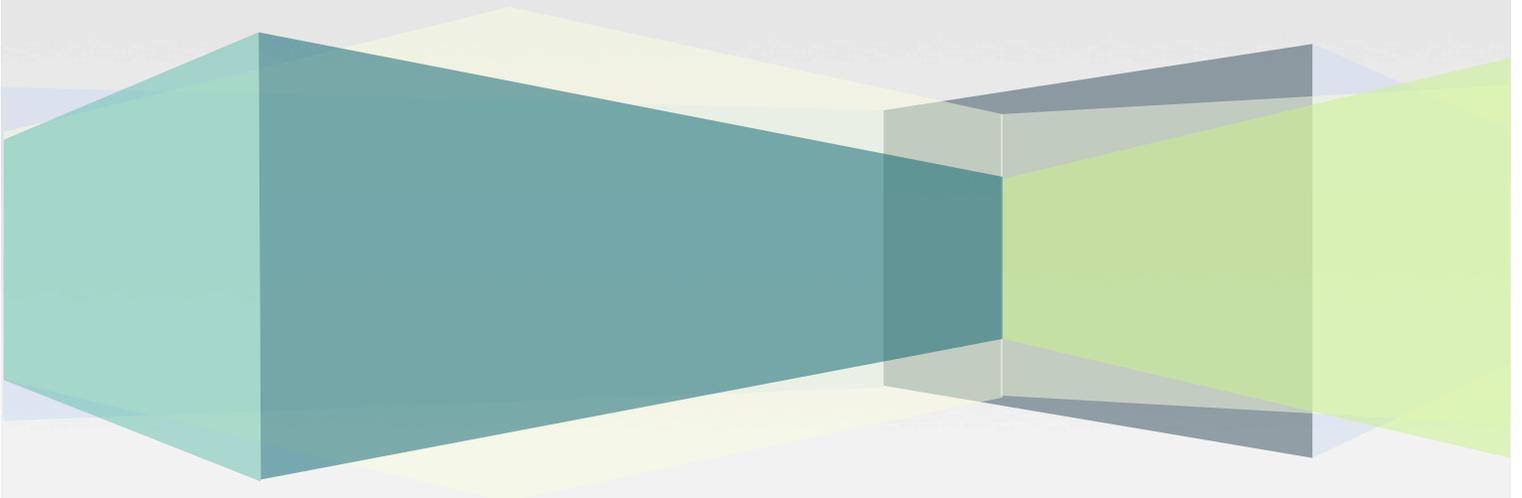


CENTER FOR SURVIVOR AGENCY & JUSTICE

Achieving Economic Justice for Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Survivors

