if community GBV organizations are using academic research and/or other forms of GBV research in the content they disseminate online. This analysis supplemented interview data regarding advocates' engagement with GBV research in their work.

Finally, this study offers various empirical contributions to existing literature. There is a gap in existing literature on the pressures facing community GBV organizations regarding the challenges advocates experience accessing and utilizing academic research on GBV. This study contributes to this literature by exploring how the pressures facing community GBV organizations impact advocates' capacity to engage with academic research in their work. This study contributes to existing literature on the inaccessibility of academic research and the challenges with mobilizing academic research on GBV by exploring how advocates in

community GBV organizations in Ontario utilize and perceive academic research on GBV, which is largely unexplored in this literature. This study also provides recommendations to academics engaged in GBV research, and academics in general, to disseminate accessible research to community organizations and other non-academic audiences. These recommendations contribute to existing literature on the challenges with mobilizing academic research on GBV, and strategies to mitigate these challenges.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This multi-method qualitative project explores how advocates working in community GBV organizations utilize and perceive academic research on GBV, using Smith's (2005) theoretical discussions on knowledge, texts, and institutional discourses, in conversation with de-colonial critiques of academic knowledge from Go (2016), Fahlberg (2023), Connell (2010), and Collins (2019) to guide my data collection and analysis. In this chapter, I will detail the theoretical framing and methodology of this study. I will begin by discussing how I incorporated aspects of Smith's (2005) theoretical work alongside scholars' de-colonial critiques of academic knowledge (Go, 2016; Fahlberg, 2023; Connell, 2010; Collins, 2019). Next, I will discuss my social location and positionality and how my social location has shaped this research. Then, I detail my approach to data collection including discussions on this study's sample, recruitment processes, and access challenges. I then discuss the methods I utilized to analyze data for this study. Finally, I outline the ethical considerations involved in conducting this research.

Theoretical Framing

Smith's (2005) discussion about the de-legitimization of feminist knowledge guided this study's analysis of advocates' engagement with academic research on GBV. Smith (1987, 2005) argues that the knowledges of women and marginalized groups have been excluded from processes of knowledge production and have been de-legitimized as sources of knowledge in institutional discursive practices. For instance, the production of institutionalized forms of knowledge in media, education, and science has been dominated by the perspectives of men (Smith, 1987). Thus, the perspectives of men are recognized as universal and granted more credibility than women's knowledge and experiences (Smith, 1987; 2005). Smith (2005) highlights the de-legitimization of feminist knowledge in mainstream sociology, as mainstream

sociological knowledge has been rooted in male perspectives and excludes women's lived experiences and perspectives. In this study, I draw on this theoretical discussion of knowledge to explore the de-legitimization of feminist knowledge in academia and the GBV sector, and the pressures that advocates working in community GBV organizations experience to engage with academic research on GBV. While this study does not follow all the prescribed methodological steps of Smith's institutional ethnography, Smith's (2005) theoretical discussions of knowledge, texts, and institutional discourses are useful to examine advocates' perceptions and engagement with academic research on GBV.

I build on Smith's (2005) theoretical discussions of the de-legitimization of feminist knowledge and critiques of academic knowledge by placing her work in conversation with de-colonial critiques of academic knowledge from Go (2016), Fahlberg (2023), Connell (2010), and Collins (2019). Using these de-colonial critiques of academic knowledge together with Smith's (2005) critiques of academic knowledge, I build on Smith's (2005) work to explore how colonialism and other systems of power embedded in Western academia also shape knowledge production processes in academia and the disconnect between academic knowledge and people's lived experiences. I draw on Go (2016), Fahlberg (2023), Connell (2010), and Collins' (2019) writings on colonialism embedded in Western academia to argue that Western academic knowledge is embedded with colonial systems of power and oppression, which contributes to the inaccessibility of academic research and its inadequacy in reflecting many people's realities. For instance, as many of these scholars argue, Western academic knowledge universalizes Western perspectives and de-legitimizes non-Western knowledges (Go, 2016; Fahlberg, 2023; Connell, 2010). In this study, I use these arguments to illustrate the inaccessibility of Western academic knowledge and the limited forms of knowledge that sociology, and Western academia more

broadly, produces due to the Western epistemic hierarchies embedded in academic research (Go, 2016; Connell, 2010; Fahlberg, 2023; Collins, 2019).

In addition to Smith's (2005) theoretical discussion about the de-legitimization of feminist knowledge, and de-colonial critiques of academic knowledge (Go, 2016; Connell, 2010; Fahlberg, 2023; Collins, 2019), Smith's (2005) understandings of texts and institutional discourses guided this study's analysis of advocates' engagement with academic research on GBV. Within her broader institutional ethnography, an approach she proposes for investigating how institutions coordinate and regulate people's actions, Smith (2005) defines texts as anything that is "material in form" (p. 228) and can be reproduced, such as electronic media, drawings and written texts. She describes institutional discourses as ways of thinking and speaking that dominate in institutions, and defines them as selecting "...those aspects of what people do that are accountable within it, subsuming actualities as integral to the production of the institution... Typically, perspectiveless representations are created in which people disappear as subjects and agents" (p. 225). Smith (2005) argues that institutional discourses subsume people's lived experiences into institutional categories and obscure people's perspectives and identities. Smith (2005) contends that texts play a central role in producing and reproducing institutional discourses that obscure people's lived experiences and perspectives and often do not reflect people's lived experiences. This study draws on these theoretical ideas to explore how academic research on GBV perpetuate institutional discourses that are often inaccessible and disconnected from the work and experiences of advocates in community GBV organizations.

In this study I also use Smith's (2005) concept of work knowledges. Smith defines work knowledges as "what people know of and in their work and how it is coordinated with the work of others" (p. 229). Smith argues that in mainstream sociology, women and marginalized groups'

lived experiences and experiential knowledge is often overlooked and excluded as sources of knowledge. Drawing on work knowledges, Smith argues, helps mitigate the disjuncture between academic research and people's lived experiences because it centres the realities and perspectives of people being studied. In this study, I centre the work knowledges of advocates in community GBV organizations to explore how they perceive academic research on GBV, the barriers they experience using academic research on GBV, and how these barriers can be overcome.

Social Location and Positionality

Positionality describes how individual's social identities, such as race, gender, class, and ability impact people's perspectives, knowledge, and engagement with the world (Alcoff, 1988). One's positionality is important for researchers to understand because our experiences and perspectives shape the research we conduct and how we conduct it (Bourke, 2014). In the context of this study, my experience as a co-op student conducting research at the University of Waterloo's Sexual Violence and Prevention Office (SVPRO) provided valuable experience for this project. Although SVPRO is an institutional organization and the work differs in some ways from community GBV organizations, my experience at SVPRO provided insights into the experience of working at a GBV organization, and the relevance of academic research to this work. In addition, to my experience at SVPRO, my experience as a sociology student guided my interest in this project. As a sociology student I have read plenty of important academic articles about various social issues that could make meaningful changes outside of the academy, but have often reflected on how the inaccessible nature of academic research hinders the potential of this knowledge reaching important audiences outside of academia.

In addition to these experiences, it is important to recognize that my social location, as a white, cis-gender, able-bodied woman from an upper middle-class family in Canada shapes my

experiences, privilege, and ability to conduct this study. My social location has shaped my opportunities and knowledge of the world and thus influences my experience conducting research and my interpretation of the social world. Throughout this study, I sought to maintain awareness of how my positionality and experiences impact my collection and analysis of data.

Methodology

This study is a multi-method qualitative project involving semi-structured interviews and an analysis of unobtrusive textual data. A qualitative orientation was beneficial for this study because qualitative research aims to provide an in-depth understanding of an issue through the eyes of participants (Bell et al., 2022). Thus, a qualitative design best supported the goals of this study to capture some of the voices of those involved in frontline GBV work to determine if/how research is informing their work, what types of research they are using, the challenges associated with using academic research, and how these challenges can be mitigated. Using qualitative methods allowed me to learn from employees at GBV organizations and gain rich and detailed knowledge about their perceptions of and experiences with utilizing GBV research. Additionally, qualitative methods leave room for unexpected and nuanced findings that may not be identified through quantitative methodologies (Bell et al., 2022). Therefore, using qualitative methods provided extensive data and ensured that the voices of employees at GBV organizations were highlighted in this study.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews

Participants

Twelve advocates working in community GBV organizations in Ontario were interviewed for this study. To be included, participants had to be currently working in a paid position within sexual assault centres (SACs) or women's shelters in Ontario. Organizations selected for this study are part of the Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres and the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses, which receive some provincial funding. Of the twelve participants, seven were advocates working in SACs, and five were advocates working in women's shelters. The geographical location of participants in this study ranged from Southwestern Ontario to Eastern Ontario. Interviewing advocates from Southwestern Ontario and Eastern Ontario allowed me to gather data from advocates working in different areas of Ontario. Most participants interviewed worked in organizations located in urban areas, and a couple organizations also served some rural areas. The organizations that participants worked at were founded in the mid to late 1970's and the early 80's. The majority of participants interviewed were white cis-gendered women with a university degree.

Recruitment

I applied for and received ethics approval in the spring term of 2024 by the University of Waterloo Research Ethics Board (see Appendix A). To recruit interview participants, I utilized purposive sampling techniques to ensure that I was recruiting participants who fit the criteria of this study. After my study received ethics approval, I contacted community GBV organizations in Ontario via email to recruit advocates. To recruit advocates, I used community GBV organizations' public websites to find the general email address of organizations and the emails of staff members. If the contact information of staff was not available, I emailed the Executive Director (ED) of organizations. In this email, I explained the details and purpose of my study, and asked if the ED or the person responsible for the organization's general email, would be

willing to assist me with recruiting advocates at their organization to participate in an interview. If they agreed to assist me with recruitment, I asked them to forward a recruitment email to advocates working at their organization. In this recruitment email, I explained the details and importance of my study and attached the information and consent letter inviting advocates to email me if they were interested in participating, as well as an assurance that their participation would be kept confidential from their employer. If staff member's emails were publicly available, I directly emailed them with the recruitment email inviting them to participate in the study. The advocates who participated in my study were given the choice of virtual interviews via Zoom or in-person interviews at a location convenient for them if we were located in the same area.

Access Challenges

Due to the intense workloads of advocates working in community GBV organizations, and the context these organizations are working within, I experienced challenges recruiting participants for this study. As I will discuss in Chapter 4, community GBV organizations are experiencing underfunding, understaffing, and high workloads (Beres et al., 2009; Ullman & Townsend, 2007; Boucher, 2021). Thus, it was understandably difficult for advocates to find time in their already busy schedules to participate in my study. In the stage of planning the study, I anticipated that I would have some difficulties with recruiting participants for this study. To address this, I ensured that I offered potential participants a lot of flexibility in scheduling the interviews and expressed a willingness to accommodate their schedules. I also voiced my appreciation for the time and effort it would take to participate in interviews and the expertise that they shared with me. In anticipation of recruitment challenges, I also offered advocates an opportunity to participate in a small two-person semi-structured interview. This allowed

advocates from the same organization who were interested in participating, to participate together if they wanted.

To overcome some of the challenges with recruiting participants, I expanded and extended my recruitment and collected unobtrusive data from more organizations than originally planned. Additionally, it is interesting to note that I experienced more difficulty recruiting advocates working in women's shelters than advocates working in SACs. Despite these challenges that I experienced with recruitment, I gained valuable data and findings from interviews with the twelve advocates who participated in this study, and the unobtrusive data gathered for this study helped to supplement these findings.

Semi-structured interviews

Eight individual semi-structured interviews, and 2 two-person semi-structured interviews with advocates working at the same organization were conducted for this study. I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews, because they allow participants to respond freely while keeping the conversation geared towards the research goals (Bell et al., 2022). Thus, the semi-structured interview format allowed advocates to share their personal experiences and ideas without feeling restricted to answer several specific questions. Despite offering in-person interviews to advocates who were located in a similar area to me, all of the participants chose to do the interviews virtually via Zoom. Before the interview began, participants received the information and consent letter for this study via email and were asked to sign the information and consent letter or they were asked to indicate their consent verbally before the interview began.

Before the interviews began, I re-iterated some of the information in the information and consent letter to remind advocates that their consent is completely voluntary, assured them that we could stop the interview at any time, and we could skip any question(s) that they did not feel

comfortable answering. Additionally, I reminded advocates that their identity would be kept confidential, and asked if they had any questions about the information and consent letter or any other questions about their participation in this study. Next, I asked if participants were comfortable with me audio-recording the interview. If advocates said yes, I verbally indicated that I was beginning the audio-recording.

To facilitate the semi-structured interviews, I utilized an interview guide with some set questions covering topics related to my research questions (see Appendix B). For example, participants were asked if their role involves using and/or conducting research on GBV, if their organization uses academic research on GBV, and if they experience challenges accessing and/or using academic research on GBV. Utilizing this interview guide ensured that significant topics related to my research questions were asked, while giving space to advocates to offer perspectives and experiences that may not have been covered in my interview guide. Throughout the interviews, I also took notes about anything that stood out to me as significant or unexpected findings. At the end of the interviews, I asked advocates if there was anything else related to our conversations that they wanted to discuss and verbally indicated when I was stopping my recording.

Unobtrusive Data

To supplement interview data, I collected unobtrusive textual data from six GBV organizations' social media content. The four community GBV organizations that I gathered data from (2 shelters, and 2 SACs) were chosen based on their geographical locations (Southern and Eastern Ontario) and the amount of content they had disseminated on their social media platforms to ensure that I had enough data to work with. Additionally, I gathered data from two provincial organizations that are parent organizations to women's shelters and rape crisis centres

in Ontario. I gathered social media content disseminated by the six organizations from 2022-2024 via Instagram related to the work that these organizations are engaged in, and their engagement with research on GBV in the content they disseminated. This time period was chosen due to the significant changes that community GBV organizations experienced to their work and services during lockdowns in the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, analyzing content after the lockdown period provided a better sense of the work that community GBV organizations are currently engaged in and information that they are currently disseminating.

I chose to gather content from the six organizations' Instagram pages, because Instagram displays posts in chronological order, making them easier and more efficient to collect and analyze than Facebook posts, which are often not presented in chronologically. Additionally, most of these organizations have their Instagram and Facebook pages linked, meaning the same content is being posted to both pages. To gather data, I created separate Word documents for each organizations' social media content I was analyzing, and screenshotted every post from 2022-2024 that related to my research questions. I ensured that the content was organized chronologically, and included the dates and links to each Instagram post. Throughout this process, I had a separate Word document to take notes on the Instagram posts I was screenshooting. In this document I took note of anything interesting I was finding, any research that was being referred to in the posts and/or captions, and anything that connected to existing academic literature related to community GBV organizations.

Data Analysis

I utilized qualitative thematic analysis to analyze the interview and unobtrusive data gathered in this study. Both thematic analyses incorporated Smith's (2005) understandings of knowledge, texts, and institutional discourses, alongside de-colonial critiques of academic

knowledge from Go (2016), Fahlberg (2023), Connell (2010), and Collins (2019). To do so, I drew on Timmermans and Tavory's (2012) abductive approach to qualitative analysis, which emphasizes the use of theoretical frameworks and concepts to guide interpretation of research findings, while also allowing new insights from research findings to shape existing theoretical frameworks. This approach allowed Smith's (2005) theoretical concepts of knowledge, texts, and institutional discourses, and de-colonial critiques of academic knowledge (Go, 2016; Fahlberg, 2023; Connell, 2010; Collins, 2019) to guide my analysis. For instance, I drew on Smith's (2005) theoretical discussions about texts and institutional discourses in my analysis of interview data by focusing on how academic research on GBV informs the work and actions of advocates in community GBV organizations and the disjuncture between academic research on GBV and the experiences of frontline workers. I also used Smith's (2005) theoretical discussions about the de-legitimization of feminist knowledge and Go (2016), Fahlberg (2023), Connell (2010), and Collins' (2019) de-colonial critiques of academic knowledge to draw my attention to research findings that illustrated the systems of power and oppression that are embedded in academic knowledge production processes and the de-legitimization of feminist knowledge in the GBV sector and academia. I followed this approach in my analysis of social media content disseminated by the six GBV organizations chosen for this study. Smith's (2005) theoretical work directed me to pay attention to if and how research was informing the content that the GBV organizations were disseminating, what forms of research were being used, and other texts that were being used in the content they disseminated.

Analysis of Interview Data

The first step of analyzing interview data was my transcriptions of interviews. I chose to manually transcribe interviews in Word documents to deepen my engagement with and

understanding of my research findings, and I had sufficient time between interviews to manually transcribe them. Throughout this process, I took notes on interesting findings and any re-occurring themes that were arising. After I transcribed the interviews, I drew on the five-stage approach to qualitative analysis outlined by Rapley (2016), Grbich (1991), and Braun and Clarke (2006). In stage one, I familiarized myself with interview data by reading and re-reading the interview transcripts and took notes of anything that stood out to me as significant and important. In stage two I began coding the interview transcriptions with NVivo. To begin the coding process, I systematically coded interview data and took notes of important findings (Rapley, 2016). I utilized an abductive approach to coding, which allowed theoretical discussions and concepts to guide my development of codes, and allowed me to generate codes that capture new findings related to my research questions (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). After systematically coding data interview data, following Rapley's (2016) approach I coded similar findings and themes with the same codes. In stage three, I used the codes to begin generating themes in my findings that captured my research questions and combined similar codes into potential themes. Throughout this process, I continuously reviewed and refined codes to ensure that they accurately represented interview data. In stage four, I re-examined the themes created from the initial codes. In this stage, the codes moved "from more verbatim, descriptive codes to more conceptual, abstract and analytic codes" (Rapley, 2016, p. 334). In stage five, I reviewed and refined these themes to ensure that they accurately represented the interview data.

Analysis of Unobtrusive Data

To analyze the unobtrusive data, I followed the same abductive approach to coding and the five-stage process of thematic analysis discussed above (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012; Rapley, 2016; Grbich, 1991, Braun & Clarke, 2006). To systematically code the data, I imported

the Word documents of the social media content I had gathered from the six organizations into NVivo. The five-stage process to analyze the unobtrusive data was more tedious and complex than interview data due to the large amount of data I had gathered. Thus, locating themes from the initial codes was a lengthy process. After locating themes from the codes, I began the process of reviewing these themes and turning them into broader more abstract codes/themes related to my research questions.

