What Can You Evaluate and How?

Total time: 13min 46sec

Aislinn Addington 00:14

Thank you for listening to this short recording. In this audio series we explore prevention, evaluation, and assessment. These are part of a larger audio library to help explore creative prevention ideas and developing and expanding our prevention efforts. Today we are joined by National Prevention and Evaluation Contractor Patrick Lemmon, and I'm Aislinn Addington, Campus Advocate Coordinator at the Sexual Assault Task Force.

In this recording, we talk more about some of the different things you can evaluate, as well as some of the tools that can be used to evaluate them. In our prevention work, we can implement strategies focused on making changes in individuals, in relationships, in our broader communities and institutions, and/or make changes to our broader society. This is known as the social ecological model. It's important to recognize that all of these levels are interconnected. Evaluation strategies shift depending on the levels that we are focusing our prevention strategies on. With that in mind, let's start with the individual and relational levels. These are possibly the most common levels that people evaluate in their prevention efforts. Patrick, what are some examples of the things people may look at to evaluate at the individual or relational level?

Patrick Lemmon 01:37

Well, thanks Aislinn, I'm glad to be here. And as you said, these are probably the most common things that we see people evaluate, or that when we think about evaluation, it's the kind of stuff that we look at. So for example, at the individual level, we might want to evaluate changes in individuals' knowledge, attitudes, or beliefs. Those are sometimes called KABs, K-A-B, knowledge, attitudes and beliefs. And we would usually use surveys or maybe focus groups in order to get at those pieces.

There are other things, though, that we could also measure, things like behavioral intent. This is individuals saying, "I would like to change in this way or I would like to do this in the future." We could measure self-efficacy, "I think that I could make a difference." We could measure actual behavior change. All of these can be done through surveys, or focus groups. Behavioral change might be measured through things like observation, outside observers looking at it.

And then one final thing at the individual level that we might talk about is skills acquisition. That if we believe that people have to have particular skills in order to behave in a way that we're hoping they'll behave, then we'll probably want to know whether they've acquired those skills. So we might do that through a series of different tests, or examples. And this might be things like roleplay exercises, or "what if" scenarios that we had people write in. Those are the sorts of things that we would see at the individual level, or what we might evaluate at the individual level.

At the relational level, we would be more likely to measure things like people's behavior in relationships or their understanding of what healthy relationships are. But as you can see, that already feels very individual. So the crossover here is really high. Or the other thing that we might see at the

relational level is, what individuals sense of their peers' attitudes are. And the reason that that might be particularly useful is that if we understand what people think their peers believe, then we understand what's influencing their own behavior because people actually are more likely to be influenced by what they think their peers think, than what their peers actually do think. So that's how these things work together at the individual and relational level. But of course, there are other things that we'll want to pick up on that we'll talk about at the community level, and the institutional level.

Aislinn Addington 04:38
Thank you so much, Patrick. Those are all fantastic examples. And I think you're right. Those are the questions and evaluation ideas that people think of most commonly. So now that we've heard a little bit about the individual and relational, can you compare that to community level?

Patrick Lemmon 04:56
Sure. So when we're thinking about community level change, there are a number of different ways that we can think about it. First one that I want to talk about is a sense of a community's ownership of an issue, or readiness to engage with an issue. And there's a really great tool called the Community Readiness Assessment, which helps to go into some real depth about how you can explore a community's readiness to take on a particular issue. It's not developed specifically around sexual violence, but it definitely applies and works very well. I've seen a few different organizations use it very effectively.

Another thing that is really useful at the community level, is looking at a community's endorsement of social norms. And that's different from an individual's endorsement of social norms, although again, they're associated with one another. But we can certainly look at the degree to which a community supports social norms, and whether those social norms are positive or negative. And those are things that we can look at, that help us capture the degree to which our message is expanding beyond simply the individual and relational levels.

So those are some of the things that we might want to look at at the community level. And in a lot of places, and on the national level, often community and institutional levels of the socio-ecological model are combined. But here in Oregon, we actually keep them separate because we think that there's a lot of richness that we can get at the institutional level. So Aislinn, can you talk a little bit more about that?