A National Needs Assessment



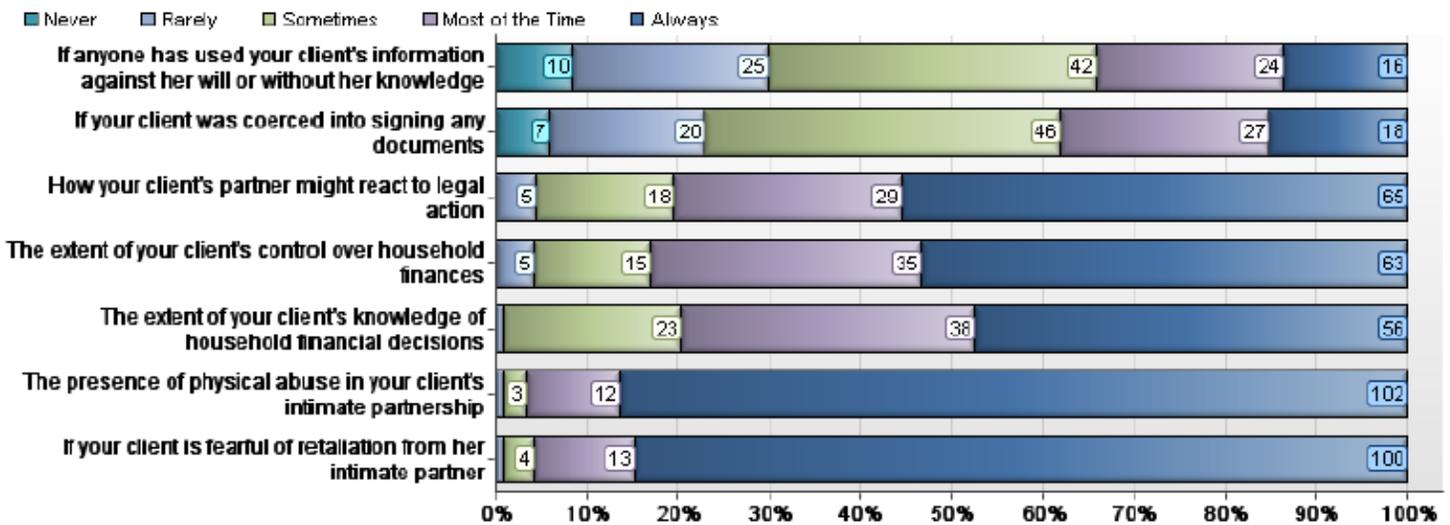


CSAJ’s National Economic Advocacy Needs Assessment

The Center for Survivor Agency and Justice is a national organization that seeks to promote survivor centered advocacy by improving the work of lawyers, organizing communities, and offering leadership on critical issues facing survivors and advocates throughout the nation.¹ In 2012 CSAJ conducted a needs assessment of individuals who address domestic violence and/or consumer rights issues in their work. The purpose of the assessment was to gather information about existing consumer rights advocacy for domestic violence survivors, as well as to survey the factors that shape professionals’ capacities to engage in these efforts.² The assessment produced a number of striking results.

First, although professionals in the domestic violence community provide many intensive services related to coercive control tactics employed by abusers, they *rarely address the ways in which coercion manifests as economic abuse*. The large majority of domestic violence advocates and attorneys reported inquiring about their clients’ fear of retaliation and physical abuse from an intimate partner (83%). However, less than half said they routinely ask if clients were coerced into signing any documents (45%) or if personal information was used against a client’s will (40%).

FIGURE 1: FREQUENCY OF INQUIRIES FROM DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROFESSIONALS



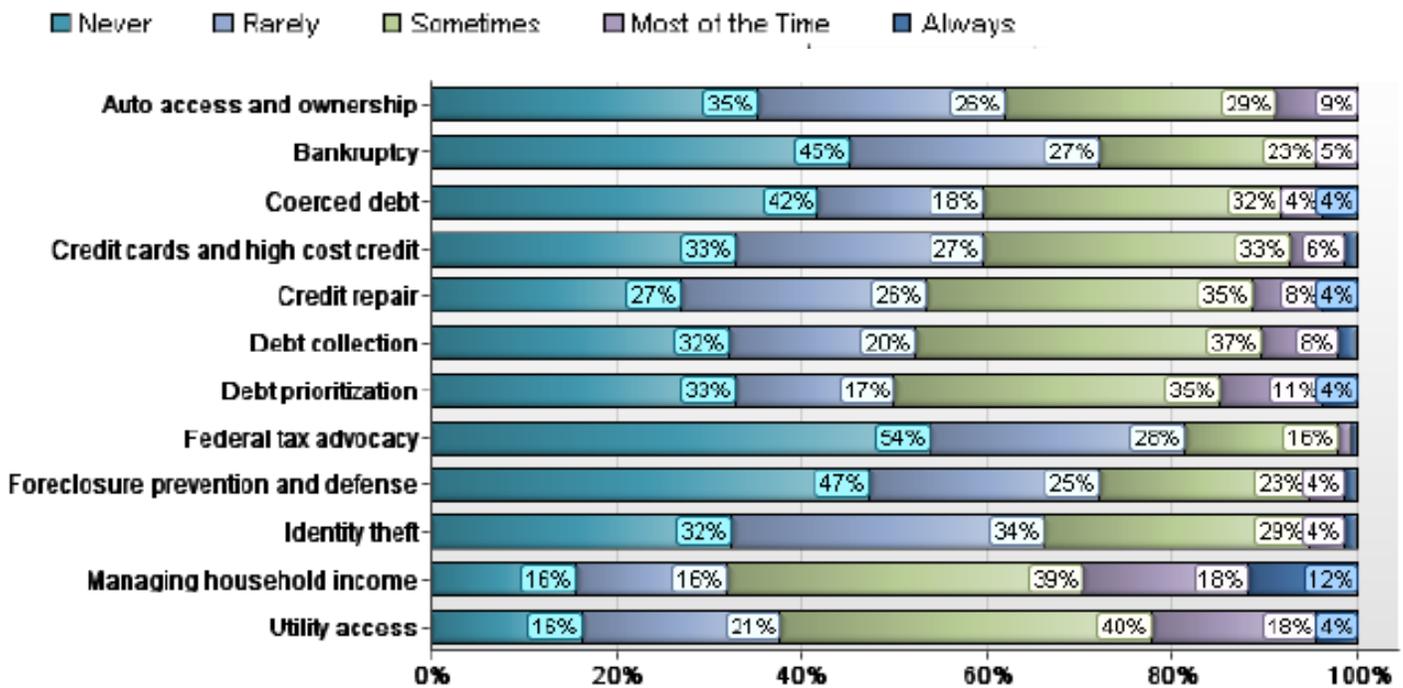
¹ To learn more about CSAJ’s innovative partnership building work and to access expertise at the intersection of IPV and consumer rights, visit www.csaj.org.