Ethical Considerations

Throughout the research process, I followed the protocols for ensuring confidentiality and voluntary participation for participants, and the protection and safe storage of data. As discussed previously, advocates were sent the information and consent letter for this study prior to participating, and I made sure to re-iterate this information before the interviews began and asked advocates if they had any questions about participating. Additionally, I gained consent to audio-record interviews before the interviews began. After the interviews were transcribed I deleted the audio-recordings of the interviews. The identities of participants were kept confidential throughout data analysis and writing the report. Due to the potential risks associated with employees sharing any challenges that they experience using GBV research, none of the GBV organizations are named in this report. In the report pseudonyms are used to identify quotes from advocates, and any identifying information was removed from interview transcriptions.

Chapter 4 “Undervalued, underfunded, and overworked”: The Conditions Shaping Advocates’ Engagement with Research

Introduction

Community GBV organizations support their communities in crucial ways through providing services to survivors, engaging in activism and advocacy work, and collaborating with other community organizations (Boucher, 2021; Beres et al., 2009; Ullman & Townsend, 2007). Sexual assault centres (SACs)/Rape Crisis Centres (RCCs) are engaged in various types of work such as: “advocacy, counseling, police and court accompaniment, referrals, producing public education materials, emergency intervention, organizing for political/social change, keeping records for clients” (Beres et al., 2009, p.151), operating 24 hour crisis lines, and providing medical support (Ullman & Townsend, 2007). Women’s shelters are engaged in similar forms of work, such as counseling, outreach and advocacy services, transitional support, and crisis line support” (Burnett., 2016, p. 519). Amidst this intense work, community GBV organizations are facing pressures from underfunding, understaffing, and limited capacity to meet service demands (Beres et al., 2009; Ullman & Townsend, 2007; Boucher, 2021). This context shapes how and the extent to which advocates in community GBV organizations utilize and engage with academic GBV research.

In this chapter, I illustrate that the intense workloads and types of work that advocates in community GBV organizations are engaged in, and the conditions that they are working within provides insight into the complex relationship many advocates have with academic research on GBV. I argue that while they often have limited capacity to engage with academic research, they experience increased pressures to do so in areas of their work, such as grant applications and public education work, stemming from neoliberalism, professionalization of the field of GBV,

and the de-legitimization of feminist knowledge. Thus, advocates experience tensions between the pressures to engage with academic research and the limited capacity to do so. These pressures highlight the complexities of advocates' engagement with research due to the barriers associated with accessing academic research on GBV and the factors that limit advocates ability to engage with research in their work.

First, I trace the origins of the feminist anti-violence movement and community GBV organizations, and impacts of neoliberalism on the movement and the work of advocates in community GBV organizations. Next, I outline the pressures on community GBV organizations' work to provide context into the limited capacity that advocates have to engage with academic research on GBV. Then I discuss the de-legitimization of feminist knowledge, and illustrate how this contributes to the pressures that advocates experience to engage with research on GBV and conduct research in their work. Finally, I highlight that the pressures advocates experience to conduct research and engage with research on GBV in their work takes shape in grant applications and public education work to 'legitimize' and quantify their work and funding needs. I also discuss how these pressures are not experienced by advocates in direct-service provision roles.

Feminist Anti-Violence Movement Emergence and Context

From the late 1960's to the early 70's, the North American battered women's movement brought GBV into the public sphere, framing it as a social and political problem (Bumiller, 2008; Lehner & Allen, 2009). The women's movement emerged out of conversations with women about their lived experiences of oppression and gave these experiences "a political presence" (Smith, 2005, p. 7). Grassroots feminist anti-violence organizations began to form and were rooted in feminist and anti-state ideologies (Bumiller, 2008; Mehrota et al., 2016). As these

organizations took shape, they were led by feminist volunteers and survivors to provide women safe spaces to heal from violence (Bumiller, 2008; Mehrota et al., 2016). The work that these organizations engaged in embodied feminist values and sought to deconstruct hierarchy and power relations between survivors and advocates working within the organization (Mehrota et al., 2016).

Grassroots feminist anti-violence organizations were created and led by feminist volunteers and often survivors of GBV (Mehrota et al., 2016; Bumiller, 2008; Quinlan, 2017; Tutty, 1998). These organizations originated as fundamentally feminist, anti-state and non-hierarchical (Bumiller, 2008). Survivors of GBV were not perceived as clients or as dependent on staff in anti-violence organizations (Tutty, 1999). Instead, survivors and staff were recognized as equals and group consensus guided decision making (Tutty, 1999). Reflecting feminist principles, feminist anti-violence organizations were structured horizontally and the work of volunteers/staff were guided by feminist values (Salis, 2023; Tutty, 1999). Feminist anti-violence organizations emerged as collectives in which leadership was shared, and there were no hierarchal roles or responsibilities of staff (Rebick, 2005). In the early stages of the feminist anti-violence movement, feminist anti-violence organizations were community led and structured around feminist knowledge and expertise grounded in advocates' GBV activism and volunteer work rather than professionalized credentials and titles (Rebick, 2005; Quinlan, 2017). However, the growth of these organizations led to the need for stable funding to overcome barriers in meeting survivors' needs (Bumiller, 2008; Boucher, 2021; Quinlan, 2017). Inevitably, RCCs and shelters formed relationships with the state to gain stable funding and resources (Bumiller, 2008).

With the growth of neoliberalism in the 1970's, the mainstream feminist anti-violence movement and community GBV organizations were significantly impacted (Bumiller, 2008; Boucher 2021). To maintain state funding, the types of work that community GBV organizations engaged in were restricted, and led to community GBV organizations operating hierarchical and bureaucratically (Bumiller, 2008; Heiner & Tyson, 2017). Neoliberal politics are “associated with less restraint on free-market policies, pro-corporatism, privatization, and in particular, the transfer of public services to private organizations” (Bumiller, 2008, p. 5). Bumiller (2008) argues that the growth of neoliberalism led to the co-optation of the mainstream feminist anti-violence movement into the sphere of the regulatory state and its neoliberal agenda, despite resistance from feminists of colour (Bumiller, 2008). This shifted the work and services that community GBV organizations could engage in due to funding cuts in the welfare sector (Bumiller, 2008; Boucher, 2021).

Smith's (2005) discussion about the de-legitimization of feminist knowledge provides a useful frame for understanding the co-optation of the mainstream feminist anti-violence movement. Smith (2005) illustrates how dominant and institutionalized forms of knowledge and governance exclude women's lived experiences of oppression.² Women and marginalized groups, Smith (1987, 2005) argues, have been excluded from processes of knowledge production, and thus their experiences are not reflected in institutionalized forms of knowledge and culture, and have been de-legitimized as sources of knowledge in discursive practices. The de-legitimization of feminist knowledge is evident in the co-optation of the mainstream feminist anti-violence movement into the sphere of the neoliberal state. As mainstream feminists formed relationships with the state to address GBV, their voices and needs became subordinate to

² Echoing Smith's (2005) work, I use the term women to refer to anyone who identifies as a woman. Crucially, my usage of this term is not intended to homogenize the experiences of women or overlook intersectional complexities.

neoliberal politics and the goals of the state (Bumiller, 2008). Additionally, the lived experiences and knowledge of feminists and survivors were de-legitimized with the growth of state and quasi-state professionals responsible for addressing GBV under neoliberal governance (Bumiller, 2008). As I will argue in this chapter, this historical context shapes the relationship advocates in community GBV organizations now have with academic research on GBV.

Impacts of Neoliberalism on Community GBV Organizations

The growth of neoliberalism in the 1970's significantly shifted the structure of community GBV organizations and the work and services delivered by advocates (Boucher, 2008; Heiner & Tyson, 2017; Boucher, 2021). In this section, I will illustrate how neoliberal politics and principles have led to individualization of GBV, the professionalization of the GBV sector, and the underfunding of community GBV organizations. These changes mark a significant transition from the origins of the feminist anti-violence movement, and the work of advocates in community GBV organizations (Bumiller, 2008; Mehrotra et al., 2016). This context provides insight into the lack of capacity that advocates have to engage with academic research on GBV.

The Individualization of GBV

Neoliberal politics emphasize individual accountability, the privatization of welfare services, and the individualization of social issues (Mehrotra et al., 2016; Bumiller, 2008). These neoliberal principles have led to the individualization of GBV and have limited advocates' capacity to engage in social and political change (Mehrotra et al., 2016; Boucher, 2021; Payne et al., 2008). For instance, reflecting neoliberal politics, there are less supports available for survivors and survivors' eligibility for services is rooted in their pathologization as a victim requiring medical and legal treatment (Bumiller, 2008; Heiner & Tyson, 2017). Consequently,

this constructs GBV as a “chronic yet treatable problem” (p. 13) and restricts understandings of victimhood outside of medical and legal discourses (Bumiller, 2008). Additionally, the emphasis on personal responsibility under neoliberalism led to a growth of individualized treatments and understandings of GBV through which GBV becomes survivors’ ‘problem’, which can be ‘treated’ through therapeutic interventions (Mehrota et al., 2016; Lehner & Allen, 2009). Reflecting this trend, data in this study reveal that community GBV organizations commonly disseminate social media content advertising individualized and therapeutic services such as mental health services, yoga therapy, and counselling (SASCO, 2022a; SASCO, 2023d). These therapeutic services arguably illustrate the individualization of GBV as the onus to heal from violence is placed on the survivor, while the broader factors contributing to GBV are not addressed through these services.

The individualization of GBV obscures the structural conditions that foster GBV and restricts community organizations’ ability to engage in work aimed at social change. The individualization of GBV and the limited capacity for community GBV organizations to engage in broader activist work to address structural issues is a major shift from the origins of battered women’s movement (Mehrota et al., 2016). For instance, in a study with DV advocates in the United States, Lehner and Allen (2009) found that new forms of funding for community GBV have expanded the number of services available for survivors, but this limits the ability of these organizations to engage in work aimed at social change related to GBV. Community GBV organizations need funding to survive, but some DV advocates argued “that survival has come at a cost to the movement’s social change agenda” (Lehner & Allen, 2009, p. 66). Reflecting Smith’s (2005) arguments about the de-legitimization of feminist knowledge, the process of neoliberalism and the individualization of GBV overlooks the central core of the feminist anti-

violence movement derived from women's experiences to address the broader social factors that foster GBV.

Professionalization

In addition to the individualization of GBV, neoliberal politics have led to a growth in state power in governing personal lives (Bumiller, 2008). This expanded state power increased the number of state and quasi-state actors responsible for addressing GBV beyond community GBV organizations, such as “hospital emergency rooms, medical doctors in a range of specialties, mental health professionals, community services and religious organizations” (Bumiller, 2008, p. 6). Bumiller (2008) highlights how this neoliberal shift towards professionalization resulted in sexual violence prevention and response becoming “everybody’s concern” (p.11) and thus less connected to grassroots feminist principles. This is a significant shift from the emergence of the feminist anti-violence movement and organizations which were rooted in feminist ideologies (Bumiller, 2008; Mehrota et al., 2016). This shift towards professionalization privileges medical and legal knowledges and marginalizes rape crisis advocates’ extensive experiential expertise and knowledge on rape and GBV (Quinlan, 2017).

The impacts of professionalization on community GBV organizations are evident through the requirement of higher educational degrees or credentials for staff to work at community GBV organizations, which is a significant shift from the origins of grassroots feminist anti-violence organizations (Mehrota et al., 2016). Echoing Smith’s (2005) arguments about the de-legitimization of feminist knowledge, Mehrota et al. (2016) argue that these educational requirements marginalize the “value of lived experience” (p. 158) and disregard advocates without higher education from working in community GBV organizations. For instance, Lehner and Allen (2009) argue that the requirement of educational degrees have resulted in RCCs hiring

professionals without feminist orientations. Additionally, the achievement of higher education does not always indicate a superior capability to support survivors (Lehner & Allen, 2009). The educational requirements for advocates working at community GBV organizations can be seen through the educational backgrounds of advocates I interviewed for this study. All twelve advocates interviewed have received post-secondary education. One advocate attended college for social work, and the other 11 advocates have university degrees. Six advocates have master's degrees, four have bachelor's degrees, and one is a PhD student. Lehner and Allen (2009) argue that exclusively hiring staff with graduate degrees can result in RCCs losing their "broader activist focus" (p. 426), which is a crucial aspect of empowering survivors (Ullman & Townsend, 2007). As I describe below, this move towards professionalization has shaped how advocates have interacted with academic research on GBV.

The Underfunding of GBV Organizations

Reflecting neoliberal politics aiming to privatize social welfare services and personalize systemic issues, community GBV organizations experienced shifts and cuts in funding (Bumiller, 2008; Boucher 2021; Beres et al., 2009). For instance, Beres et al. (2009) argue that in Canada the election of the Mulroney Conservatives in the 1990's led to significant funding cuts for community GBV organizations, women's social services, and anti-violence efforts. Additionally, these budget cuts occurred alongside "a series of reductions and finally the elimination of the Secretary of State Women's Program that had provided operational funding for women's movement organizing" (Beres et al., 2009, p. 141). In conjunction with the federal government, provincial governments adopted neoliberal politics resulting in funding cuts for community GBV organizations and the dissolution of state organizations dedicated to women's equality (Beres et al., 2009).

These issues are further illustrated in Boucher's (2021) policy analysis exploring funding changes for feminist anti-violence work in Ontario from 1990-2015. Boucher (2021) demonstrates that Ontario has heightened spending on GBV initiatives over time, but she argues that it is crucial to examine how these resources are allocated. For example, rather than an increase in grants for feminist anti-violence organizations, more organizations are now competing for funding (Boucher, 2021). Thus, community feminist anti-violence organizations spend more time on grant applications resulting in less time available for providing services (Boucher, 2021). These funding shifts must be understood as a resulting from a neoliberal funding environment, as organizations are granted "smaller and short-term pockets of funding and are made to compete over limited resources" (Boucher 2021, p. 229).

Reflecting neoliberal politics, the individualization of GBV, cuts to welfare services and the privatization of social services have substantially impacted community GBV organizations (Bumiller 2008; Boucher, 2021; Macy et al., 2010; Beres et al., 2009). Stemming from funding shifts and cuts, advocates in community GBV organizations experience challenges to best meet the needs of survivors and engage in broader activist work, which is central to their core and purpose (Boucher, 2021; Payne et al., 2008; Beres et al., 2009). Additionally, due to funding constraints and project-based funding, community feminist anti-violence organizations experience difficulties with hiring and staff which increases existing staff members' workload and heightens burnout (Macy et al., 2010; Beres et al., 2009). These challenges impose significant barriers for community feminist anti-violence organizations to continue providing much needed services for survivors and engage in social and political advocacy to confront GBV. The challenges that community GBV organizations are experiencing stemming from

underfunding highlights the limited capacity that advocates have to engage with academic research on GBV.

Pressures on Community GBV Organizations' Work

The numerous forms of work that community GBV organizations are engaged in, including activism, advocacy, education and providing direct supports to survivors, coupled with the underfunding and understaffing of these organizations, results in intense and heavy workloads for advocates working in community GBV organizations (Beres et al., 2009; Ullman & Townsend; 2007, Burnett et al., 2016). These intense workloads contribute to burnout among advocates working in community GBV organizations and the pressures from underfunding and understaffing limits the ability of community GBV organizations to meet the needs of survivors (Burnett et al., 2016; Behounek, 2011; Beres et al., 2009; Ullman & Townsend, 2007; Boucher 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated service demands of community GBV organizations and the already substantial workloads of advocates (Burd et al., 2023; Boucher, 2023; Quinlan & Singh, 2020). These issues provide insights into advocates' limited capacity to engage with research on GBV.

Funding Pressures

The pressures on community GBV organizations due to underfunding are evident in the unobtrusive and interview data collected for this study. For instance, in 2024, the Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres (OCRCC) disseminated an Instagram post concerning the National Action Plan to end GBV. In this post, OCRCC highlights that “government dollars in GBV work are too-often allocated to new work or time-limited projects, instead of investing in stability and continuity of existing services” (2024f). The OCRCC argued that short-term project

based funding “keeps GBV organization precarious” and limits these organizations’ capacity to support survivors through services and resources (2024f). Advocates interviewed also discussed the pressures they experience due to a lack of government funding. For instance, one advocate stated “Unfortunately, we do need to fundraise to operate some of our programs. And, you know, the majority of our fundraising isn't in programming, but it's actually salaries for individuals to facilitate or oversee those programming as well” (SHEL5). Reflecting similar findings, in a national survey with RCCs and SACs in Canada, Beres et al. (2009) found that as a result of the shift to project-based funding for community GBV organizations, advocates must allocate more time to fundraising, which limits their capacity to support survivors and engage in activist work. This is further illustrated by another advocate I interviewed who stated:

Yeah, I certainly agree that we have a lot of different projects and a lot of that too comes with the fact that we apply for a lot of different grants to help with funding and those are very geared and tied to project-based work so we often have a lot of projects on the go.
(SHEL4)

The lack of funding that community GBV organizations are experiencing impacts the work of advocates in community GBV organizations (Payne et al., 2008; Macy et al., 2010). For instance, through survey data from 27 directors of SACs in Virginia and 16 employees at SACs, Payne et al. (2008) argue that SACs need more funding to adequately support survivors, as they are understaffed and do not have enough funding to “support staff development and training” (Payne et al., 2008, p. 381). These issues were echoed by interview participants in this study. For example, one advocated stated, “...I mean, most organizations too, like all of their staff are undervalued, underfunded, overworked....” (SHEL1). Lack of funding also limits advocates’ capacity to support survivors (Macy et al., 2010). For instance, it is challenging for community

GBV organizations to regularly pay staff which leads to difficulties to hire and retain staff (Macy et al., 2010). As a result of these challenges, staff must take on various roles within their agencies which significantly increases staff burnout (Macy et al., 2010). Additionally, intricate and lengthy applications for funding create challenges for community GBV organizations obtain funding and limits their capacity to support survivors (Macy et al., 2010).

Intensive Workloads

The advocates working in SACs and women's shelters who I interviewed held various roles in their organizations. Some roles involved direct service provision and advocacy for survivors, while other roles involved education, managing programs and operations within the organization, and research related tasks. Despite advocates' varying roles, the intense and heavy workloads of advocates working in SACs and women's shelters were consistent throughout conversations with advocates about their roles and responsibilities. For instance, three advocates discussed taking on additional responsibilities outside of their official positions due to the nature of non-profit organizations, as one shelter advocate stated "...So as with most nonprofits, you know you wear a lot of hats at the organization" (SHEL3).

Additionally, many advocates discussed that their role involves taking on numerous responsibilities within the organization they work at. Another shelter advocate explained "...And so you're asking me what I do every single day, I'm just like I do everything [Laughs]" (SHEL5). This sentiment is echoed by another three advocates working in SACs who take on dual roles in their organizations. For example, one advocate discussed their heavy workload in their dual role as a direct service provider and education coordinator:

The support and advocacy role is mainly doing that support and counseling with service seekers so individual group counseling, doing referrals and giving resources... And then for the public piece, that's mainly going out into the community, giving access to our brochures and information, connecting with community partners, doing presentations and workshops in schools, and various other organizations that just want more information.

