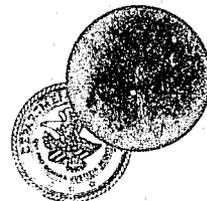


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National Institute of Justice

Research
in Action

James K. Stewart, Director

August 1988

Victim assistance programs report increased workloads

by Barbara Webster

Victim assistance programs, whether they are independently operated or sponsored by law enforcement, are feeling the impact of increased police arrests in cases of domestic violence and increased reports of child abuse and sexual assault.

Funding for most victim assistance programs, including local and State support, has increased significantly in the past few years. In addition, the hard work that victim advocates have devoted to promoting their services seems to be paying off: The majority of programs report increased referrals, particularly self-referrals and referrals from police.

In spite of these gains, most victim assistance agencies report needs for further increases in police and other referrals, improvements in interagency coordination, and a better public understanding of victims' needs.

This *Research in Action* summarizes results of surveys completed by victim assistance program administrators as part of the National Assessment Program. It describes the major problems and needs reported by two groups: Programs administered by criminal justice agencies (prosecutors, police,

and sheriffs); and independently operated multiservice agencies. These agencies (1) were not administered by a government agency and (2) provided services to victims of several different types of crimes.

The National Assessment Program (NAP) surveys seek to identify key needs and problems in local and State criminal justice systems.¹ To accomplish this, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) sponsored a national survey of approximately 2,500 practitioners from a sample of 375 counties across the country. Included were all 175 counties having populations greater than 250,000 and a sample of 200 counties having less than 250,000 population. Persons receiving surveys in each county included the police chief of the largest city, sheriff, jail administrator, prosecutor, chief trial court judge, trial court administrator (where applicable), and probation and parole agency heads. On the State level, wardens, commissioners of corrections, and State attorneys general were surveyed.

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AGGREGATIONS

The questionnaire addressed five general areas, with questions tailored to each group of respondents. The general areas were the following:

- Background characteristics—descriptive data including staff size, budget totals, caseloads, services provided, etc.
- Criminal justice system problems—current significance of criminal justice problems identified in an earlier survey.
- Workload—factors contributing to workload increases.
- Staffing—recruitment, retention, and training needs.
- Policies and procedures—management, management information, and the specific operations in which the respondents are involved.

To gather information about victim assistance programs, a set of questions about victim assistance was included in the questionnaires distributed to prosecutors, police, and sheriffs; and a special questionnaire was distributed to independent multiservice victim assistance agencies.²

Exhibit 1
Criminal justice sponsors of
victim assistance programs in survey sample

Type of agency	Total number of NAP survey respondents	Number/percent with victim assistance programs	
Prosecutors	225	174	77%
Police	281	95	34%
Sheriffs	209	78	38%

Barbara Webster wrote this report for the Institute for Law and Justice, Inc., Alexandria, Virginia, which conducted the 1986 National Assessment Program for the National Institute of Justice.

Victim assistance programs report increased workloads

Programs sponsored by prosecutors, police, and sheriffs

Exhibit 1 shows that 77 percent of responding prosecutors administer victim assistance programs, compared with 34 percent of police and 38 percent of sheriffs. The median number

of full-time staff members is 3 for prosecutor-based programs, 2 for police, and 1.7 for sheriffs.

Police and sheriffs' departments respond to victims of all types of crime, regardless of whether the offender is ever identified or apprehended; however, no victim assistance program has

sufficient resources to effectively serve all victims. Most programs, therefore, target particular groups.

Victim assistance programs administered by police and sheriffs tend to give priority to victims of sex crimes and domestic violence. Most prosecutors' programs focus on cases for which charges have been brought. Thus, the focus on victims of violence is not quite so pronounced among programs sponsored by prosecutors; approximately two-thirds assist victims of burglary compared to only one-third of police and sheriffs' programs (Exhibit 2).

Exhibit 2 Types of victims served

Victims by crime type	Percent of programs with services		
	Prosecutors (%)	Police (%)	Sheriffs (%)
Family, friends of homicide victims	76	39	49
Rape and other sex crimes	89	79	80
Domestic violence	69	73	70
Assault	66	65	54
Child abuse and sexual abuse	90	63	63
Robbery	57	38	30
Burglary	62	34	36
Auto theft	27	7	8
Larceny	32	14	22

Ninety percent of prosecutors with victim assistance programs serve children who have been abused or sexually assaulted. More than 90 percent of the prosecutors also report that an increase in child victim cases over the past 3 years has significantly contributed to increased workloads. Similarly, 64 percent of responding police departments and 55 percent of the sheriffs report that domestic violence arrests have increased workloads.