² Respondents included 217 lawyers, advocates, administrators, educators, and social workers, representing legal services organizations, domestic violence and sexual assault agencies, law school clinics, community health centers, consumer advocacy services organizations, homeless shelters, universities, and statewide coalitions.



Second, while professionals in the domestic violence community often provide advocacy regarding economic issues that can be addressed through non-legal remedies, *screening for issues that require more technical expertise rarely take place*. The majority of domestic violence professionals reported that they “sometimes,” “most of the time,” or “always” screen for their clients’ needs regarding managing household income (69%), accessing utilities (62%), and prioritizing debts (50%). However, the majority “rarely” or “never” probe into issues regarding federal tax (82%), foreclosure (72%), bankruptcy (72%), or identity theft (66%).

FIGURE 2: DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROFESSIONALS’ SCREENING FOR CONSUMER ISSUES



Third, while many professionals in the domestic violence community enjoy informal partnerships with consumer rights experts, the needs assessment illuminated a *lack of institutionalized policies, protocols, and practices to encourage inter- and intra-agency collaboration*. While almost 80% of respondents agreed that they consulted with consumer rights experts as needed, only 4% strongly agreed with the statement that they have *regular* meetings with those experts. Given that domestic violence experts reported that they do not screen for complex consumer issues regularly, such interdisciplinary collaboration is critically important.