(SAC6)

In addition to advocates' extensive workloads, social media content disseminated by community GBV organizations illustrate that community GBV organizations are engaged in various forms of work and projects, such as GBV activism, hosting community events, public education, and collaborating with other community organizations. For instance, in 2022 North York Women's Shelter created a Pride edition of their *Power & Voice* magazine to highlight the important work and 2SLGBTQIA+ activism of four community organizations in Toronto (NYWS, 2022b). Many community GBV organizations organize activist events in their communities, such as Take Back the Night events to raise awareness about GBV and support survivors (OCRCC, 2023b; IHO, 2022a; SASCO, 2023c). Additionally, community GBV organizations disseminate educational social media content related to GBV, such as information about the intersectional nature of GBV and the groups most vulnerable to GBV (IHO, 2024b; OCRCC 2024g). These activist events and awareness raising initiatives intensify the heavy workloads and responsibilities of advocates.

These data reveal that advocates working in community GBV organizations take on numerous responsibilities within the organizations and intense workloads that may be beyond an individual's capacity. As highlighted in existing literature, these intensive workloads contribute to burnout among staff working at community GBV organizations and the lack of funding and

resources for these organizations creates additional challenges for advocates to support survivors (Ullman & Townsend, 2007; Burnett et al., 2016; Behounek, 2011). These issues were intensified in the COVID-19 pandemic as rates of GBV and service demands increased (Boucher, 2023; Burd et al., 2023; Statistics Canada, 2022). The intense workloads of advocates and broader pressures that community GBV organizations are experiencing due to a lack of resources sheds light on the limited capacity that advocates working in community GBV organizations have to engage with research on GBV.

Advocates' Engagement with Research

The pressures on community GBV organizations, from the growth and impacts of neoliberalism, the resulting lack of funding and resources, and the intense workloads of advocates working in community GBV organizations shapes advocates' engagement with research on GBV. Due to these pressures, as well as the barriers associated with accessing academic research on GBV, which I will discuss in Chapter 5, advocates working in community GBV organizations have limited capacity to engage with academic research on GBV in their work. And yet, as I will argue below, advocates face significant pressures to engage with research on GBV in their work, as a result of the growth of neoliberalism, professionalization of the field and the de-legitimization of feminist knowledge.

De-legitimization of Feminist Knowledge

Smith (2005) argues that the knowledge and lived experiences of women are de-legitimized by objectified forms of knowledge that position women and marginalized groups as objects rather than subjects of knowledge and experts in their lived experiences. Thus, women have been excluded from dominant forms of knowledge production which reinforce gendered relations that situate women in subordination to men (Smith 1987). This is evident in mainstream

sociology, as illustrated by Smith (2005), and academia more broadly as academics position themselves as subjects of knowledge and people as objects to be known and studied. These processes of knowledge production overlook the realities of women and marginalized groups and dismiss their voices as sources of knowledge (Smith, 2005). This de-legitimization of feminist knowledge is evident in the experiences of advocates working at community GBV organizations. Illustrating this idea, one advocate stated:

...How many times can we say y'know we need more funding, or y'know the context around this gender-based violence needs to be considered... *There's so many different things that frontline workers can say that are sometimes de-legitimized because we say it so often, because we're women, because y'know they don't want to hear it, because it makes people uncomfortable* [emphasis added], especially in the work that we do with sexual violence and so being able to have y'know a[n] institution or an academic institution say-y'know echo back what we're saying... (SAC2)

This advocate's words illustrate the pressure that advocates experience to engage with research on GBV and conduct their own research for grant applications and public education work, because the first-hand knowledge and experiences of advocates working in community GBV organizations are often overlooked without the support of academics to 'verify' their claims. To stay accountable to funders and achieve government grants advocates, advocates must quantify the impacts of their work to 'legitimize' their work and funding needs. These pressures are also felt among advocates offering public education, because the public seeks quantified statistics on GBV and its prevalence in their communities. Echoing Smith's (2005) arguments, the advocate also highlighted how academics are perceived as the 'knowers' which dismisses the knowledge of frontline workers in community GBV organizations. Advocates working in community GBV

organizations are experts in the issues that their organizations are facing and in the field of GBV more broadly, but their voices are often invalidated and not granted the same credibility as academics. For example, one advocate stated:

...Because it's not seen as we are the expertise of conducting, even though some of us has been doing this work for many, many years [emphasis added]. But because we do not have that status of a PhD- and I do get that there's ways of conducting research- whoever decided long ago of how research is conducted and the process of that, and what gets accepted. I get that, but I do struggle and I don't understand why academics doesn't see it as an exclusionary practice of how we are not considered credible because we don't belong in a university with letters behind the name and so therefore if we were going to publish something, for example, it would be the university publishing it and not us...

(SHEL5)

This discussion illustrates Smith's (2005) argument about the de-legitimization of feminist knowledge. Advocates working in community GBV organizations conduct research related to GBV and have years of experience working in the field, but they are not recognized as 'knowers' and subjects of knowledge. Due to the colonial, gendered, and Western epistemic standards in academia, knowledges outside of Western academia are de-legitimized (Connell, 2010; Fahlberg, 2023; Go, 2016; Collins, 2019; Smith, 2005). Consequently, the research that advocates working at community GBV organizations conduct is not granted the credibility and power that academic research holds. Thus, despite the limited capacity advocates working in community GBV organizations have to engage with research, advocates experience pressure to engage with academic research on GBV to 'prove' or 'back up' their work and experiences.

In community GBV organizations, advocates recognize the significance of their experiential knowledge in the field, and the experiences of survivors in their work. For instance, when discussing their engagement with research and knowledge dissemination two advocates highlighted the significance of experiential knowledge in their work. For instance, one advocate stated:

When we're offering our training and education pieces for those topics, we do bring we bring like that academic piece of statistics and stuff that is researched... *But what we're like really bringing with us, is like our knowledge* [emphasis added] that we have been able to build on from our direct service delivery to clients. (SAC4)

Beyond experiential knowledge of advocates working in community GBV organizations, advocates also discussed the significance of survivors' knowledge in their work. For instance, when discussing her engagement with research, one advocate stated "... I also think much of the information that we need, we have already. Right? We've heard from survivors, um and survivors have said what they need" (SAC1).

These discussions from advocates highlight the ways that community GBV organizations prioritize the first-hand knowledge of advocates working in community GBV organizations and survivors in their work. Echoing Smith's (2005) discussion of women's standpoint, community GBV organizations recognize the lived experiences of advocates working in community GBV organizations and survivors as sources of knowledge.

Forms of Research Community GBV Organizations are Engaging With

Stemming from neoliberalism, the professionalization of the GBV sector, and the delegitimization of feminist knowledge, advocates who I interviewed in roles outside of direct

service provision experience pressures to engage with research on GBV in some aspects of their work, such as grant applications and public education work. The neoliberal shift to professionalize the GBV sector and the restrictions on the types of work community GBV organizations can engage in to maintain government funding, has impacted the way advocates present their work to the state and public (Bumiller, 2008; Boucher; 2021, Mehrota et al., 2016). To maintain government funding and remain accountable to founders, the state is interested in quantitative and observable measures related to GBV and the work advocates are engaged in. The public is also interested in these quantitative measures to better understand the prevalence of GBV. However, advocates' engagement with research is shaped and limited by the context GBV organizations are working in. Additionally, advocates' engagement with research varied based on their role at the organization they work at. For instance, two advocates I interviewed had research centred roles and many advocates suggested that their co-workers whose roles involve disseminating educational social media posts may use more GBV research in their work to verify information and statistics. On the other hand, advocates whose roles involve direct service provision or managing different aspects of the organization are less research focused, do not experience the need to utilize research in their frontline work, and their capacity to engage with this research is further limited.

Academic Research

Despite the various barriers to accessing and using academic research, which I will discuss in Chapter 5, four advocates discussed regularly utilizing academic research in their work. In particular, advocates who have academic backgrounds discussed their ability to find and use relevant academic research. For instance, an advocate who has a Bachelor's in Psychology discussed using some academic research in her role:

I go back and forth because of my background with academia, I kind of know how to find things in that realm. So there's like some like psych info websites and things that I go back to here and there... (SAC6)

Additionally, two advocates discussed that their roles overlapped with their education which led to them using and applying academic research in their work. For instance, one advocate is a PhD student and the community projects lead at the shelter she works at, and she stated:

...Part of my dissertation especially aligns with the work that I'm doing, because I've gone through and read all of these archival documents that are produced in and around the discourse of violence against women, in addition to drawing from the more traditional academic literature... And I've been able to even just bring that to my supervisor now and say, hey, this is what I'm starting to see in our own institution. (SHEL1)

Thus, due to the overlap between this advocate's research as a PhD student and her role at the shelter, she is able to utilize and apply relevant academic research on GBV in her work at the shelter. This was echoed by another advocate who discussed that when she was a Master's student in Social Work, she had access to academic research relevant to her work and was utilizing it in her role. Many advocates who have backgrounds in academia, or advocates who are both students and advocates working at community GBV organizations, thus have experience engaging with academic research and apply these skills in their roles at the organization they work at. Additionally, advocates working at community GBV organizations who have student access to academic databases and journals are able to overcome the barrier to physically accessing academic research on GBV. However, advocates without institutional access are often unable to overcome the barrier to physically accessing academic research due to the costs associated with accessing this research.

Two participants with research heavy roles in their GBV organizations discussed that they routinely engage with academic research in their work. For instance, one advocate discussed using Google scholar to find relevant academic research related to her work on anti-human trafficking initiatives:

So this role is a lot of research and a lot of reading... I have looked at like Google Scholar, so I'll go on there and I'll look for the literature that's specific to anti-human trafficking initiatives and programs... So yeah, so spending a lot of time doing research that's academic... (SAC4)

Additionally, another advocate discussed utilizing academic research in his role:

...Typically, I'll use sort of general research, such as empirical studies in journals, so using things like Google Scholar, and to sort of bypass a lot of the paywalls for those sort of things, I use like Internet Archive is actually kind of an interesting way to sort of subvert that. If the research is really pertinent and I'm not able to find a way around, I always just contact the researcher directly... (SHEL3)

While this advocate engages with academic research on GBV in his role as the data and evaluation specialist within his organization, as I discuss in Chapter 5, many other advocates face barriers to accessing academic research on GBV.

Advocates' circumscribed engagement with academic research on GBV, is also evident through unobtrusive data collected in this study. The community GBV organizations' social media content analyzed for this study highlight that community GBV organizations are often disseminating educational posts related to GBV. Most of these educational posts do not refer to academic research. However, some social media posts cited academic research in position statements, such as OCRCC's position statements on white supremacy, colonialism, and racism

in North America as well as their statement on sex work (2022b; 2022a). Additionally, OAITH disseminates ‘monthly snapshots’ on femicide that may reference findings from academic research, such as the links between “previous histories of violence and men who perpetuate mass killings (Geller et al., 2021)” (OAITH, 2023b).

Indirect Use of (Academic) Research

Due to the barriers associated with directly accessing and utilizing academic research on GBV and the pressures to engage with this research, advocates discussed that they more commonly engage with academic research on GBV in indirect ways, rather than directly accessing and utilizing academic research for public education work and research projects. For instance, advocates use GBV research compiled and disseminated from non-academic organizations or from academic organizations disseminating non-traditional forms of research on GBV, such as infographics, videos, and training modules. For example, one participant discussed using research from the National Institute of Cognitive and Behavioural Medicine:

...One of the websites that we use pretty frequently around here for professional development is the National Institute of Cognitive and Behavioural Medicine. So that, and I think we've had like a lot of success with that because it's very- it's easy to digest... So like it's a bunch of you know academic smart people that are putting these videos and like training modules together. So the research is there, they've already done it. And then they all come together and make it digestible for frontline staff to be able to just kind of take what they need. (SAC4)

As this advocate makes clear, directly utilizing academic research related to GBV may not be accessible for frontline workers, and as a result, advocates often choose to engage with more digestible forms of research disseminated by external organizations. This point was further

echoed by two advocates who use research disseminated by an academic organization that disseminates non-traditional forms of GBV research. For instance, one advocated stated:

So I rely more on education... So it's the Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children, so it's based out of Western University... they kind of collect and create like one pagers, two pagers, like guidebooks, toolkits whatever, that cite academic research related to violence against women and children, and violence against other groups as well...I'm not necessarily citing papers directly, I'm more like drawing from these kinds of one-pagers and briefs that they create that cite other academic research. So *it's like an indirect use of academic research* [emphasis added].

(SAC7)

This highlights that when academic research related to GBV is disseminated in accessible ways, it is often more relevant to the work of community GBV organizations and more often utilized by frontline workers.

In addition to directly or indirectly utilizing academic research on GBV, some advocates discussed engaging with research on GBV from secondary sources such as Google, news articles, and statistics. For instance, due to heavy workloads and inaccessible academic research, some advocates who I interviewed discussed using Google to find research on GBV relevant to their work and compile information. However, two advocates discussed the importance of utilizing a critical lens when using Google due to bias in media related to GBV, and Google searches may not present advocates with the most robust and accurate search results.

Furthermore, when engaging with news articles one advocate discussed the importance of fact-checking to determine where the author got their information.

Beyond the use of Google to engage with research on GBV, some advocates discussed engaging with statistics related to GBV. For instance, when discussing the forms of research that she engages with, one advocated stated:

...For stats, I always go to StatsCan, to our local police, and to the Canadian Anti-Human Trafficking Hotline, they collate stats. And then I belong to a number of national and international anti-human trafficking groups, and, you know, they're often publishing things. (SAC5)

This was echoed by another advocate when discussing the presentations that their organization gives on human trafficking:

... I know that... To go in and give like a presentation on human trafficking we do consult research about that. So we're taking statistics from StatsCan, we work quite closely with [Region] police the human trafficking and Intimate Partner Violence Unit, so we can gather statistics from them. We, as an agency, have our database that we're like very rigorous, the statistics that we capture. (SAC4)

Advocates' engagement with statistics related to GBV was further illustrated by a participant who stated:

...Also looking for statistics, so that we can get a picture of who is experiencing what, or how frequent these certain crimes are being experienced, or reporting, how often reports lead to um charges or not, that kind of thing... (SAC3)

Many of these advocates highlighted how they utilize statistics related from GBV from Statistics Canada and other organizations in their work. Community GBV organizations'

engagement with statistics related to GBV is also evident through unobtrusive data collected for this study. Many social media posts disseminated statistics related to GBV from Statistics Canada, OAITH's femicide research, and other external organizations (e.g. OCRCC, 2023d; OCRCC, 2024e, SASCWR, 2022). Additionally, community GBV organizations' social media content highlights engagement with news and media sources. For instance, OAITH's research on femicide draws on news and media reporting to track femicide (OAITH, 2023c). Additionally, community GBV organizations utilize news research in their social media content to disseminate information on current events, such as news related to GBV in sports and political issues (e.g. OCRCC, 2022c; OAITH, 2022a).

Advocates Conducting their own Research

Stemming from the pressures of professionalization and the de-legitimization of feminist knowledge, community GBV organizations experience pressure to conduct research to 'legitimize' their work and funding needs. For example, four advocates discussed the need to conduct and utilize internal statistics for different aspects of their work in presentations, publications to the community, and to apply for grants and produce reports to keep the community and donors informed about the work their organization is doing. For example, one advocate stated:

...I do a monthly statistics report that tells us about how many people come into shelter, how many people are still staying with us, et cetera, a myriad of different metrics there... I guess also too uh for you know people like our donors in the community, we also create annual reports and quarterly reports, et cetera, varying in different size and magnitudes,

just to keep the community informed about what's going on here, for donors, what their impact is and things like that. (SHEL3)

Drawing on Smith's (2005) arguments, this highlights how the voices and experiences of advocates are not recognized as credible sources of knowledge without accepted forms of 'objective' measures to verify their claims and statistical representations of their work. The pressures that community GBV organizations experience to engage with and conduct research was further illustrated by an advocate who discussed their organizations' goals for evidence-based strategies. For instance, an advocate who is a PhD student stated "I will say... my employer has told me like- why they were so excited that I had applied for the position... it was really obvious that they are looking for like evidence-based strategies..." This points to the pressures that this advocate's organization experiences to engage with and conduct research to utilize evidence-based strategies. With this advocate's academic background, her substantial research experience helps their organization to engage with academic research, forms of non-academic research, and conduct internal research.

Community GBV organizations also conduct research for development of programs. While this research does not stem from the pressures to 'legitimize' their work, advocates may recognize the need for additional information to develop and provide programming, and this information may not be available in existing research. For example, one advocate discussed participating in a ride-along with an agency that supports women engaged in sex work, and learn about the program from two participants to build a similar framework in their city:

There's an agency in...[City] called...[name of organization], and they are a housing first agency that supports women involved in the survival sex trade. So, I do have a ride along coming up with them.... So getting some hands-on experience research as well... (SAC4)

Advocates recognizing the need to conduct research to develop and enhance community GBV organizations' programming is further illustrated through the use of feedback surveys in community GBV organizations. For instance, one advocate stated "...We do some informal research. So for instance, like we have our internal feedback survey evaluations that I create..." (SHEL3). The use of feedback surveys to enhance programming is also evident through community GBV organizations' social media content. For instance, in an Instagram post North York Women's Shelter stated "...In the past three years of operating in our new space, we have continued to accumulate data, knowledge, survivors' testimonies and feedback, to innovate and create programs and services that best serve them..." (2022a). Additionally, the Sexual Assault Support Centre of Ottawa (SASCO) shared a service user's feedback through an Instagram post and stated "...We believe it's important to always listen to how our service users are benefiting from the support we offer and taking their feedback to ensure our support services are meeting their needs..." (2022c).

Community GBV organizations may also experience pressure to conduct research related to GBV outside of their individual organizations' statistics and programming from the public and the government to 'verify' their calls for the government to seriously address GBV. For example, the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses (OAITH) conducts monthly and annual femicide reports. OAITH draws on media reporting to track incidents of femicide in Ontario and the framing of these incidents in media (OAITH, 2023c). This information is disseminated by OAITH through reports and social media posts (OAITH, 2023c). This research

helps 'legitimize' advocates calls to address and prevent femicide and GBV in Ontario, because it provides numbers and statistics to 'prove' that GBV is a significant and persistent issue in Ontario. Without this research and numeric data, the calls from advocates for the government and policy makers to address GBV more easily overlooked.