The increased reporting of these crimes may reflect the success of victim advocates over the years in several areas:

- Lobbying for laws that require medical professionals, educators, and others to report suspected abuse.
- Encouraging laws that allow, and department policies that require, more police arrests in domestic violence cases.
- Conducting public education campaigns that encourage victims to report sexual and domestic crimes.
- Providing training and advocating for more sensitive treatment of child domestic assault victims by police, prosecutors, hospital personnel, and others.

Exhibit 3 Services commonly provided by law enforcement programs

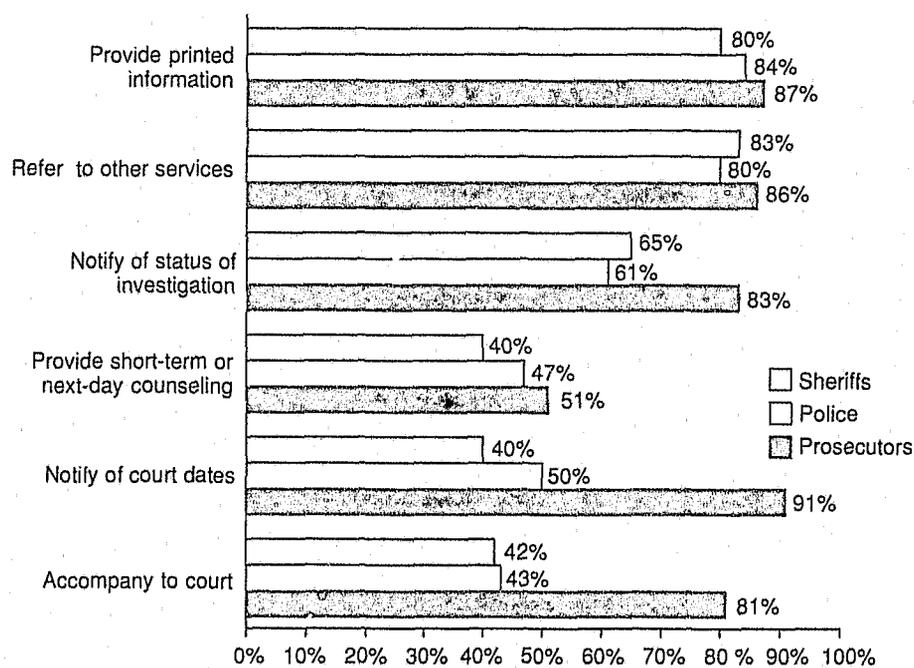


Exhibit 3 compares the types of services most commonly provided by prosecutor, police, and sheriff-sponsored victim

assistance programs. As might be expected, prosecutor programs are about twice as likely as those sponsored by police and sheriffs to notify victims and witnesses of court dates and to accompany victims to court.

Many prosecutor-based programs, however, have moved beyond simply providing "witness management" services. Like police and sheriff programs, about half the prosecutor programs provide short-term or next-day counseling, and more than 80 percent make referrals to various service agencies.

Independent programs of victim assistance

Exhibit 4 shows budget and staff size for independent victim assistance programs. The agencies responding represent a considerable range in program size: The largest agency has a budget of \$2 million, while the smallest uses an all-volunteer staff and has a budget of \$1,300. Many of these programs depend heavily on volunteer staff.

Budget increases of at least 30 percent from 1983 to 1986 are reported by 68 percent of the independent agencies. These increases cannot be attributed solely to Federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funds, and suggest growing local and State support for victim assistance.

Exhibit 5 shows those services provided by more than half the respondents. A smaller percentage provide notice of or accompany victims to lineups (42 percent), arrange for emergency loans (28 percent), and notify victims of parole hearings (22 percent). A few agencies offer such specialized services as suicide intervention, death notification, and restitution programs.