FIGURE 3: DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROFESSIONALS’ INTRA-AGENCY COLLABORATION

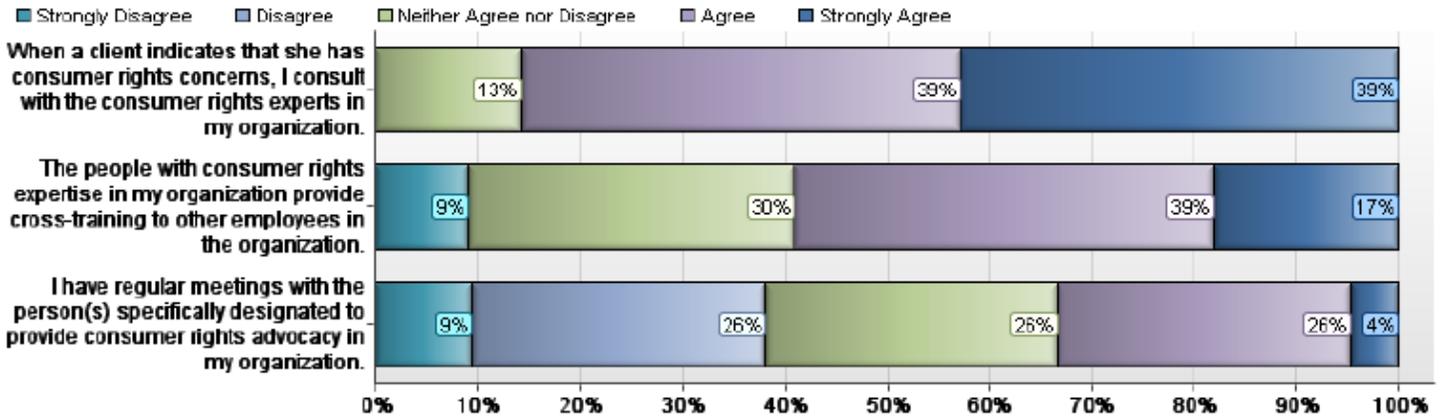
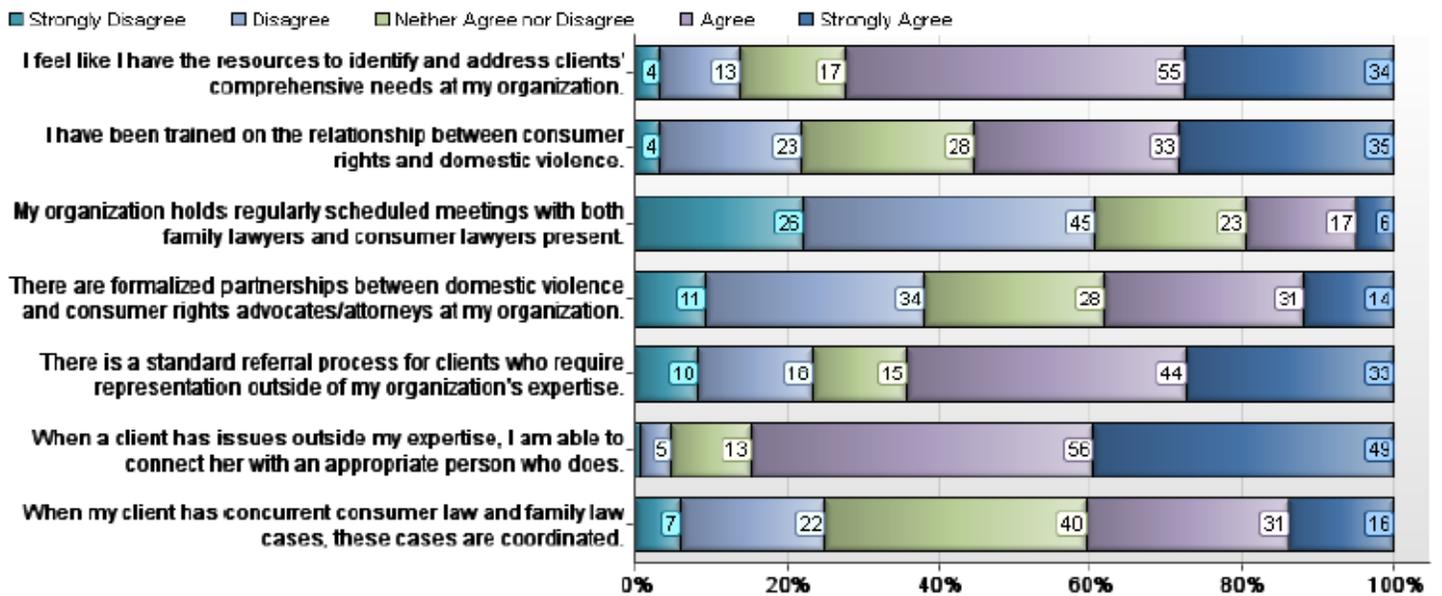


FIGURE 4: DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROFESSIONALS’ INTRA-AGENCY COLLABORATION



The CSAJ needs assessment demonstrates that domestic violence attorneys and advocates address a remarkably broad range of survivors’ needs and goals. However, the biggest gaps in economic advocacy were related to issues that demanded in-depth consumer law expertise. While, historically, domestic violence attorneys and advocates strive to “do it all,” a single professional cannot develop intensive technical knowledge in all aspects of consumer and domestic violence law, no matter how seasoned. Rather, in order to adequately attend to the full scope of IPV survivors’ barriers to safety, advocates and attorneys must partner with professionals who are able to lend the requisite expertise.