De-legitimization of Advocates' Research. Although advocates working in community GBV organizations conduct various forms of research, this research may be overlooked and dismissed as non-credible sources of knowledge in a broader context in which feminist knowledge is de-legitimized (Smith, 2005). For example, due to the Western epistemic standards in academia, the research that advocates working at community GBV organizations conduct is not granted the credibility and power that academic research holds. This can be seen through an advocate's discussion about the exclusionary practices of academia:

I would call it all in all, in this political environment, it's exclusionary... I think who is deemed as an expert-and it's funny because I even had these debates when I was starting my thesis- because I'm like, yeah, who sets these rules?... but who's to say someone who has well-established and been doing this for umpteen years is not an expert in this sector... I can say that there are some of us who's been doing this work for 10, 20, 15 years, right? Have been doing this work and then has done research on top of that. I can tell you, I can show documents that we did. And I would call it credible Canadian-based evidence because also *there is a lack of on the ground community research in regards to gender-based violence* [emphasis added] ... but if I were going to publish something, it wouldn't be seen as such. It wouldn't have that same weight as maybe someone at your university would publish, it would be considered a grey paper, which is a problem.

(SHEL5)

This participant highlighted that although advocates are experts in the field of GBV and have conducted their own research, this research is not considered credible and publishable in the standards of academia. This echoes Smith's (2005) argument about the de-legitimization of feminist knowledge and the power relations between academics and frontline workers.

Advocates' firsthand experiences, knowledge, and research are rarely recognized as sources of knowledge in the way that academic research is.

Concluding Thoughts

The pressures that advocates working in community GBV experience to engage with research on GBV and conduct research to 'legitimize' their claims and experiences are compounded by the barriers associated with accessing and utilizing academic research. This chapter has traced the emergence of the feminist anti-violence organizations and community GBV organizations, and the neoliberal shifts that have transformed the movement and advocates' work. The growth of neoliberalism in the 1970's led to the individualization of GBV, the professionalization of the GBV sector, and funding cuts and shifts in community GBV organizations (Bumiller, 2008; Boucher, 2021; Mehrota et al., 2016). Stemming from the professionalization of the GBV sector and the de-legitimization of feminist knowledge, community GBV organizations experience pressure engage with academic research on GBV in grant applications and public education to 'verify' and quantify their work and funding needs. However, this research is largely inaccessible for community GBV organizations and non-academics more generally. Thus, advocates working in community GBV organization experience tensions around engaging with research that remains largely inaccessible outside of academia due to the barriers associated with accessing and utilizing this research.

Chapter 5: Barriers to Accessing and Utilizing Academic Research

Introduction

Community GBV organizations experience pressures to engage with academic research in different areas of their work, such as when they are applying for funding and providing public education on gender-based violence. However, as this chapter explores, the pressures to engage with academic research on GBV for advocates working in community GBV organizations are complicated by the inaccessible nature of academic research. The paywalls associated with accessing academic research and the complex jargon embedded in academic articles create barriers for advocates to accessing and utilizing this knowledge in their work. Additionally, community GBV organizations are working amidst pressures stemming from neoliberalism, underfunding, and intense workloads (Beres et al., 2009; Ullman & Townsend, 2007; Boucher, 2021). As I will argue in this chapter, these pressures in conjunction with the barriers preventing advocates from accessing academic research, and the lack of time that advocates have to engage with academic research, contribute to the disconnect between academic research and community-based advocacy (Pennell & Maher, 2015). Thus, the barriers that prevent advocates from accessing and utilizing academic knowledge on GBV exacerbate the research practice gap in the GBV sector.

This chapter illustrates that beyond the barriers that prevent advocates from accessing and utilizing academic research on GBV, academic knowledge perpetuates colonial and gendered inequalities and Western epistemic hierarchies (Connell, 2010; Smith, 2005; Fahlberg, 2023; Go, 2016; Collins, 2019). These systems of oppression perpetuated in academic knowledge exclude the experiences and knowledge of women and marginalized groups (Smith, 2005; Fahlberg, 2023). Thus, the knowledge constructed in academia can be limited and exclusionary, and does

not always represent people's lived experiences (Smith, 2005; Go, 2016; Connell, 2010; Fahlberg, 2023; Collins, 2019). As I will highlight in this chapter, the exclusionary knowledge production processes in Western academia, can at times exclude the experiences and knowledge of advocates within academic knowledge on GBV and contribute to the disjuncture between academic knowledge on GBV and the experiences of frontline workers.

In this chapter, I demonstrate the various barriers that prevent advocates working in community GBV organizations from utilizing academic research in their work. In addition to the barriers that contribute to the inaccessible nature of academic research, I draw on Smith's (2005) discussions of texts and institutional discourses to argue that academic knowledge on GBV produces and re-produces institutional discourses that can be disconnected from the experiences of frontline workers. These institutional discourses can obscure the experiences of frontline workers and contribute to the disjuncture between academic knowledge on GBV and lived realities of advocates working in the sector (Smith, 2005). In this chapter, I also use de-colonial critiques of Western academic knowledge from Connell (2010), Go (2016), Fahlberg (2023) and Collins (2019) to illustrate how systems of power embedded in Western academic knowledge exacerbate the disconnect between academic knowledge and people's experiences. First, I discuss the inaccessible nature of academic research, and the systems of power and oppression embedded in knowledge production processes in Western academia. Then, I outline the barriers that advocates experience to accessing and utilizing academic research on GBV and the disjuncture between academic research on GBV and the experiences of frontline workers.

Barriers to Accessing and Utilizing Academic Research

Academic research can be inaccessible for non-academic audiences due to complex language and jargon, abstract theories, and costly journal subscriptions that prevent non-

academic audiences from accessing and utilizing academic research (Badley, 2020; Fahlberg, 2023, Anderson & McLachlan, 2016). Beyond these barriers to accessing and utilizing academic research for non-academic audiences, many scholars have pointed to the systems of power and oppression embedded in how academic knowledge is produced (Connell, 2010; Go, 2016; Collins, 2019; Smith, 2005; Fahlberg, 2023). For example, scholars have argued that academic research perpetuates Western epistemic hierarchies, and colonial and gendered inequalities (Connell, 2010; Smith, 2005; Fahlberg, 2023; Collins, 2019; Go, 2016). For instance, many marginalized groups are excluded from higher educational settings and are not represented in Western sociological research, which hinders the types of knowledge sociological research produces (Connell, 2010; Fahlberg, 2023; Collins, 2019). These exclusionary practices are also reflected in the de-legitimization of knowledge held by Indigenous people and people living in the Global South (Fahlberg, 2023; Connell, 2010; Go, 2016). Western epistemic standards de-legitimize non-Western perspectives as sources of knowledge, and exclude non-Western voices from processes of knowledge production (Connell, 2010; Fahlberg, 2023; Go, 2016; Collins, 2019). Colonial systems of oppression embedded in Western academia limit the type of knowledge produced in academe and exacerbate the disconnect between academic knowledge and people's lived experiences (Go, 2016; Connell, 2010; Fahlberg, 2023). Reflecting similar arguments, Smith (2005) highlights how sociological knowledge, which can be applied to academic knowledge more broadly, is constructed in ways that exclude the perspectives of women and marginalized groups. Additionally, Fahlberg (2023) argues that beyond exclusion from academic institutions, marginalized groups are often excluded from conversations about the impacts and recommendations of this research, which can cause unintended negative consequences.

The colonial, gendered, and Western epistemic hierarchies in academic research illegitimize forms of knowledge outside of Western academia (Connell, 2010; Fahlberg, 2023; Smith, 2005). For instance, in sociological research, and academia more broadly, the researcher is recognized as the ‘subject’ of knowledge and research participants and voices outside of Western academia are recognized as ‘objects’ to be studied (Smith, 2005). Thus, non-Western academic voices and experiences are de-legitimized as sources of knowledge. For example, Mohanty (1998) argues that discursive practices in Western feminist literature reinforce the normalization and superiority of the Western perspective and produce a singular monolithic image of women living in the Global South. This monolithic image ignores the diversity and context specific experiences of women living in the Global South (Mohanty, 1998). These discursive practices position Western feminists as ‘subjects’ of knowledge and women living in the Global South as ‘objects’ to be written about (Mohanty, 1998). Go (2016) also illustrates the colonial and imperial discursive practices in Western academia that universalize Western perspectives and reduce the experiences of Eastern and non-Western cultures in monolithic ways. The colonial and epistemic hierarchies in Western academia reinforce notions of Western superiority and ‘other’ non-Western academic voices and practices (Connell, 2010; Go, 2016; Fahlberg, 2023; Mohanty, 1998).

In addition to the colonial and Western epistemic hierarchies perpetuated in academic knowledge, Smith (2005) argues that sociological knowledge, and academic knowledge more broadly, objectifies people and excludes the knowledge and experiences of women. For example, in mainstream sociology, sociologists are recognized as ‘objective experts’ and sources of knowledge and people are treated as ‘objects’ to be known or studied (Smith, 2005). Thus, Smith (2005) illustrates that sociological knowledge is disconnected from people’s lived experiences

and de-legitimizes women's knowledge, because the perspectives of women and marginalized groups are not recognized as sources of knowledge in academia. In academia, the researcher is granted the power to interpret and explain the social world and people's lived experiences, but the firsthand knowledge of women and marginalized groups are not granted the same weight as the researcher (Smith, 2005). This contributes to the systems of power and oppression that are perpetuated in academic knowledge (Smith, 2005; Connell, 2010; Go, 2016; Collins, 2019; Fahlberg, 2023).

The complex language and costs associated with accessing academic articles and the colonial, gendered, and Western epistemic hierarchies create barriers for non-academic audiences to access and utilize academic research (Billig, 2020, Fahlberg, 2023). As a result, the audiences who need this research most are often excluded from accessing and utilizing academic research (Fahlberg, 2023). Through interviews with advocates working in community GBV organizations, I found that advocates experience a wide range of barriers to accessing and utilizing academic research on GBV that could be relevant to their work.

“Behind a ton of Paywalls”: Lack of Physical Access

Existing literature highlights how paywalls and costly journal subscriptions prevent non-academic audiences from accessing and utilizing academic research (Fahlberg, 2023; Mapes, 2023; Eve, 2014). The costs associated with accessing academic research exclude important groups outside of academia from accessing knowledge relevant to their work and experiences (Fahlberg, 2023; Eve, 2014). This issue may be particularly evident for advocates working in community GBV organizations, because community GBV organizations are underfunded and staff are underpaid (Beres et al., 2009; Ullman & Townsend, 2007; Boucher, 2021). Due to these issues facing community GBV organizations, it is clear that community GBV organizations do

not have additional funds to spend on purchasing academic research. For instance, community GBV organizations are struggling to meet the needs of survivors with the funding they currently have (Beres et al., 2009; Boucher, 2021; Payne et al., 2008). Thus, the costs associated with accessing academic knowledge is a significant issue preventing community GBV organizations from utilizing academic research who are already experiencing pressures from the lack of funding they have to support survivors (Beres et al., 2009; Boucher, 2021; Payne et al., 2008).

Most of the advocates I interviewed suggested that paywalls are a major barrier preventing them from accessing and utilizing academic research on GBV. For example, one advocate stated:

Most of the people doing gender-based violence work are in non-profits or institutions that don't have a lot of extra money to have access to databases, or hire someone specifically for research, or anything like that. At least in sort of like our world, a lot of its non-profits and small organizations um trying to do sort of community level work where we don't have access to these things. (SAC3)

Thus, the financial pressures facing community GBV organizations hinder advocates' ability to engage with academic research on GBV. Echoing the lack of funds that community GBV organizations have to purchase journal subscriptions, another advocate discussed:

One issue that I've come across multiple times, and I actually had to ask our operations manager who handles like all of our money, if I can have money to purchase academic literature online. So I'll find like this great article, and I read the abstract and I'm like *this definitely fits with the current project that I'm working on. But then it's like, oh, you have to pay \$50 to access this* [emphasis added]. So financially, that sucks, especially from a

not-for-profit perspective. We don't get funding that's specific to accessing information, right? So that has to come out of our own pocket. So that's a barrier. (SAC4)

While some academic research may be relevant for the work advocates do, the financial barriers common in the non-profit sector place this research out of reach. Community GBV organizations are not granted funding related to accessing research, which prevents advocates from utilizing relevant research. Similarly, an advocate expressed that she would like to have access to academic research without depending on access through a student because it can be useful for her work:

It was a lot easier when I could just login with my student email and I could access all of those things, *because it was beneficial to our work here* [emphasis added]. Like, it would be nice to be able to access those when needed, or have students access them... *I mean it would be nice to not have to rely on their institutions as well* [emphasis added]. (SAC3)

The lack of institutional access that prevents advocates from accessing academic research on GBV highlights the exclusion that non-academic audiences experience to utilizing academic research (Fahlberg, 2023; Eve, 2014). Although some academic research is beneficial to the work of advocates in community GBV organizations, without institutional access advocates do not have the funds to purchase relevant academic articles. These issues highlight the exclusionary practices in academic knowledge construction (Connell, 2010; Go, 2016; Collins, 2019; Smith, 2005; Fahlberg, 2023). Without the status of 'student', advocates in community GBV organizations experience barriers that exclude them from engaging with academic knowledge on GBV. This reinforces the dynamic in academia that positions academics as 'knowers' and people as 'objects' to be studied (Smith, 2005). Advocates working in community GBV organizations are experts in the field. Thus, advocates who want to utilize academic

research relevant to their work should not have to rely on students for access to this knowledge. Frontline workers should be recognized in academia as ‘knowers’ and have access to the knowledge that academics are producing relevant to their work. Additionally, the need to rely on students working in community GBV organizations to access academic research points to the financial barriers that prevent community GBV organizations from accessing and utilizing academic research.

Eight out of 12 advocates I spoke with mentioned that the lack of institutional access through a student working at their organization is a barrier to accessing academic research. For instance, a PhD student who is also working as an advocate discussed the value of having access to academic databases through her university affiliation:

...Because of my academic connection, the library system has a surprising number of reports and documents that were published by community agencies. But nobody outside of being an academic student has access to the repository of any sort of university.

(SHEL4)

Echoing community GBV organizations’ lack of access to academic articles without an institutional affiliation, another advocate stated:

Like I know it's happening and if you sought it out you could probably find it, often behind a ton of paywalls, that we don't have access to. So like, *unless I have a university login or I pay for access to like journals and stuff like that, then I'm not going to be able to see that research necessarily* [emphasis added]. (SHEL2)

To address the lack of physical access to academic research on GBV, one advocate discussed the methods he utilizes to overcome this barrier. Due to the financial barriers that

prevent advocates from accessing academic research, some advocates must find and utilize strategies to accessing academic research that would otherwise be inaccessible to them:

...To sort of bypass a lot of the paywalls for those sort of things, I use like Internet Archive... If the research is really pertinent and I'm not able to find a way around, I always just contact the researcher directly. I was a researcher at one point... so I know when people have wanted mine and not to pay for it, you just give it to them, right?

(SHEL3)

However, some advocates working in community GBV organizations may not know how to overcome barriers related to physical access or have the time to research different strategies to surpass paywalls. Additionally, this advocate's discussion about contacting the researcher to access articles relevant to his work points to the power dynamics between academics and frontline workers. For instance, Smith's (2005) argument that researchers are recognized as 'sources' of knowledge in academia and people are objectified as the objects of that knowledge highlights how in the context and culture of academia, people outside of academia are not recognized as 'knowers.' In this dominant culture in academia, where researchers are recognized as the 'sources' of knowledge, there is little incentive for academics to connect with people outside of academia and send them their work.

In relation to the lack of physical access to academic research, some advocates discussed that frontline workers might not know where or how to access academic research on GBV that may be accessible to them. For example, four of the 12 advocates I interviewed discussed that without the necessary skillset, academic research can be difficult to find. This is evident in SHEL2's discussion about finding academic research on GBV. Knowing how to find academic research and incorporate key search terms is a skill that frontline workers in community GBV

organizations may not have been taught. This may prevent advocates from finding relevant academic research. For instance, one advocate explained:

...Searching for academic research is actually quite a skill... So like, oh, I'd like to know more about you know um more data about women, you know, not fleeing domestic violence because of their companion animals or something not being allowed in the shelter. I want to know more about that. How do I even begin to search it? Because the way that academic research is cataloged is so specific [Laughs]. (SHEL2)

These issues are further explained by an advocate who expressed the barriers he experiences to physically accessing academic research:

...Mostly just the gatekeeping that comes with journals and institutionalizations for the fiscal part of that... A lot of the time people will have to go through institutional libraries in order to get those things. And even then there needs to be a level of literacy of like what you're looking for... *I would say that funding, media literacy are... sort of the bigger barriers for us getting information...* [emphasis added]. (SHEL3)

The complexities of searching for relevant academic research are compounded by the lack of time that advocates have to learn where to find relevant academic research and acquire the skills needed to efficiently search for academic research. For example, an advocate stated:

...Part of it is just like *I don't even know where to go and I don't really have the time to put into like figuring that out* [emphasis added]. It was a lot easier when I could just login with my student email and I could access all of those things, because it was beneficial to our work here. (SAC3)

Additionally, although some advocates know that there are methods to overcome paywalls to access academic research, they might not know where to search for academic research on GBV.

For instance, one advocate asserted:

I am aware that there are probably like search banks or... research piracy sites where you can access these things for free, but *it's again like not knowing where you would go to quickly access information related to gender-based violence* [emphasis added], because there's so many journals... (SAC7).

Thus, beyond paywalls that prevent advocates working in community GBV organizations from accessing academic research, not knowing where or how to search for relevant academic research on GBV is a barrier to accessing and utilizing academic research for frontline workers.

The advocates working in community GBV organizations who I interviewed perceive some academic research on GBV as relevant to their work. However, without access through a student working in their organization, community GBV organizations do not have the funds to purchase journal subscriptions or academic articles. Only one of the 12 advocates who I interviewed discussed how he mitigates the barrier of physical access to academic research without relying on students' institutional affiliations. For instance, one advocate explained that he uses Internet Archive to access academic research behind paywalls or directly contacts the researcher to ask for access. Additionally, some advocates do not know how or where to search for relevant academic research and do not have the time to learn.³ The lack of physical access to academic research on GBV is a significant barrier to overcoming the research-practice gap in the

³ See Chapter 4 for more discussion.

GBV sector. If advocates working in community GBV organizations cannot physically access academic research, how can academics expect their research to be utilized outside of academia?