Aislinn Addington 06:43
Sure. Absolutely. Thank you. You're right, depending on your circumstances, and what you're looking at, one level or the other might seem more appropriate. So coming from a campus perspective, which is where I've done most of the prevention work that I've been involved with, the campus is a great example of an institution. And so we can look at things like priorities and visibility. For example, I had a student who wanted to understand better what an average student who wasn't working in violence prevention would understand about the Title IX process. They did an audit of all the websites for the university to see just if students were doing a casual look, what could you see about this? That's just an

example of looking at an institutional priority. Messaging is another place where one can look at an institution to see where those priorities are, what they're talking about and how involved they are in violence prevention.

I also think of leadership as an institutional level; we can look at who is involved or kind of what their messaging to the community is to better assess where we are in our prevention efforts at an institutional level. When I think of institutions, then often my mind goes to a policy place. So I'm wondering, Patrick, can you talk to us a little bit about policy and practice and how that might fit into the institutional level or others?

Patrick Lemmon 08:14
Absolutely. And often, we think about policy as something that happens at the government level, that the state or Congress, or the city council or the school board creates a policy, and that can absolutely be an indicator of successful change, that we change policies from one to another. That's wonderful. So nothing to be dismissed there. But it actually misses a lot of opportunities. If that's all we think about, we miss opportunities looking at other kinds of policies and practices. So there are two things that I want to say about that. One is that we can think about policy, and policy is very valuable, but if it doesn't get implemented at the institutional level, then it's not terribly effective. So when I talk about policy, I try to talk about both policy and practice so that we can make sure to pay attention to what it looks like on the ground.

And then the other thing that I want to say about policy that, again, we often miss, is that when we are going out and doing this work, and trying to change communities, trying to help communities to engage in some kind of positive change process, we often fail to recognize that we're part of those communities and our institutions are part of those communities, and so we can look at institutional policy and practice at our own workplaces. What's happening in our workplaces and how is that related to the issues that we're trying to address? In my experience, just asking that question actually brings up a lot of real opportunities for both creating and measuring real social change and progress.

Aislinn Addington 10:06
Thank you, Patrick. Now when it comes to evaluating societal change, that's commonly not done by local prevention efforts, but it's important to consider as we think about the longer term outcomes we're trying to achieve. Patrick, what are some examples of things that could be evaluated to measure societal level change?

Patrick Lemmon 10:27
Sure. And as you said, this is pretty difficult to imagine when you're at a local organization because imagining that you're going to have an impact on a societal level issue is much harder, and it's true, it absolutely is true. And if there are local programs in Portland and Bend and Grants Pass, and also in Dallas and Fort Worth and Austin, and also in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, then we might start seeing different things. So if we recognize that we're in a common movement together, we're much more likely to be able to imagine the kinds of societal change that we're looking for.

In the example I like to give on this is, if we think about the change as a national endorsement or rejection of a particular issue, that's what matters. So things like wearing seatbelts or drinking and driving, that 50 years ago, someone sat down and said, "We need to do something about drunk driving," and they created MADD and SADD and all of these other organizations (that's Mothers Against Drunk Driving and Students Against Drunk Driving, if you're not familiar with those). That took movement, and that took effort, and today, there's been a dramatic change in the national endorsement of wearing seat belts and use of designated drivers. And another thing I noticed the other day, I was watching Netflix, and Netflix put up at the beginning of its, whatever show that I was watching a description like the rating, so it said TV, PG or whatever it was. And then it described why it got the rating. And one of the things that was listed was smoking, the fact that smoking was shown on this program was considered a negative feature and that cost it a family friendly rating. That is a dramatic social change from when I was a kid. And so we see these things. And sometimes we don't even notice them because the change is often so gradual. But we've witnessed a dramatic change at the societal level of the endorsement of all of these issues. If we aren't paying attention to it, we won't notice it when it happens.

Aislinn Addington 12:52
Oh, what a fantastic example. Thank you for that, Patrick. Hopefully this conversation has helped folks to understand a little bit about looking at evaluation at those different levels. Thank you so much for listening to this short recording, check out our other recordings in the series on evaluation as well as the other series in our Exploring Prevention Audio Library. Please let us know what you want to learn more about by reaching out to us at OregonSATF.org.

Contact Us

Oregon Sexual Assault Task Force
3625 River Road North, Suite 275
Keizer, Oregon 97303
taskforce@oregonsatf.org
Phone: 503.990.6541
Fax: 503.990.6547