Resources for Structural Economic Advocacy Reform

Partnerships between domestic violence and consumer rights advocates and attorneys are critical to achieving the joint goals of physical *and* economic safety for survivors. Such partnerships require purposeful cross training, networking, and sustained communication. The Consumer Rights for Domestic Violence Survivors Initiative (CRDVSI) is a national project of CSAJ that aims to enhance consumer rights for survivors by building the capacity of and building partnerships between domestic violence and consumer lawyers and advocates. During the early stages of CRDVSI, we heard frequently of the substantial gaps between domestic violence and consumer law advocates. Our trainings, technical assistance efforts, and focus groups unearthed a disconnect, a lack of coordination on both individual and systemic levels, and a lack of understanding among both domestic violence and consumer law advocates with regard to one another's resources, expertise and capacity. CRDVSI sought to address these gaps by identifying and fostering opportunities for education, capacity building, cross-training and collaboration. CSAJ recruited lawyers and advocates with expertise in domestic violence, consumer advocacy, or both to participate in focus groups and in-depth interviews regarding the structural challenges to and resources for building partnerships. These conversations resulted in the development of a number of tools and projects:

Domestic Violence and Consumer Issues Screening Tools

- The *Consumer Rights Screening Tool for Domestic Violence Advocates and Lawyers* (available at <http://csaj.org/library/view/consumer-rights-screening-tool-for-domestic-violence-advocates-and-lawyers>) aims to 1) provide a general overview of common consumer issues with which survivors grapple and 2) offer concrete guidance on how to identify these issues in the course of one's client work.
- The *Domestic Violence Screening Tool for Consumer Rights Lawyers* (available at <http://csaj.org/library/view/domestic-violence-screening-tool-for-consumer-lawyers>) is intended to assist consumer lawyers in determining who, among their clients, is a survivor of domestic violence in order to enhance legal representation and advocacy.

Building Partnerships for Consumer Rights Self-Assessment Tool

The *Building Partnerships to Enhance Consumer Rights for Domestic Violence Survivors Assessment and Resource Guide* (available at <http://csaj.org/library/view/building-partnerships-to-enhance-consumer-rights-for-domestic-violence-surv>) provides a starting point for attorneys and advocates interested in enhancing consumer rights for domestic violence survivors. The questions offer advocates an opportunity to assess their organizational and individual capacity for building partnerships. The guide provides ideas and resources to attorneys and advocates interested in building partnerships for consumer rights both within their organizations and within their communities.



Innovative Partnerships Pilot Projects

CSAJ is now collaborating with five precedent-setting local organizations across the country to develop Innovative Partnerships Pilot Projects. These projects are on-the-ground implementation sites focused upon collaborative approaches that enhance consumer rights for survivors. The five project sites are: One Place Family Justice Center in Montgomery, Alabama; Women’s Resource Center in Scranton, Pennsylvania; Texas Council on Family Violence in Austin, Texas; Indiana Legal Services in Bloomington, Indiana; and Columbus Community Legal Services, Catholic University of America School of Law in Washington, DC. Pilot Projects are receiving specialized technical assistance to develop and maintain collaborative consumer rights for domestic violence survivors projects. Based these pilots, CRDVTI will publish a Building Partnerships Manual that highlights best practices for programs and communities interested in enhancing economic justice for survivors through collaborative efforts.

As CSAJ’s work has revealed, current advocacy efforts often fall short of addressing the lasting economic effects that ripple through IPV survivors’ lives. Structural systemic changes are needed to address the depth and scope of survivors’ economic needs. Such changes can only come about through purposeful, innovative, collaborations across disciplines.