“Getting lost in the Weeds”: Complex Jargon & Inaccessible Academic Research

The barriers to accessing and utilizing academic research are not limited to physical access. As I discussed in Chapter 1, the racial, colonial, and sexist systems of power embedded in Western academic knowledge production (Connell, 2010; Go, 2016; Fahlberg, 2023; Collins, 2019), and the pressures that academics experience to publish research in scholarly journals within this context, can impact their style of writing (Badley, 2020). Many academics embed articles with complex jargon, abstract concepts, and theories which creates barriers for non-academics to read and understand academic research (Badley, 2020; Smith, 2005). Due to the pressures to publish research, academics may feel the need to adopt this particular style of writing to succeed (Badley, 2020). For instance, academics may feel senses of professional insecurity and incompetency if they write in more accessible formats (Billig, 2013; Badley, 2020). However, the language and style of writing embedded in academic articles may result in non-academics perceiving this research as “academic bullshit” (Badley, 2020, p. 248).

Due to the pressures that academics experience to publish research and excel in academia, academics are producing forms of knowledge that exclude non-academic audiences (Badley, 2020; Billig, 2013; Smith, 2005; Fahlberg, 2023). Smith (2005) argues that the role of texts in coordinating people’s actions “are key to transposing people’s local work into the institutional” (p. 173). This argument highlights how texts play a major role in producing institutional discourses that subsume people’s experiences and identities into institutional categories and procedures that regulate people’s actions (Smith, 2005). Smith (2005) defines institutional discourses as selecting “those aspects of what people do that are accountable within

it, subsuming actualities as integral to the production of the institution...Typically perspectiveless representations are created in which people disappear as subjects and agents” (p. 225) As texts produce and reproduce institutional discourses, they obscure people’s lived experiences and perspectives, and often do not reflect people’s lived experiences (Smith, 2005). Smith (2005) utilizes these ideas to critique sociology and sociological knowledge. In sociology, and academia more broadly, people’s lived experiences are often de-legitimized as sources of knowledge (Smith, 2005). In mainstream sociology, and academia more broadly, people are often treated as ‘objects’ to be studied (Smith, 2005). This hinders the type of knowledge that sociology creates because it does not truly represent all people’s realities (Smith, 2005; Go, 2016; Fahlberg, 2023).

Academic research produces institutional discourses that are disconnected from people’s lived experiences. For example, the complex jargon and theories embedded in academic research can be understood as an institutional discourse that obscure people’s social realities (Smith, 2005). The knowledge that academics produce is written in ways that are inaccessible to non-academic audiences and do not capture all people’s experiences (Badley, 2020; Smith, 2005; Connell, 2010; Go, 2016; Fahlberg, 2023; Collins, 2019). For example, the complex jargon and theories that academic use to ‘explain’ the social world produce institutional discourses that may not align with the experiences of the people that academics are writing about (Smith, 2005). Rather than recognizing people’s experiences as sources of knowledge, academics assume the role of ‘knower’ and write about people’s experiences in ways that align with epistemic and professional standards in academia, which obscures the perspectives and knowledge of people outside of academia. This contributes to the exclusionary forms of knowledge that academia constructs, and does not represent people’s lived experiences (Smith, 2005; Connell, 2010; Go, 2016; Fahlberg, 2023; Collins, 2019).

Through conversations with advocates I interviewed, it is evident that advocates working in community GBV organizations echo Badley's (2020) arguments about the inaccessible language and style of academic research. For example, when discussing the barriers to utilizing academic research in her work, one advocate stated: "One is language, so like most of it is written in a way that is just not interpretable for most people, heck I mean, most students struggle like academic students themselves struggle with some academic papers [Laughs]" (SHEL1). Despite the value that advocates might see in qualitative research that arises in the field of GBV, the complex jargon in academic articles creates barriers for advocates to read and utilize academic research in their work. For instance, an advocate asserted:

...Academic research is just that. I mean, there's often a lot of jargon in there [emphasis added] ... In this field I would say it might be better because there's a lot more qualitative research... so I find that information very valuable... (SAC5)

In addition to the complex language and jargon embedded in academic research, some advocates reported frustrations about the amount of perceived irrelevant information embedded in academic research. For example, one advocate explained:

...From like an advocate counselor's perspective, I never was on Google Scholar trying to get information, or like tips and tricks... on how to support like a traumatized client because it was not digestible, and... it didn't give me what I needed... So it's just giving me a whole bunch of information that I didn't need, and I think you can get lost in that really easily [emphasis added]. (SAC4)

Thus, advocates working in community GBV organizations may experience challenges to parse through academic articles and highlight the most pertinent information related to their work. This

was echoed by another advocate who stated “... But like any other academic literature, it can get a bit jargony, you can get lost in the weeds basically [Laughs]” (SAC3). Additionally, the same advocate indicated the importance of addressing barriers beyond physical access: “Yeah, because like access is not only physically getting the information, but access is being able to like digest and use the information as well” (SAC3). The complex jargon embedded in academic knowledge related to GBV illustrates how accessibility goes beyond physical access. Even if advocates working in community GBV organizations are granted access to academic knowledge on GBV, the style of writing and language embedded in academic research are inaccessible to frontline workers.

Reflecting Smith’s (2005) arguments, these findings highlight that the jargon embedded in academic articles, create institutional discourses that are disconnected from people’s experiences and are inaccessible to audiences outside of academia. The institutional discourse of Western academe has been shaped by Western epistemologies that are exclusionary and are not reflective of all people’s realities (Go, 2016; Connell, 2010; Fahlberg, 2023; Collins, 2019). Due to the complex jargon and perceived irrelevant information in academic articles to the work of advocates in community GBV organizations, the knowledge produced in academic research on GBV does not reflect the experiences of frontline workers. These issues create barriers for advocates working in community GBV organizations to utilize academic research on GBV in their work. Beyond physical access, advocates in community GBV organizations cannot utilize academic research that is embedded with jargon and theories that do not reflect their lived experiences and is irrelevant to their work. These issues may result in advocates engaging with knowledge produced by other frontline workers in the GBV sector rather than the knowledge produced by academics. For example, an advocate claimed: “... In general, I think we rely more

heavily... on reports from people on the frontline doing the work” (SAC5). Advocates working in community GBV organizations have a better understanding of the context that frontline workers are working in and thus can produce knowledge that is more accessible and relevant to the experiences of advocates working in the field.

“We Don’t Have the Time to Be Reading Articles all Day”: Advocates’ Lack of Time

Related to the barriers of inaccessible language preventing advocates from utilizing academic research on GBV, six of the twelve advocates I interviewed explained that lack of time is a barrier to utilizing academic research in their work. The complex jargon and theories embedded in academic research, as well as the lack of time additional time that advocates have to find and read academic research prevents advocates in community GBV organizations from utilizing academic research. The pressures that community GBV organizations are experiencing resulting from underfunding, understaffing, and the intense workloads of advocates in conjunction with the inaccessible nature of academic research, contribute to the lack of time that advocates have to search for, read, and utilize academic research in their work. This was highlighted by an advocate who expressed: “I mean, most organizations too, like all of their staff are undervalued, underfunded, overworked. And so, I mean, I barely feel like I have time to sit down and read a 25-page academic paper, they certainly do not” (SHEL1). Echoing these claims, another advocate explained:

...Partly it’s a time thing right? And like the time accessibility, but part of it is just like I don’t even know where to go and I don’t really have the time to put into like figuring that out.... As much as we don’t have the time to be reading articles all day, which would be great because they have so much knowledge... (SAC3)

Similarly, a participant discussed: “It's also a time thing too, like taking the time to like review papers to try to find the most up-to-date information on better or best practices for whatever disclosure, responding disclosures or anything like that” (SAC7). Thus, when thinking about accessible academic research for advocates in community GBV organizations, the barriers related to time must be addressed.

Additionally, some advocates who are both a student and an advocate working in a community GBV organization, may experience additional barriers related to time preventing them from utilizing academic research in their work. For instance, when asked if the advocate who is in charge of social media content at their organization uses academic research in the creation and dissemination of their posts, an advocate stated:

...She doesn't have the time, she's a part time worker, full time masters student. So, she is extremely busy... She will do y'know research, y'know if you look at our social media, we do um so many like psycho-educational posts. (SAC3)

These advocates' discussions illustrate that beyond physical accessibility, the complex language and jargon within academic articles and the lack of time they have to read lengthy articles and parse through relevant information are major barriers preventing them from utilizing academic research in their work. As I will discuss further in Chapter 6, academics should prioritize accessible forms of knowledge dissemination to target audiences outside of academia. If academics are producing research that is relevant to the work of advocates in community GBV organizations, the onus should not be on the advocates to spend time searching for articles that could potentially be useful for them, reading through lengthy articles with information irrelevant to them, and trying to understand key information that might be clouded by academic jargon and abstract theories.

“That’s Not How it Works in the Real World”: Disjuncture Between Academic Research on GBV and the Experiences of Frontline Workers

Beyond the barriers preventing advocates from utilizing academic research in their work, through conversations with advocates I interviewed, I found that there is a disjuncture between academic research on GBV and the lived experiences of frontline workers. The systems of power and oppression embedded in Western academic knowledge production heighten the disconnect between Western academic knowledge and people’s realities (Connell, 2010; Go, 2016; Fahlberg, 2023; Collins, 2019). For instance, one advocate stated: “Academia and research and the way that they do things, it’s been rooted in years and years of- How I say [Laughs] like this colonial way of thinking, patriarchal, like all these pieces right?” (SHEL5). This advocate’s words highlight how Western academic research on GBV may produce knowledge that perpetuates Western epistemic hierarchies and does not reflect the systems of oppression that impact advocates’ experiences and work (Go, 2016; Connell, 2010; Fahlberg, 2023; Collins, 2019).

Academic research on GBV produces knowledge that may be irrelevant and inaccessible to the work of advocates in community GBV organizations. Due to the lack of physical access to articles and the complex jargon embedded in academic research, academics engaged in GBV research are producing knowledge that excludes advocates from utilizing this knowledge. Additionally, academics may be producing knowledge that is disconnected from and irrelevant to the work of advocates in community GBV organizations. Reflecting Smith’s (2005) arguments about sociologists, and academics more generally, assuming the role of ‘knower’, academics engaged in research on GBV may not use the perspectives and voices of frontline workers as sources of knowledge. Thus, the knowledge they produce could be out of touch with the work

that advocates are engaged in and their capacity to implement the recommendations for audiences engaged in GBV work outside of academia.

Drawing on Smith's (2005) understandings of texts and institutional discourses, from the perspectives of advocates working in community GBV organizations, I argue that academic research on GBV produce institutional discourses about GBV that are not reflective of the lived experiences of frontline workers. The advocates I interviewed expressed concern that academic research on GBV is not relevant or useful for advocates working in the GBV field, and is disconnected from the work that they are engaged in. For example, one advocate stated:

...I did find that when I was doing my master's in criminology, I was doing it with both students and faculty members who had never actually worked outside of academia.

Right? And so they would propose solutions or even just have theoretical conversations, and I would just be like, yeah, that's not how that works in the real world, right?

[emphasis added] Or that's not feasible or you're forgetting the fact that like agencies receive funding that has like very strict rules about what they can spend money on.... *So they would have these ideas that would get published in papers and I would read the paper and just think like, have you ever even talked to someone who works in the field?....*

They're talking about us often. But they're not talking to us... [emphasis added] (SHEL1)

This advocate's discussion illustrates Smith's (2005) arguments about the reproduction of institutional discourses that are detached from people's experiences. Additionally, this advocate's words highlight Smith's (2005) critique of mainstream sociology which can be applied to academia more broadly, through which researchers assume the role of the 'subject' of knowledge and people are 'objects' of knowledge to be written about. This advocate is highlighting the disjuncture that occurs when academics produce research on GBV without

talking to and learning from the experiences of frontline workers. Without the perspectives of advocates engaged in GBV work, solutions and recommendations that academics propose for target audiences outside of academia, such as community GBV organizations, may not be possible or feasible in reality. This disconnect was further illustrated by an advocate who stated:

Whereas academia, like that world is so affluent and... I am a member of academia, right?

But... I have so much criticism towards that because it's like this elite part of society that is not in touch with the actual frontline workers on the ground that are doing the work...

[emphasis added] (SAC4)

Thus, in line with Smith's (2005) arguments, academic research on GBV may produce institutional discourses about GBV that subsume the lived experiences of frontline workers. Conversations and knowledge about GBV, and strategies and solutions that could be implemented outside of academia are happening without the input of frontline workers. This results in the reproduction of academic knowledge on GBV that is disconnected from the experiences of advocates working in the field. This disjuncture between academic research on GBV and the experiences and work of advocates working in community GBV results in academic research that might be perceived as irrelevant to frontline workers. For example, one advocate asserted that in regard to academic research on GBV "I would say there's also a piece around the fact that a lot of it is not relevant or useful [Laughs]" (SHEL1).

The disjuncture between academic research on GBV and the experiences of frontline workers is also evident through the disconnect between the work that academics are engaged in and the work that advocates in community GBV organizations are engaged in. Resulting from academic knowledge on GBV being produced without the perspectives and knowledge of frontline workers, advocates working in community GBV organizations may be unaware of the

research and work that academics are producing. For instance, one advocate described that there is a “disconnect” between academic research on GBV and frontline work, because academics producing academic research on GBV have not made an effort to share their findings with this advocate’s organization. Thus, this advocate’s organization is largely unaware of the academic knowledge on GBV that researchers are producing. In addition to the disconnect between the academic knowledge being produced on GBV and the experiences of frontline workers, academics may not be connecting with frontline workers in community GBV organizations to share and exchange their knowledge and work. This lack of connection between academics and advocates working in community GBV organizations may further contribute to the disjuncture between academic knowledge on GBV and the experiences of frontline workers. For example, an advocate highlighted that the university in their area has not invited advocates working in their SAC to knowledge sharing events or collaborations:

I can't say if they've ever reached out to us to invite us to like forums or sharing, or being like hey we had findings on this, here's something that might be relevant to your SAC, or do you want to collaborate on this. (SAC7)

Thus, if academics do not connect with frontline workers about the work they are engaged in, advocates working in community GBV may not be aware of the knowledge being produced in academia related to GBV. On the other hand, if academics are producing knowledge about GBV without the perspectives of frontline workers, this knowledge is disconnected from the work and experiences of advocates working in the field. These findings illustrate Smith’s (2005) arguments about the production of institutional discourses that are disconnected from people’s lived experiences. Without connecting with advocates engaged in GBV work and learning from their experiences, academic knowledge on GBV will not truly represent the realities of advocates

working in the field and the issues that are facing community GBV organizations. This issue is further highlighted by SHEL2 who stated:

...Unless I have a university login or I pay for access to like journals and stuff like that, then I'm not going to be able to see that research necessarily, and so I don't see a ton of layman dissemination to people that are actually working in the front line. (SHEL2)

This advocate's words illustrate that the disconnect between the research that academics are engaged in and the work of advocates in community GBV is a barrier for advocates to access and utilize academic on GBV. If academics are not connecting with advocates working in the field to share and disseminate accessible research, how do they expect frontline workers to find and utilize their research? Advocates working in community GBV organizations may see the value of connecting and collaborating with academics engaged in GBV research. Without these connections, the work of academics and advocates working in the field will remain disconnected.

Concluding Thoughts

The disjuncture between academic research and the experiences of frontline workers reveals an interesting dynamic between the role of academic research and the work of advocates in community GBV organizations. As I discussed in Chapter 4, there are some ways that advocates engage with academic research in their work. However, the barriers that advocates experience to access and utilize this research, and the disjuncture between academic research and their lived experiences highlights that there is a disconnect between academic research on GBV and the work and actions of advocates in community GBV organizations. Although Smith (2005) argues that texts coordinate people's actions and play a significant role in producing and reproducing institutional discourses that are disconnected from people's lived experiences, my

findings indicate that academic research on GBV produce institutionalized discourses about GBV that are disconnected from the experience of frontline workers, but these texts do not necessarily coordinate the actions of frontline workers. Although these texts may not coordinate the actions of frontline workers, they play a key role in coordinating institutional discourses on GBV that are exclusionary and disconnected from the people's lived experiences.

Academic knowledge perpetuates colonial, gendered, and Western epistemic hierarchies that exclude the perspectives of women and marginalized groups (Connell, 2010; Go, 2016; Fahlberg, 2023; Smith, 2005; Collins, 2019). The complex jargon and inaccessible nature of academic research, largely resulting from professional pressures and epistemic standards in academia, produces institutional discourses that do not capture all people's realities and are exclusionary to non-academic audiences (Badley, 2020; Smith, 2005; Fahlberg, 2023). Applying Smith's (2005) arguments to the GBV sector, it is evident that academic texts play a role in coordinating institutional discourses that obscure the lived experiences of frontline workers. The advocates I interviewed highlighted that the research on GBV that academics produce might be irrelevant to their work and out of touch with the actualities of their daily work. These institutional discourses contribute to the disjuncture between academic research and the experiences of frontline workers.

In addition to the barriers preventing advocates from accessing and utilizing academic research on GBV, the disjuncture between academic research and the experiences and knowledge of frontline workers hinders advocates' engagement with this knowledge. Thus, there is a dynamic in which advocates working at community GBV organizations may be unaware and excluded from knowledge production related to GBV in academia, and academics are uninformed about the work that frontline workers are engaged in and the issues they are facing.

It is crucial to mitigate the barriers that frontline workers experience to accessing and utilizing academic research on GBV, and the disjuncture between academic knowledge and the experiences of frontline workers to ensure that academic knowledge on GBV is relevant and can be utilized by advocates engaged in GBV work.

Chapter 6: Recommendations to Mitigate the Inaccessibility of Academic Research

Introduction

The challenges with mobilizing academic research on GBV are well-documented in existing literature (Wathen, 2022; Wathen et al., 2011). Wathen (2022) argues that GBV is a complex social issue that is difficult to address due to a lack of consensus among various stakeholders regarding how to confront GBV, high costs, and gaps and inconsistencies in GBV research. Additionally, the limited avenues of presenting results of academic research in peer-reviewed journals and conferences create barriers for successful knowledge mobilization (Wathen, 2022). Beyond these issues, the intense pressures that academics experience to excel in traditional academic forms of knowledge dissemination, such as publishing articles in journals, create challenges for academics to engage in accessible forms of knowledge dissemination (Badley, 2020; Wathen, 2022; Fahlberg, 2023). Due to these pressures to succeed within academia, academics may not have the time to engage with methods to mobilize their research outside of academia.

The challenges of mobilizing academic research on GBV may contribute to the disjuncture between academic research on GBV and the experiences of frontline workers that I discussed in Chapter 5. As I illustrated in Chapter 5, knowledge produced in Western academia perpetuate institutional discourses that are disconnected from people's lived experiences (Smith, 2005; Connell, 2010; Go, 2016; Fahlberg, 2023; Collins, 2019). I argue that the disjuncture between academic research on GBV and the experiences of frontline workers may be compounded by the challenges of mobilizing academic research on GBV. For instance, the knowledge on GBV being produced by academics may not be reaching target audiences outside of academia, indicating a disconnect between the research being produced within academia and

the work and experiences of advocates in community GBV organizations. Additionally, due to the challenges with mobilizing academic research on GBV, academics may not be connecting with frontline workers and learning from their perspectives and feedback. As a result, the knowledge on GBV produced by academics may overlook many of the realities of frontline work.

