

The IDRA Survey



Line defender research priorities
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The IDRA Survey: Line Defender Research Priorities

Prepared by Andy Davies & Janet Moore for the Quality Legal Representation meeting, Albany NY, October 29 & 30, 2015.

Contents

Introduction and Summary	1
Is research a priority?	2
How do line defender research priorities compare to other IDRA members?.....	3

Introduction and Summary

The 'IDRA Survey' was distributed in May 2015 to persons with an interest in research and data in public defense. Its purpose was to survey people who were doing work in that field and to plot a role for IDRA in fostering its development. A report titled *The IDRA Survey: Preliminary Results* was published on 5/22/15 with details on the conduct of the survey and early results. It can be found at [https://www.ils.ny.gov/files/IDRA Survey May 2015 Report.pdf](https://www.ils.ny.gov/files/IDRA_Survey_May_2015_Report.pdf).¹

In order to compare the responses from this original group with those from line defenders, we solicited survey responses from practicing defenders attending a training in Lexington, KY, in June 2015. 51 of them filled out the survey. The analysis which follows contains key findings from both groups. All participants who indicated interest were subsequently also invited to join IDRA.

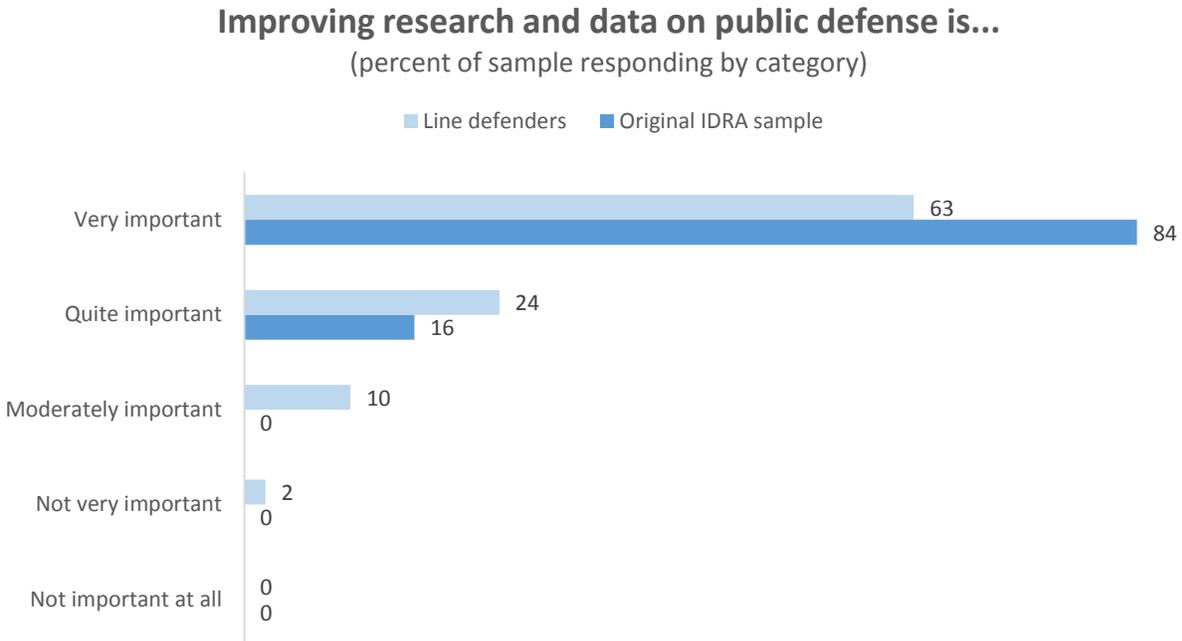
The survey instrument itself is still open, and anyone interested to add their opinion, or distribute it to an audience not yet reached, can use this link: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/IDRA>.

To be added to the IDRA email list, contact Janet Moore (moore2jt@ucmail.uc.edu) or Andy Davies (Andrew.Davies@ils.ny.gov).

¹ At the time of the publication of *The IDRA Survey* 52 responses had been received. At the time of publication of this report, 66 responses had been received from IDRA members other than the Lexington defenders.

Is research a priority?

Our line defenders saw improving research as a high priority (63% 'very important'), though the original IDRA sample felt even more strongly (84% 'very important').



13 of the 51 line defender respondents explained their feelings about the importance of research. Their responses broke down into four categories:

- 1) Research may be useful to illustrate to legislators, judges, the media and the public the burdens under which public defenders labor. It may increase empathy, and assist in obtaining more resources.
- 2) Scientific research is useful in individual cases to debunk state theories, yet defenders frequently lack the time to review relevant work, or (as necessary) to conduct their own original data collection.
- 3) Broad criminal justice reform may be made more achievable through critical research on, for example, racial bias in the criminal justice system.
- 4) Improved data and research may allow defenders to self-examine more effectively, and work to improve their own representation.

How do line defender research priorities compare to other IDRA members?

Line defenders felt strongly that research should be tied to ‘reform goals’ and ‘questions defenders have’, as did other IDRA members. Though strongly favorable to the idea of ‘communication’ with researchers (and improved accessibility of findings) they did not prioritize this as highly as other IDRA members. Other issues – a clear national research agenda, education on doing research, and transparency in funding – were of lower salience in both groups.

Researchers in public defense should prioritize...

(all scores out of 5)