To help overcome the barriers associated with accessing and utilizing academic research on GBV, as I discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, I asked advocates about the recommendations they have for academics to make their research more accessible and useful for community GBV organizations. Smith (2005) highlights the importance and value of “work knowledges” (p. 229). As I discussed in Chapter 3, Smith (2005) defines work knowledges as “what people know of and in their work and how it is coordinated with the work of others” (p. 229). Smith (2005) argues that learning from people’s experiential knowledge and the work they are engaged in is important because in mainstream sociology, and academia more broadly, academics often perceive research participants as subjects of knowledge rather than sources of knowledge. In this study, I draw on the work knowledges of advocates in community GBV organizations, specifically their perceptions of academic research on GBV, and the challenges they experience accessing and utilizing academic research on GBV. Drawing on advocates’ firsthand experiences concerning the challenges they experience accessing and using academic research on GBV can provide recommendations to academics to make their research more accessible in ways that directly benefit advocates in community GBV organizations. Learning from the perspectives and experiences of advocates in community GBV organizations concerning ways to mobilize accessible academic research helps provide academics with the best methods they can utilize to disseminate accessible and useful research for community GBV organizations.

In this chapter I centre the perspectives and voices of advocates working in community GBV organizations to provide academics with recommendations to mobilize accessible research outside of academia. I begin this chapter with a discussion about the challenges with mobilizing academic research on GBV. I then outline structural recommendations from advocates regarding how academics can make research on GBV more accessible to community GBV organizations. These recommendations focus on broader structural barriers that require changes to institutional practices and knowledge production processes in Western academia. Finally, I outline specific recommendations from advocates that academics can utilize to disseminate more accessible and useful research to community GBV organizations.

Challenges with Mobilizing Academic Research on GBV

Mobilizing academic research on GBV is difficult, because there is a lack of consensus among stakeholder groups concerning how to address the issue (Wathen, 2022). For instance, various public and private institutions are involved in addressing GBV, such as the criminal legal system, various levels of government, and non-profit advocacy organizations (Wathen, 2022). Wathen (2022) argues that these institutions typically have conflicting priorities, and thus their definitions of GBV and recommended solutions differ (Wathen, 2022). Beyond these conflicting priorities and understandings of GBV, GBV is a complex social issue that intersects with other systems of oppression, which makes it especially challenging to address (Wathen, 2022). Without consensus from stakeholder groups on definitions of GBV and potential strategies to address it, it is difficult to build coordinated responses to address GBV and mobilize academic research on GBV due to opposing perspectives (Wathen, 2022). For instance, community GBV organizations may prioritize survivor-centred and trauma-informed approaches and research to address the structural issues that foster GBV, whereas the government may prioritize

individualized medical-legal solutions (Bumiller, 2008; Mehrota et al., 2016). These different goals and priorities create obstacles for mobilizing academic research on GBV into actionable policies and initiatives to address GBV (Wathen, 2022).

The limited methods of presenting academic research create further challenges to mobilize academic research on GBV (Wathen, 2022). For example, Wathen (2022) argues that expecting findings from academic research to reach target audiences outside of academia through academic modes of knowledge dissemination in conferences and articles is ineffective. However, it is important to consider the context that academics are working within. Due to professional pressures and the limited incentive for academics to disseminate accessible knowledge it can be challenging for academics to engage in accessible forms of knowledge dissemination (Badley, 2020; Wathen, 2022). Despite the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council's push for academics to diversify their knowledge mobilization, universities are not yet formally recognizing and valuing diverse knowledge mobilization efforts in processes of promotion and tenure (Wathen, 2022). For example, Wathen (2022) describes "when I started actively partnering in research, there did not exist space in CV or annual performance evaluation templates to even list these kinds of activities, let alone assign them value" (p. 125). Thus, if academics are rewarded solely on peer-reviewed academic publications, they may be deterred from investing time and efforts into diverse knowledge mobilization processes (Wathen, 2022; Badley, 2020).

In addition to the challenges with mobilizing academic research on GBV, Wathen (2022) illustrates that assessing whether research has made impacts can also be challenging. It is difficult to measure what successful knowledge mobilization is "...because knowledge sharing, uptake, use, and impact are all complex, time-consuming and highly confounded processes" (p.

120). Additionally, the way that research *use* is defined impacts perceptions of successful knowledge mobilization (Wathen, 2022). For instance, Wathen (2022) discusses that much of the existing literature on knowledge mobilization perceives knowledge *use* as something that must be apparent through specific actions or decisions. However, Wathen (2022) suggests that concrete actions are not the only indication of knowledge use and contends that we must find ways to investigate how knowledge is used “symbolically and conceptually” (p. 121) to mobilize research knowledge. For instance, although advocates in community GBV organizations I interviewed typically do not directly utilize academic research in their work, it is difficult to assess if academic research on GBV has led to changes in advocates’ perceptions and understandings of GBV, or if it has implicitly informed the frameworks advocates draw on to support survivors.

Overcoming Barriers to Accessing and Utilizing Academic Research on GBV From the Perspectives of Frontline Workers

Mitigating the Barriers to Physical Access

As discussed in Chapter 5, the costs associated with accessing academic articles and journals and advocates’ lack of access to these articles without an institutional affiliation prevents advocates from utilizing academic research on GBV that could be relevant to their work. To help overcome the barriers to physically accessing academic research, one advocate suggested that universities could offer library memberships to community organizations:

I have always thought or wondered why the universities in each city don't offer, like a membership or access to their library for community-based agencies. You know, even if it's not the journal articles per se, but even just being able to borrow books and reports and access to like they have the government documents, like all of those pieces (SHEL1).

To help community organizations gain physical access to university libraries, this advocate recommended that academics could lobby for their university to provide a special membership or access for community organizations. Providing community organizations with library access would help ensure that knowledge produced within academia can be accessed and utilized by audiences outside of academia. If it is not feasible for universities to grant full library access to community organizations, some participants suggested universities could grant organizations access to the journals that are most relevant to their field of work.

In relation to library access, to help overcome the barriers to physically accessing academic research on GBV, two out of 12 advocates discussed that access to a search engine or specific database would be beneficial for frontline workers. For example, one advocate stated:

I think it would be nice if our staff had more general access to a search engine where if they were interested on their shift, they could do some of their own research and searching as well to get those updates of knowledge and information (SHEL4).

Providing advocates with access to academic search engines, such as OMNI, or databases relevant to their work would significantly help overcome the financial barriers that prevent frontline workers from accessing academic research. Additionally, these tools would help minimize the time advocates spend searching for relevant research on GBV through publicly available search engines such as Google and Google Scholar. Without mitigating the barriers associated with physically accessing academic research on GBV, academic knowledge remains largely inaccessible outside of academia.

Beyond directly providing frontline workers with access to academic libraries and databases, two advocates discussed the importance of educating frontline workers about where and how to access academic research on GBV. As discussed in Chapter 5, searching for

academic research on GBV is a skill that advocates working in community GBV organizations do not always have. Thus, these advocates suggested that academics could connect with local community GBV organizations to provide guidance on how to find and access relevant academic research. For example, one advocate suggested that academics could create a roadmap for frontline workers regarding how to access academic research and how to overcome some of the barriers in physically accessing academic research. Additionally, another advocate recommended

Better education on how to access these sorts of papers... Having those who are doing research on sexual violence prevention kind of have like, hey, here's like a monthly newsletter of studies that have come out recently about interesting things, right?... So there kind of needs to be a middle accessible ground for it, right? Like even just a starting point to be like, here's some interesting points that were pulled out of studies if you want to read more, here they are over here. (SHEL3)

Thus, in addition to educating advocates working in community organizations on how to access academic research relevant to their work, some advocates suggested that academics in departments producing knowledge on GBV could connect with community GBV organizations and create newsletters highlighting important studies that might be relevant to their work. Providing community organizations with the titles and/or links to relevant academic studies could help mitigate the barriers that advocates experience when searching for academic research.

Mitigating the Disjuncture Between Academic Research on GBV and the Experiences of Frontline Workers

As discussed in Chapter 5, advocates who I interviewed highlighted that there is a disjuncture between academic research on GBV and their work and lived experiences. Advocates discussed that academics produce knowledge on GBV that might be irrelevant and inaccessible

to frontline workers. For instance, one advocate stated “...because again, it's the gap between the specialists and the researchers and individuals, even if they are educated, still feels like very far apart...” (SHEL3). It is crucial to mitigate this disjuncture, given community GBV organizations’ central role in confronting GBV, supporting survivors, and GBV activist work, and the potential value of academic research on GBV to this project (Boucher, 2021). Thus, disseminating accessible and relevant academic research to community GBV organizations can lead to meaningful changes in the GBV sector and for survivors. Academics who are engaged in GBV research and prevention should be committed to disseminating this knowledge outside of academia.

Academics Should Connect, Communicate, and Collaborate with Community GBV Organizations

To help ensure that academic knowledge on GBV is reaching target audiences, such as community GBV organizations, five out of 12 advocates who I interviewed asserted that academics could connect with community GBV organizations and send them their research. For example, one advocate asserted:

... I do think like sending research that you think might be relevant, if not directly to organizations, then perhaps to their parent organizations... there's Ontario Women's Shelter, like a bigger organization that could then disseminate it to the other shelters if you feel like your research is useful in that. (SHEL1)

Sending academic research on GBV to community organizations or parent organizations, such as the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses (OAITH) and the Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres (OCRCC), could be a feasible first step for academics trying to ensure that

their research can be accessed by advocates in community GBV organizations. Similarly, another advocate argued:

...Being able to provide it [academic research] to gender-based violence organizations in addition to having it behind that paywall I think would make it more accessible. Like, hey I made this really valuable piece of research that's really relevant to Ontario, like can I share it with... the Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres... to distribute?... (SAC3)

This advocate highlights how academics can provide community GBV organizations with relevant research, while also keeping this research behind a paywall if necessary. Thus, there are methods that academics can utilize to help ensure their research can be accessed by relevant audiences outside of academia, while still engaging in more traditional academic forms of academic knowledge dissemination in journal articles.

In addition to academics providing community GBV organizations with their relevant research, some advocates discussed the importance of academics connecting and collaborating with community GBV organizations to ensure academics are producing knowledge relevant to the experiences of frontline workers. Connecting and collaborating with advocates in community GBV organizations to inform academics' research could help mitigate the disjuncture between academic research on GBV and the experiences of frontline workers. For example, one advocate suggested that academics should ensure that the knowledge they are producing is relevant to local issues:

...To actually make an effort in researching things that are directly related to your local issues... Not everything has to be some kind of like untouchable, elusive entity right? Like go to the [name of community organization], come to our doors, go to women's shelters and say what is it that you're seeing? And like ask for feedback- how can we be

more useful with all of our money and all of our resources to try to support you down here. There's a gap there and it needs to be bridged. (SAC7)

This advocate clearly highlights the gap between academic research on GBV and the work of advocates in community GBV organizations. Connecting with community GBV organizations to determine the issues they are experiencing and the work that they are engaged in will help ensure that academics are producing research that is relevant to their work. Additionally, another advocate explained that their organization has not often been approached by academics to share their research:

I don't know about like, hey, let's sit down with like some local community organizations who are doing frontline work to like kind of share what we've been doing. And also we can inform the work they're doing by letting them know what's relevant to our current context. But yeah, that's kind of, I wish there was more of that (SAC7).

This advocate highlights how advocates in community GBV organizations can help advise the research of academics to ensure they are producing knowledge that is relevant to their experiences.

To produce accessible and relevant academic knowledge on GBV, some advocates suggested that academics could engage in collaborative forms of research with community GBV organizations. For example, one advocate asserted:

I think it's just the sense of disconnect... of like we are doing our good work, and there's researchers who are doing important, meaningful work too, and it's like *we would be so much more impactful and powerful if we're able to have a little bit more collaboration or crosstalk of what's going on* [emphasis added], because otherwise it feels very siloed...

because I think... both kind of parties want to be doing things that are actually relevant to the context, and like directly applicable, and will have the most impact and allow for the most like meaningful changes. (SAC7)

This advocate highlights how collaborations between community GBV organizations and academics could help mitigate the disjuncture between academic research on GBV and frontline workers. Research collaborations between academics and community GBV organizations could result in this knowledge leading to more meaningful impacts because the perspectives and experiential knowledge of frontline workers would help ensure that academics are engaged in research that is relevant to their work. Three other advocates out of 12 who I interviewed discussed the value of collaborations between academics and community GBV organizations. For example, one advocate stated, “I think stronger partnerships would benefit not only that... research part of it, but also things such as better advocacy...” (SHEL3).

Strategies for developing research collaborations between academics and community organizations are well-documented in existing literature. For example, Fahlberg (2023) highlights how Participatory Action Research (PAR) can be a solution to mitigate the colonial and epistemic hierarchies in sociological research, and academia more broadly. PAR:

“calls for (1) the substantive participation of the research community in research design, data collection, analysis and publication; (2) a focus on education through co-learning and the co-production of sociological theories with community members; and (3) a commitment to collaborative action between the research team and the research population that promotes positive social change and more equitably distributes the benefits of the research.” (p. 97)

Fahlberg (2023) illustrates that PAR “provides a framework for capturing, incorporating and valuing the knowledge of communities historically harmed by colonialism, while also contributing to political interventions that address the continued legacies of colonial inequities” (p. 97). PAR prioritizes the perspectives of the community being researched and focuses on collaborating and learning from community members. Additionally, PAR is rooted in “collaborative *action* between the research team and the research population that promotes positive social change and more equitably distributes the benefits of the research” (Fahlberg, 2023, p. 97). Thus, PAR prioritizes research that leads to meaningful changes from the perspectives of the community that academics are working with.

PAR is a valuable approach that has been utilized for GBV research. For instance, Lévesque et al. (2023) conducted a PAR project with service providers in Québec who support survivors who have experienced reproductive coercion and abuse (RCA). Through focus groups with service providers and a literature review of best practices regarding RCA intervention, Lévesque et al. (2023) drew on recommendations from service providers and feedback from field experts to develop an intervention guide for service providers to support survivors of RCA, and a booklet about reproductive choices for women and non-binary people seeking reproductive health services. In a Brazilian context, Signorelli et al. (2022) conducted a PAR study with “the House of the Brazilian Woman (HBW) of Curitiba, Brazil, a cross-sectoral one-stop center (OSC) providing comprehensive care for intimate partner violence (IPV) survivors” (p.433) to explore the possibility of creating an online safety-decision tool for women experiencing IPV in Brazil. Signorelli et al. (2023) co-designed and co-authored the study with local stakeholders and centred the recommendations of staff who support survivors of IPV in Brazil throughout the project regarding the development of an online SDA.

Researchers have also utilized Photovoice Action Research (PVAR) as a method for GBV research (Christensen, 2019). PVAR “engages participants in taking photographs about a topic of concern, critically reflecting on the topic, and developing solutions to address the problem” (Christensen, 2019 p. 485). The value of this alternative methodological approach was emphasized by an advocate who I interviewed in this study. She explained:

...When I was in school some students and I did a project called Photovoice, where we gave cameras to a group of people and they went out and, you know, we had some themes and they took pictures and then we told the story that way, and so it was fun to be creative that way and I think it also can be more engaging and more interesting (SAC5).

Using PVAR as a method to address GBV, prioritizes the perspectives of community members with lived experience and engages them in capturing and narrating photos that reflect their perceptions on GBV, and later showcases the photos to the broader community (Christensen, 2019). After the photos are displayed to the community, participants engage in reflections on the photos they presented and the feedback from the community to inform concrete solutions to help address GBV in their community (Christensen, 2019).

In the context of academic research on GBV, PAR could be a method for academics to collaborate with advocates working in community GBV organizations. Collaborative methods, such as PAR, could help mitigate the disjuncture between academic research on GBV and the experiences of frontline workers. Additionally, PAR could help centre feminist knowledges and the lived experiences of frontline workers. In the GBV sector, PAR would ensure that the perspectives of advocates in community GBV organizations, and survivors, are central to the academic knowledge on GBV being produced. Additionally, PAR would help ensure that the knowledge being produced is accessible and relevant to audiences outside of academia and can

lead to meaningful changes. Echoing Smith's (2005) critique of mainstream sociology and academia more broadly, alternative collaborative methods such as PAR help dismantle the power dynamics between researchers and participants. For example, drawing on Smith's (2005) arguments, utilizing PAR in academic research on GBV would ensure that advocates working in community GBV organizations and survivors are recognized as sources of knowledge rather than objects. For instance, PAR centres the knowledge of people in the community being researched and prioritizes learning from community members (Fahlberg, 2023). This can disrupt the subject-object relationship in academic research in which academics are recognized as the sources of knowledge and centre the lived experiences of advocates and survivors in academic knowledge production on GBV (Smith, 2005).

Addressing the Power Imbalance Between Academics and Frontline Workers

Smith (2005) illustrates that in mainstream sociology, and academia more broadly, researchers are recognized as 'knowers' and the lived experiences of people outside of academia are de-valued as sources of knowledge. This creates a power imbalance between researchers and people outside of academia. If academics connect, communicate, and collaborate with advocates working in community GBV organizations, this power imbalance must be confronted. One advocate who I interviewed discussed this issue in detail. She stated:

So if there is true collaboration, I think there needs to be an acknowledgement of like that disparity, that power in regards to what academia holds versus like community-based organizations, and if they really wanted to authentically work with organizations and do collaborative work, I think some of those things need to be deconstructed. (SHEL5)

Thus, if academics collaborate with advocates working in community GBV organizations, they must centre the experiential knowledge of advocates and ensure that they are recognizing

advocates as sources of knowledge. Echoing Smith's (2005) arguments, academics should not take on the role of teaching advocates. If academics collaborate with community GBV organizations, they should be learning from advocates. Returning to the quote from Chapter 5, these issues are further illustrated by the same advocate who asserted:

Academia and research and the way that they do things, it's been rooted in years and years of- How I say [Laughs] like this colonial way of thinking, patriarchal, like all these pieces right? And normally when you're dealing with this work... If you're operating already from that power indifference, the only way to really work collaboratively is academia needs to deconstruct that way of thinking and also then be able to leverage true collaborative or authentic collaboration with organizations out there. (SHEL5)

In line with existing literature showcasing the systems of power and oppression embedded in academia, as discussed in Chapter 5, this advocate highlights the need for academics to deconstruct these colonial and patriarchal systems of oppression to work collaboratively with community GBV organizations. For instance, academics must dismantle Western epistemic hierarchies in Western academia that invalidate the knowledge and lived experiences of women and marginalized groups (Smith, 2005; Fahlberg, 2023; Connell, 2010). This advocate's words illustrate that academics must deconstruct the systems of oppression embedded in Western academic knowledge production that privileges the knowledge and perspectives of academics over people's lived experiences (Smith, 2005; Fahlberg, 2023; Connell, 2010; Go, 2016; Collins, 2019). As illustrated by Fahlberg (2023), PAR is a method that can help de-colonize sociological research and deconstruct the power imbalance between academics and community members. In addition to deconstructing the systems of power embedded in academia, the same advocate asserted:

...The main thing is academia reaching out to community-based organizations, not from a *power over* positions but *power with* [emphasis added], and if research is conducted... people who have lived experience need to be part of that research right? And people who are doing the work need to be a part of that. And so it needs to be an applicable approach and if like things are published, they should be okay that it's under the name of the individuals who are doing the research. (SHEL5)

This advocate highlights an important consideration for collaborations between academics and frontline workers: if academics are collaborating with advocates in community GBV organizations and co-producing research, and this knowledge is being published, their names should be included in the publication. This aligns with Smith's (2005) arguments to prioritize people's lived experiences as sources of knowledge and showcases that research collaborations can help mitigate the disjuncture between academic research on GBV and the experiences of frontline workers.

Although research collaborations can help overcome the inaccessibility of academic research and mitigate the disjuncture between academic research and the experienced of frontline workers, Nyden and Wiewel (1992) argue that fostering trusting relationships between academics and community members can be challenging. Based on their experiences conducting community-based research in Chicago, Nyden and Wiewel (1992) reflect on the importance of community-based research and the challenges that come with it. For instance, community organizations and academics have different daily activities and relationships to the research (Nyden & Wiewel, 1992). Additionally, academics may prioritize a disciplinary focus in their research, which results in research that is less focused on community needs (Nyden & Wiewel, 1992). Community organizations' needs for fast-paced research may be at odds with academic

research methods, which can cause tension between academics and community organizations concerning timeline expectations different priorities (Nyden & Wiewel, 1992).

Nyden and Wiewel (1992) highlight the importance of critically evaluating academic standards that privilege disciplinary focused research and devalue community-based and collaborative research. For instance, they suggest that academics conducting community-based research may experience more challenges achieving publication than disciplinary focused research. Additionally, Nyden and Wiewel argue that community organizations and academics must breakthrough pre-existing stereotypes and assumptions about each other to create trusting relationships. Nyden and Wiewel's (1992) reflections illustrate how collaborative research can result in meaningful changes beyond academia. With the formation of trusting relationships, and careful planning to overcome potential obstacles, collaborations between GBV organizations and academics can lead to impactful research that is accessible to activists and organizations that need it (Nyden & Wiewel, 1992). These findings highlight important issues that must be addressed for true successful collaborations between academics and community GBV organizations.

Mitigating Discursive Barriers

Beyond physical access, there are discursive barriers that prevent advocates from accessing and utilizing academic research on GBV that must be addressed. As discussed in Chapter 5, academic jargon and lengthy articles prevent advocates from utilizing academic research on GBV that might be relevant to their work. To address these issues, advocates who I interviewed discussed the importance of academics ensuring that their research is accessible to participants and everyday people outside of academia. For instance, one advocate explained the

importance of ensuring academic research on GBV is accessible to survivors who have different capacities for understanding this knowledge:

... For someone who is differently abled or disabled... you're doing research that is relevant to their lives... That would be anti-oppressive, that would be y'know part of the goal I think in doing this kind of research, is to make sure that your research has an impact on the lived realities of its subjects. (SAC2)

This issue was further described by another advocate who said,

Finding a way to disseminate that research in a way that's even more digestible than what you might share with gender-based violence advocates, because there might be different knowledge or understanding. I have clients with a grade three education level, I have clients who have traumatic brain injuries... Sometimes there's no way that they would take the time or have the capacity to read again like a thirty page article, but how can we get this information to them so that they can feel validated in their experiences, and they can know what's happening in the sector without it being... physically inaccessible both in cost and knowing about it, and ability to comprehend and read it as well. (SAC3)

These advocates highlight that academics engaged in knowledge production on GBV must consider the accessibility of their research for not only advocates working in community GBV organizations, but also survivors of GBV. These recommendations connect to Smith's (2005) critiques of mainstream sociology and her proposal for an alternative sociology *for* people. Smith (2005) discusses the importance of creating a sociology that is useful for people and connected to their lived experiences. Academic knowledge on GBV should be relevant and useful for community GBV organizations and survivors. These advocates echo Smith's (2005) arguments that the experiences and knowledge of advocates and survivors should be central to academic

knowledge on GBV. Additionally, to ensure that academic knowledge on GBV is useful for advocates and survivors, an advocate suggested that academics should engage in forms of knowledge dissemination that recognize the different capacities individuals may have to discursively access and utilize this knowledge. For example, one advocate asserted:

Research shouldn't just be written for other researchers, which is sort of how I feel about the gender based violence sector as well...research should be written for the gender-based violence sector to use or policy makers, or people who won't or can't spend the time to read a thirty-page paper. How can you make that more digestible? More accessible. (SAC3)

Additionally, echoing Smith's (2005) arguments about creating a sociology *for* people and recognizing people's lived experiences as sources of knowledge, one advocate stated:

...Acknowledging and centring that the people who you are studying are experts in their own lived experiences. And so, in that approach to research, y'know I think it kind of speaks to [name of SAC3] was saying about making sure that's it accessible... It doesn't mean that research has to be diluted, but y'know if you're doing research on people, people should be able to have access to that in a way that is consumable, and there's tons of different ways that that could happen... (SAC2)

These discussions highlight the importance of mitigating the barriers to discursive access to ensure academic research can be utilized by people outside of academia. To disseminate accessible academic research to people with different capacities for understanding, academics may need to disseminate different forms of research to audiences, such as advocates working in community GBV organizations and survivors.

Specific Recommendations to Disseminate Accessible Academic Research on GBV

Beyond the broader structural recommendations discussed above, which aim to address broader system-level barriers that shape access to academic knowledge, advocates who I interviewed also provided specific recommendations for academics to disseminate more accessible and useful knowledge on GBV to community GBV organizations. The following sections will outline participants' concrete recommendations on strategies academics can utilize to mobilize academic knowledge on GBV outside of the academy.

Communication Forums

To disseminate accessible research on GBV to advocates working in community GBV organizations, one advocate suggested that communication forms between community GBV organizations and academics could be helpful to share relevant academic knowledge on GBV. For instance, one advocate stated:

If we had more of a forum style with people who aren't really used to maybe having to go get research or don't have the time, if we could go onto a forum and there be topics of research papers, and also other people to communicate with. So, I'm dealing with this issue, y'know maybe someone else in another region is also dealing with that issue and they could respond and direct. So, I almost feel like peer-led... it would make it much more accessible. (SAC1)

This advocate highlights how a communication forum between advocates working in community GBV organizations could be helpful for advocates to discuss similar issues they are experiencing and relevant academic research to their work. In addition to a communication forum between advocates working in community GBV organizations, the same advocate highlighted that it

would also be beneficial for advocates to have a communication forum with academics. This could help mitigate the disjuncture between academic research on GBV and the experiences of frontline workers, because academics could gain feedback about the issues that community GBV organizations are experiencing and the research they are looking for. Additionally, academics could provide links to their research that might be relevant for community GBV organizations. An online communication forum could also help both academics and advocates working in community GBV become more aware about the work that both groups are engaged in, and potentially lead to collaborations.

Condensed Summaries and Lay Reports

To help mitigate the barriers related to discursive access, five out of the twelve advocates who I interviewed recommended that academics could disseminate condensed summaries and lay reports of the academic knowledge on their GBV research. For example, one advocate suggested “In terms of like a practical like physical accessibility of not having a long article... Something maybe a little bit more than an abstract but not quite... A bit simpler language...” (SAC3). This advocate's recommendation underscores how valuable condensed summaries of academic research on GBV could be for frontline workers. For instance, this advocate explained:

...There's a lot of mental effort in doing that, and our jobs also require a lot of mental effort. So if there could be like a here's the Coles notes version of this article, here's what you need to know, here's what's relevant... stuff like that in a one or two pager kind of thing um would make it I think more accessible. (SAC3)

Echoing these suggestions, another advocate stated:

...Doing lay reports that are a bit easier to digest like without a billion pages of citations and stuff ... Just like, okay, here's what we found, here's what we would recommend as potential things to consider when working with women who have fled domestic violence or with children who have fled domestic violence, or you know to move forward towards change in the way that we do work... (SHEL2)

These suggestions provide insights into the ways that academics can make their research more accessible and useful for community GBV organizations. As discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, advocates have intense workloads and often do not have additional time to search for and read traditional lengthy academic articles. To make academic knowledge on GBV accessible for community GBV organizations, some advocates recommended that academics could create short one/two page summaries of their research written directly for advocates working in community GBV organizations. These summaries should include only the most relevant information to the work of community GBV organizations. Additionally, some advocates suggested that academics could send these summaries directly to community GBV organizations and/or their parent organizations. This would significantly increase accessibility of academic knowledge on GBV for advocates working in community GBV organizations.

Creative Forms of Knowledge Dissemination

To mitigate the barriers to accessing and utilizing academic research on GBV for community GBV organizations, seven of the twelve advocates I interviewed discussed that academics could engage in creative forms of knowledge dissemination. For example, academics could disseminate infographics and videos with important highlights and findings relevant to advocates working in community GBV organizations. For instance, one advocate stated:

...Have infographics... So it's not quite so dry, and absolutely like videos or like TED Talk kind of things, those sort of things to hit the high points, because there's going to be people who are interested in learning more and there's going to be people that take what is offered in those in those more brief presentations and kind of ruminate on it, and I think that then you get like a broader group of people at least gaining knowledge... (SHEL2)

Similarly, another advocate suggested “One pager infographics, you know, diagrams, anything that can help sort of just distill that information into really usable pieces I think is necessary.” (SHEL1). In addition to infographics and video presentations, one advocate provided a recommendation to make academic knowledge on GBV presented in conferences more accessible to community GBV organizations, “... If there’s a conference or something where people are presenting their work around gender-based violence, having everybody do like a trailer for what that could be, y’know like a trailer video...” (SAC2). This recommendation is an interesting approach to make academic knowledge on GBV presented at academic conferences more accessible to target audiences. If academics are presenting research that might be relevant to the work of advocates in community GBV organizations, one advocate suggested creating a short trailer video about the highlights and relevant findings could help increase the accessibility of their research.

Creative methods of knowledge dissemination, such as Photovoice could increase the accessibility of academic research on GBV, because researchers would have accessible images that could be disseminated to target audiences outside of academia. For example, in Anderson & McLachlan’s (2016) PAR project in the Canadian Prairies with academics and community members regarding “the bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) crisis, or “mad cow crisis”,

local farming, and sustainable food systems (p. 300), they discuss methodological strategies that can help overcome the inaccessible nature of academic research. For instance, layering attempts to overcome inaccessible academic writing by collaborating with individuals both within and outside of academia to establish how to write in the most effective ways for different audiences (Anderson & McLachlan, 2016). Additionally, building bridges is a strategy that works to overcome knowledge differences between different actors by using “key words, examples, metaphors, objects, and discourses that can create bridges between those with different politics, sensibilities, and interests” (p. 307). Finally, they point to transmedia as a knowledge mobilization strategy that involves sharing information through various mediums because some knowledge users and creators better understand knowledge presented in various forms (Anderson & McLachlan, 2016). If academics plan these knowledge mobilization strategies in advance and allocate the time needed to complete these forms of knowledge dissemination, it might help alleviate the barriers preventing academics from engaging in accessible forms of knowledge dissemination.

In relation to creative forms of knowledge dissemination, such as infographics and videos, one advocate discussed the importance of academics remaining consistent with the knowledge they are disseminating. For example, one advocate stated:

Consistency is extremely important. So, you know, doing one or two infographics, people would be like, that's great. But then it kind of falls off there if they're not paying attention to it and it's not actively on their mind... So keeping a consistency, so things like maybe like monthly infographs from institutions about what's going on, or collaborations with other community organizations for better communication... like a community board, right? But like a digital one potentially that's quite accessible. And then promoting that

through as many partners as you can right... Communicating with the community partners and setting up a program saying like hey, can you put a spot on your website for this? Or like, do you want to share this on your social media?... (SHEL3)

This advocate's recommendations highlight the importance of academics consistently remaining in contact with community GBV organizations to disseminate accessible and relevant academic knowledge on GBV to advocates working in community GBV organizations. As this advocate recommended, a digital communication board or newsletter between relevant departments and community GBV organizations could help easily foster communication between academics and advocates working in community GBV organizations to ensure that advocates are consistently receiving accessible forms of academic knowledge on GBV, such as infographics. Additionally, the same advocate discussed the importance of ensuring advocates have access to more information beyond more creative forms of knowledge dissemination, such as infographics. For instance, this advocate stated "... Making those channels about learning more also very clear and very accessible. So for instance, you provide the infographic but saying, do you want to know more? Here's a list of other resources to go through" (SHEL3).

Creative forms of knowledge dissemination can help mitigate both the barriers to physical accessing academic research on GBV and the discursive barriers that prevent advocates from utilizing academic knowledge on GBV in their work. Many advocates suggested, methods such as infographics and videos can significantly help advocates engage with academic research on GBV, because these creative forms of knowledge dissemination help mitigate the time and mental effort that it can take advocates to search for academic research and read traditional lengthy articles. If academics incorporate these knowledge dissemination strategies in their initial

stages of research planning, it may be more feasible for them to incorporate these efforts into their work.

Concluding Thoughts

The professional pressures that academics experience to publish and engage with traditional academic forms of knowledge dissemination, such as publishing in scholarly journals and presenting at academic conferences create a disincentive to produce more accessible forms of knowledge (Badley, 2020; Wathen, 2022). These pressures may contribute to the research-practice gap in the GBV sector, because within academia promotion and tenure committees in academia do not yet incentivise accessible forms of knowledge dissemination outside of academia (Wathen, 2022). These broader pressures in academia must be addressed to help incentivize academics to engage in knowledge mobilization strategies outside of academia. While I acknowledge these pressures, the aim of this chapter is to provide academics engaged in research on GBV, and academics more broadly, with recommendations on disseminating more accessible and useful knowledge to advocates working in community GBV organizations.

The recommendations from advocates in this study echo existing literature about the systems of power and oppression embedded in Western academic knowledge production (Smith, 2005; Go, 2016; Fahlberg, 2023; Connell, 2010; Collins, 2019). To disseminate accessible academic research on GBV and collaborate equitably with advocates in community GBV organizations, academics must deconstruct the colonial and patriarchal systems of oppression in Western academia that privilege Western academic knowledges and de-legitimize non-Western knowledges (Go, 2016; Fahlberg, 2023; Connell, 2010; Collins, 2019). Creative and accessible forms of knowledge production derived from the perspectives of advocates working in community GBV organizations can help confront the Western epistemic privileges held by

academics and mitigate the disjuncture between academic research and the lived experiences of frontline workers.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Audiences outside of academia face several barriers accessing and utilizing academic research (Fahlberg, 2023; Anderson & MacLachlan, 2016; Badley, 2020). The inaccessibility of academic research and the challenges associated with mobilizing academic research on GBV exacerbates the disconnect between frontline GBV work and academic knowledge (Wathen 2022; Wathen et al., 2011). GBV is a complex social issue that is challenging to address, due to high costs and a lack of consensus among key stakeholders regarding how to confront GBV (Wathen, 2022). Inconsistencies in GBV research create knowledge mobilization challenges, and successful knowledge mobilization is difficult to assess (Wathen, 2022). In addition to these challenges, it can be difficult to mobilize academic knowledge on GBV outside the academy because target audiences outside of academia may not be reached by the limited avenues of presenting academic findings in peer-reviewed journals and conferences (Wathen, 2022). While the challenges associated with mobilizing academic research on GBV have been documented in existing literature, little attention has been given to the perceptions and use of academic research on GBV among advocates working in the GBV sector. This thesis addressed this gap in research by exploring how advocates working in community GBV organizations in Ontario perceive and utilize academic research on GBV.

Through semi-structured interviews with 12 advocates working in community GBV organizations in Southwestern and Eastern Ontario, and an analysis of social media content disseminated by six GBV organizations in Ontario, this study has illustrated the limited capacity that advocates have to engage with academic research on GBV, and the pressures that advocates experience to engage with this research despite this research remaining largely inaccessible to them. Furthermore, this thesis has outlined the barriers that advocates working in community

GBV organizations experience to accessing and utilizing academic research on GBV and has provided recommendations from advocates on how academics can make their research more accessible and useful for community GBV organizations.

This conclusion begins with a brief summary of the study's results. Next, I discuss the contributions this study has made to existing literature and implications of this study's findings for academic practice and other organizations engaged in GBV research, such as the Ending Violence Association of Canada. Then, I illustrate the study's results using an alternative form of academic knowledge dissemination, which draws on the recommendations of the participants in this study. Finally, I outline limitations of the study and discuss opportunities for future research on the barriers community GBV organizations are experiencing accessing and utilizing academic research on GBV.

Summary of Results

This study explored the overarching research question: How do advocates in community GBV organizations utilize and perceive academic research on GBV? To help answer this overarching research question, three sub-questions were explored:

1. What forms of GBV research are community organizations utilizing, if any?
2. What challenges do community GBV organizations face accessing and utilizing academic research on GBV?
3. How can these challenges be mitigated?

Chapter 4 began by exploring the emergence of the feminist anti-violence movement and grassroots feminist anti-violence organizations from the late 1960's to the early 70's. In Chapter 4, I illustrated how the growth of neoliberalism in the 1970's impacted the mainstream feminist

anti-violence movement and community GBV organizations (Bumiller, 2008; Boucher, 2021). By tracing the impacts that neoliberal politics and governance have had on community GBV organizations, I provided the context to understand the limited capacity that community GBV organizations have to engage with academic research on GBV. The individualization of GBV, the professionalization of the GBV sector, and the lack of funding for community GBV organizations stemming from neoliberal politics significantly impacted and restricted the types of work that community GBV organizations could engage in (Bumiller, 2008; Boucher, 2021; Quinlan, 2017; Mehrota et al., 2016). Drawing on data from interviews with advocates in GBV organizations, Chapter 3 also illustrated the intense workloads of advocates in community GBV organizations, and the pressures facing community GBV organizations due to underfunding and understaffing (Beres et al., 2009; Ullman & Townsend, 2007; Boucher, 2021).

The analysis in Chapter 4 provided insight into the complex relationship advocates have with research. The chapter revealed that advocates experience pressures to engage with academic research on GBV that is largely inaccessible to them in grant applications and public education work. Advocates also experience pressure to engage with academic research on GBV and to conduct research to ‘legitimize’ their work and funding needs. The pressures that advocates experience to engage with academic research on GBV are compounded by the inaccessibility of this knowledge because there are several barriers that place academic knowledge on GBV out of reach for advocates.

Chapter 5 illustrated the barriers that advocates in community GBV organizations experience to accessing and utilizing academic research on GBV. The chapter began with a discussion of systems of power and oppression embedded in the production of academic research (Connell, 2010; Go, 2016; Collins, 2019; Smith, 2005; Fahlberg, 2023), including the Western

epistemic hierarchies, and colonial and gendered inequalities that are perpetuated in academic research (Connell, 2010; Go, 2016; Collins, 2019; Smith, 2005; Fahlberg, 2023). As I discussed, women and marginalized groups are often excluded from processes of knowledge production, and many marginalized groups are excluded from higher educational settings and thus are not represented in Western sociological research (Smith, 2005; Connell, 2010; Fahlberg, 2023; Go, 2016, Collins, 2019). This hinders the type of knowledge that sociology, and Western academia produces more broadly, and exacerbates the disjuncture between Western academic knowledge and people's lived experiences (Smith, 2005; Connell, 2010; Go, 2019; Fahlberg, 2023).

Drawing on interview data and unobtrusive data, Chapter 5 revealed that paywalls and costly journal subscriptions, complex academic jargon and inaccessible academic research, and advocates' lack of time to read academic articles are major barriers preventing advocates from accessing utilizing academic research in their work. Drawing on Smith's (2005) discussions of texts and institutional discourses, Chapter 5 also revealed the disjuncture between academic research on GBV and the experiences of frontline workers. Participants in this study suggested that academic research on GBV produces knowledge on GBV that may be irrelevant and inaccessible to the work of advocates, which further prevents advocates from utilizing this knowledge in their work.

Drawing on interview data from advocates, Chapter 6 outlined recommendations for ways academics can make academic research on GBV more accessible and useful for advocates in community GBV organizations. Chapter 6 began by discussing the challenges associated with mobilizing academic research on GBV, and the professional pressures on academics to utilize traditional forms academic knowledge dissemination, such as publishing articles in journals (Badley, 2020). Advocates in this study provided recommendations to mitigate barriers related to

physical and discursive access of academic research, the disconnect between academic knowledge on GBV and frontline work, and suggested creative forms of knowledge dissemination academics can utilize.

Study's Contributions and Implications

This study provides empirical contributions to literature on the inaccessibility of academic research and the challenges associated with mobilizing academic research. In existing literature on this topic, the perceptions and use of academic research on GBV by advocates in community GBV organizations are largely unexplored. This study helps begin to address this empirical gap in research by exploring how advocates perceive and utilize academic research on GBV and the barriers they experience to accessing and using this knowledge in their work. The findings of this study also contribute to existing literature exploring accessible forms of knowledge dissemination. From the perspectives of advocates working in community GBV organizations, this study offers recommendations to academics engaged in GBV research, and academic research more broadly, to make research more accessible to community organizations and other target audiences outside of academia. This study's Canadian focus contributes to empirical gaps in Canadian literature on the inaccessibility of academic research on GBV and mitigating the challenges to mobilizing academic research on GBV.

Methodologically, this study contributes to existing research by combining interview data with unobtrusive data from community GBV organizations' social media content. This methodological approach differs from existing research exploring the pressures facing community GBV organizations and the work they are engaged in, which largely rely on interview data from advocates. Using data from community GBV organizations' social media content supplemented interview data on the barriers advocates experience accessing and utilizing

academic research on GBV. Existing literature on the challenges associated with mobilizing academic research on GBV has primarily relied on personal reflections (Wathen, 2022). This study contributes to this literature by using Smith's (2005) work to guide my methodological approach and direct my attention to the types of research texts that advocates engage with. Examining the social media content disseminated by community GBV organizations alongside interview data enhanced this study's findings on the types of research that community GBV organizations are engaging with.

This study provides theoretical contributions to existing literature by placing elements of Smith's (2005) theoretical work in conversation with de-colonial critiques of academic knowledge from Go (2016), Connell (2010), Fahlberg (2023) and Collins (2019). Drawing on these insights provided a unique analysis on the inaccessibility of academic knowledge from the perspectives of advocates in community GBV organizations. Using de-colonial critiques of academic knowledge contributes to Smith's (2005) discussions on the exclusion and de-legitimization of feminist knowledge in academic knowledge production by incorporating recognitions of how colonialism shapes Western academic knowledge. Additionally, this study extends the application of these theoretical insights to explore the inaccessibility of academic knowledge in the GBV sector and how academics can make research more accessible to non-academic audiences.

The findings of this study also have implications for academic practice. To mitigate the inaccessibility of academic research on GBV, academics and organizations engaged in GBV research can implement recommendations from advocates in this study to disseminate more accessible knowledge to target audiences outside of academia through creative forms of knowledge dissemination.

An Alternative Approach to Knowledge Dissemination

This study disseminates knowledge through a thesis. As I have discussed throughout this study, there are many limitations to this form of knowledge dissemination. For instance, existing literature and advocates in this study have highlighted that the complex theories and jargon embedded in academic texts and lengthy academic articles contribute to the inaccessibility of academic research (Fahlberg, 2023; Anderson & McLachlan, 2016; Badley, 2020). Additionally, it is difficult for traditional academic articles and texts to reach target audiences (Wathen, 2022). Due to the limitations associated with this thesis as a form of knowledge dissemination, it was important that I also considered an alternative more accessible form of knowledge dissemination.

To overcome the barriers to accessing and utilizing academic research on GBV, the advocates I interviewed suggested that academics should engage in more creative forms of knowledge dissemination. This recommendation aligns with Smith's (2005) proposition of an alternative sociology *for* people (p.10). A sociology for people beginning from people's lived experiences confronts the exclusion of women and marginalized groups from processes of knowledge production (Smith, 2005). A sociology *for* people works to dismantle the disjuncture between academic knowledge and people's lived experience and thus must involve forms of knowledge dissemination that are accessible to audiences outside of academia (Smith, 2005). Due to this study's significant emphasis on making academic research more accessible, it was necessary for me to incorporate an alternative, more accessible, form of knowledge dissemination to share the key findings of this study.

Many of the advocates I interviewed were particularly enthusiastic about infographics as a form of knowledge dissemination, which they saw as more accessible and useful and for audiences outside of academia. Due to this enthusiasm, I decided to incorporate infographics to

share the findings of this study. While the purpose of this study is to provide academics with recommendations to make their research more accessible for audiences *outside* of academia, the target audience for this study's findings and the infographics are academics themselves. The creation of infographics for this study provides an example of how creative forms of knowledge can be utilized to share key findings and present this study's findings in a more accessible way to academics who may not have the time to read an entire thesis and distinguish the key recommendations.

To share the key findings of this study to academics, I decided to create two infographics answering two key research questions for this study. The first infographic answers my research question: *What challenges do community GBV organizations face accessing and utilizing academic research on GBV?* To create this infographic, I highlighted key findings from Chapter 4 outlining the barriers that advocates in community GBV organization experience to accessing and utilizing academic research on GBV (See Figure 1).

Figure 1

Barriers to Accessing and Utilizing Academic Research on GBV

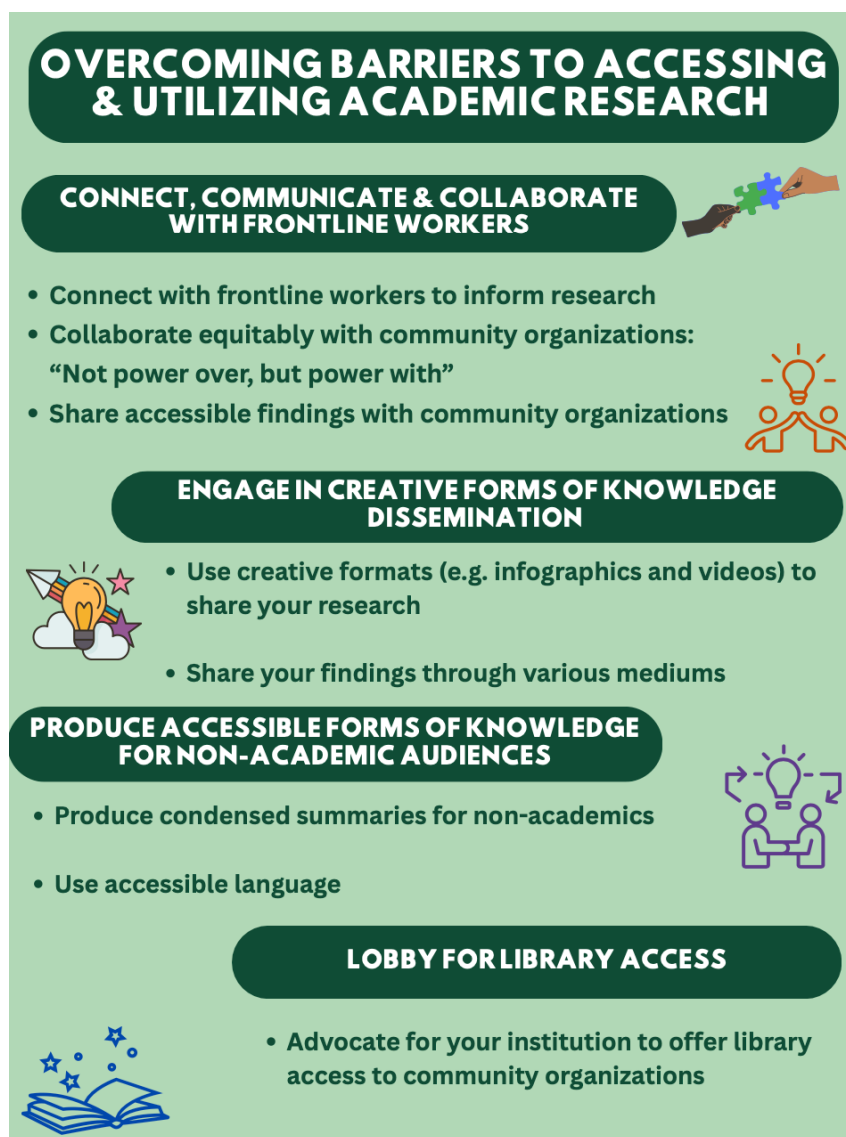


The second infographic answers my research question: *How can these challenges be mitigated?*

To create this infographic, I summarized key findings from Chapter 5 outlining the recommendations from advocates to make academic research more accessibly for community GBV organizations (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Mitigating the Barriers to Accessing and Utilizing Academic Research



These infographics outline key findings for academics concerning the barriers that advocates experience in accessing and utilizing academic research on GBV, and the recommendations to mitigate these barriers. These findings and recommendations can be applied to academic research more broadly to help mitigate the inaccessible nature of academic research. When designing these infographics, it was important for me to present the findings in visually engaging ways and through concise accessible language. I specially chose contrasting red and green colours when designing the infographics to corresponded with the barriers to accessing

academic research and the recommendations to mitigate these barriers. Additionally, I chose images and symbols that correspond with the text or themes portrayed in the infographic. Creating and designing these infographics through Canva was not overly time consuming. Thus, infographics could be a more doable approach to creatively disseminating academic findings for academics who have limited time to engage with alternative forms of knowledge dissemination, in addition to the traditional academic form of knowledge dissemination their institutions require of them.

Limitations

This study has a few limitations. One limitation is the study's small sample size of 12 advocates working in community GBV organizations in Southwestern and Eastern Ontario. As discussed in Chapter 3, I faced challenges recruiting advocates to participate in this study. The intense workloads of advocates, and the pressures community GBV organizations are experiencing from underfunding and understaffing (Beres et al., 2009; Ullman & Townsend, 2007; Boucher, 2021) shed light on the challenges I experienced with recruiting advocates, because many advocates cannot to take time out of their busy schedules to participate in interviews. The geographical location for this study was also limited to Ontario. Thus, there may be differences among advocates perspectives in different regions of Ontario, other provinces in Canada, and other countries. This study's focus on community GBV organizations in a Western context is another limitation. Future studies could include an investigation of advocacy organizations in the Global South and Indigenous-led advocacy groups to explore their perceptions on the accessibility of academic knowledge. Due to this study's small sample size and limited geographical location, there may be gaps in this study's findings. Due to this study's small, qualitative sample, the findings of this study are not generalizable. However, producing

generalizable findings was not a goal of this study. The goal of this study was to provide insights into advocates' perceptions on academic research on GBV and how this knowledge can be made more accessible to community GBV organizations. This study lays the foundation for future research to explore the barriers that advocates in community GBV organizations face to utilize academic research in their work, and how these barriers can be mitigated.

A further limitation of this study is that the unobtrusive data analyzed in this study may not truly represent all the forms of work community GBV organizations engage in or all the forms of research advocates utilize in their work. Since this study gathered unobtrusive data from GBV organizations' Instagram pages and social media content, the findings from this data represent only what the organizations were presenting online. Thus, there may be other types of work that community GBV organizations engaged with, that were displayed in their online content.

Future Research

The findings of this study raise a call for academics to engage in a particular kind of academic research that prioritizes accessible forms of knowledge dissemination, and recognizes people's lived experiences as sources of knowledge (Smith, 2005). Drawing on Smith's (2005) arguments for an alternative sociology *for* people, academics should prioritize the voices and perspectives of participants as subjects of knowledge. This approach to research has the potential to challenge the systems of power oppression embedded in academic knowledge production (Smith, 2005; Fahlberg, 2023; Connell, 2010; Go, 2016; Collins, 2019). Advocates I interviewed in this study argued that to make academic research more accessible to community GBV organizations and non-academics, academics should engage with alternative and creative accessible forms of knowledge dissemination. From advocates' perspectives, to mitigate the

disjuncture between academic research and the experiences of frontline workers, academics should communicate and collaborate equitably with community organizations to inform their research and make efforts to research local issues.

Future research regarding the barriers that advocates experience to accessing and utilizing academic GBV research could expand the sample size and geographical location explored in this study to investigate perspectives of advocates in different provinces or different countries. Future research could also explore different time periods concerning the barriers advocates in community GBV organizations face to accessing and utilizing academic research on GBV. For instance, has the accessibility of academic research changed over time? And if so, how? Finally, future research on this topic could include the perspectives of academics. Including the perspectives of academics can provide insights into the challenges that academics might face in utilizing alternative, accessible forms of knowledge dissemination and ways to overcome issues in academia.

Concluding Thoughts

Community GBV organizations play a foundational role in supporting survivors and GBV activist work. If the goal of academic research on GBV is to make meaningful changes outside of the academy, ensuring that this knowledge is accessible to community GBV organizations is a crucial step in this process. Engaging in accessible forms of knowledge dissemination and working with advocates in the GBV sector can help academic research make positive changes for survivors and to addressing the issue of GBV more broadly. Challenging the traditional approach to conducting academic research in Western academia, by learning from people's lived experiences and prioritizing people as sources of knowledge, can work to

deconstruct the systems of power and oppression embedded in Western academia and the epistemic privileges held by Western academics.

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Appendix A: University of Waterloo Research Ethics Clearance

UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO

Notification of Ethics Clearance to Conduct Research with Human Participants

Principal Investigator: Andrea Quinlan

Student investigator: Hailey Power

File #: 46578

Title: Community-based Advocates' uses and perceptions of Academic Gender-Based Violence Research

The Human Research Ethics Board is pleased to inform you this study has been reviewed and given ethics clearance.

Initial Approval Date: 08/06/24 (m/d/y)

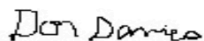
University of Waterloo Research Ethics Boards are composed in accordance with, and carry out their functions and operate in a manner consistent with, the institution's guidelines for research with human participants, the Tri-Council Policy Statement for the Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2 2022), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA), and all laws and regulations of the province of Ontario (as applicable). Additionally, CREB operates in a manner consistent with the International Conference for Harmonization of Technical Requirements for Pharmaceuticals for Human Use (ICH) Guidance E6(R2): Good Clinical Practice, the International Organization for Standardization of Good Clinical Practices (GCP) as set out by ISO 14155 - Clinical investigation of medical devices for human subjects, Part C, Division 5 of the Food and Drug Regulations, Part 4 of the Natural Health Products Regulations, Part 3 of the Medical Devices Regulations. Both Boards are registered with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services under the Federal Wide Assurance, FWA00021410, and IRB registration number IRB00002419 (HREB) and IRB00007409 (CREB).

Expiry Date: 08/07/25 (m/d/y)

Multi-year research must be renewed at least once every 12 months unless a more frequent review has otherwise been specified. Studies will only be renewed if the renewal report is received and approved before the expiry date. Failure to submit renewal reports will result in the investigators being notified ethics clearance has been suspended and Research Finance being notified the ethics clearance is no longer valid.

Level of review: Delegated Review

Signed on behalf of the Human Research Ethics Board



Appendix B: Sample Interview Guide

1. If you feel comfortable sharing, what is your gender identity and what is your racial identity?

2. What is your role at ___ organization?

3. How long have you been working at ___?

Prompt: How did you become involved in this work? Did you go to college or university before working in this field?

4. What are your responsibilities in your position?

5. What projects are you currently involved in?

Prompt: Do you work from home, online, or hybrid?

6. Does your role involve using and/or conducting research on gender-based violence?

Prompt: If so, how do you find this research? If not, do any of your co-workers' roles involve using or conducting research on gender-based violence?

7. Is the organization you work at involved in any research projects or planning research projects?

Prompt: If so, tell me what they are about, their goals and purposes. If not, are you aware of any research projects your organization has done in the past?

8. How do you define gender-based violence research?

9. What forms of gender-based violence research does your organization use? 10. How does your organization use gender-based violence research?

Prompt: For example, does your organization use gender-based violence research to make social media posts, or other content online? Or does your organization use gender-based violence research to help support survivors?

10. Do you find that academic research on gender-based violence is accessible? Why or why not?

Prompt: Where and how do you access academic research on gender-based violence?

11. Do you or your co-workers experience any challenges or barriers in accessing academic research on gender-based violence for your work? If so, can you describe them further?

12. Do you or your co-workers experience any challenges or barriers in using academic research on gender-based violence for your work? If so, can you describe them further?

13. Are there any changes that you think could make academic research on gender-based violence more accessible for your organization?

14. What could academic researchers do to make their research more useful for your organization?

15. Is there anything more you would like to share?