Exhibit 4

Characteristics of independent victim assistance programs

n=36	
Median annual operating budget (1986)	\$200,000
Percent reporting at least 30% budget increase since 1983	68%
Percent reporting inadequate funding levels	44%
Median number of full-time staff	5
Median number of part-time staff	3
Median number of volunteers	20

Exhibit 5

Services provided by over half the victim assistance programs

Services provided by 92-100% of respondents

- Provide victims with information about their rights and various criminal justice processes
- Provide short-term supportive counseling
- Make referrals to mental health agencies
- Make referrals to social service agencies
- Advocate for victims with employers, social service agencies, and other criminal justice agencies
- Accompany victims to court.
- Train or conduct educational programs for professionals, service clubs, schools, colleges, and others

Services provided by 66-92% of respondents

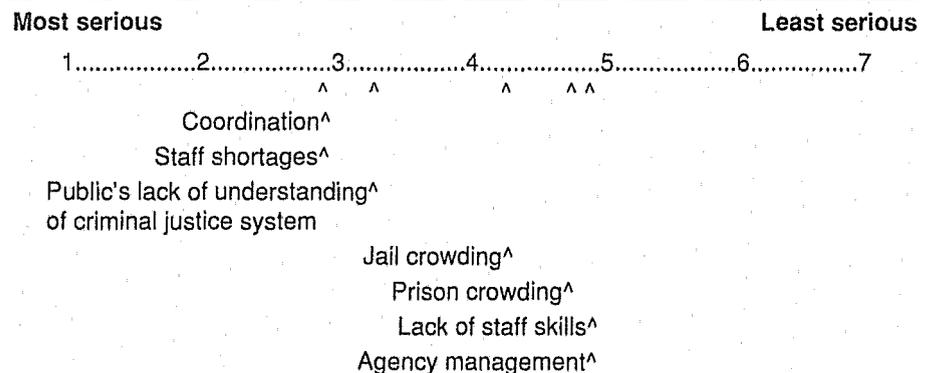
- Provide "next-day" crisis counseling
- Assist victims in applying for State victim compensation
- Assist victims in preparing victim impact statements

Services provided by 50-66% of respondents

- Provide on-scene crisis counseling
- Provide transportation
- Train law enforcement officers
- Notify victims of court dates

Exhibit 6

Average rankings of criminal justice system problems



Victim assistance programs report increased workloads

Exhibit 7
Victims served by independent agencies

Type of crime	Percent of agencies providing services (%)
Surviving families of homicide victims	83
Rape and other sex offenses	89
Domestic violence	81
Child abuse and sexual assault	83
Robbery	81
Assault	83
Burglary	72
Auto theft	56
Larceny	58
Other crimes	67

When asked what services they would like to expand, the service mentioned most frequently (by 36 percent of the respondents) was counseling. This included 22 percent who wanted to expand short-term supportive counseling and 14 percent who saw a need to provide on-scene crisis counseling.

The victim assistance respondents were asked to rank order a list of seven criminal justice system problems identified in 1983 in the previous National Assessment Survey. The average rankings are shown in Exhibit 6. Lack of coordination among criminal justice agencies and staff shortages are the two most serious problems for respondents. These are followed by the public's lack of understanding of criminal justice agencies.

Exhibit 7 shows the percent of responding agencies that provide services to victims of various types of crimes.

Independent agencies are more likely than programs sponsored by criminal justice to serve victims of property crimes such as burglary, larceny, and

auto theft. A somewhat higher percentage of independent programs (81 percent) than prosecutor, police, and sheriffs' programs (69 to 73 percent) serve domestic violence victims. About 83 percent of independent programs serve assault victims compared to about two-thirds of programs sponsored by law enforcement agencies. Approximately 82 percent of the independent victim assistance agencies surveyed report significant increases in workloads in the past 3 years; 15 percent report slight increases; and 3 percent indicate caseloads are about the same. No agency reported a decrease.

Factors reported as contributing to increased workloads are listed in Exhibit 8. Independent programs seem to have achieved considerable success in publicizing their services: 82 percent report that self-referrals have contributed significantly to their workloads. In addition, nearly three-fourths of the respondents are experiencing increased workloads because of more police referrals.

Seventy percent of the respondents report that increases in child sexual abuse victims have contributed to the rise. A median number of three persons receive services in connection with each case of child abuse or child sexual assault.

Asked to list successful measures they have taken to manage their workloads, many respondents emphasized specialized staff training and services, for example, conducting crime-specific advocacy training, hiring posttrial advocates, and adding counselors who specialize in working with victims of violent crimes and sexual assault.

Victim assistance directors were asked to indicate the degree in nine different areas to which staff training needed improvement. More than half the respondents report a need for training on each of the following five topics:

- Legal issues and statutory updates (66 percent).
- Stress management (61 percent).
- Midlevel supervision (61 percent).

Exhibit 8
Factors contributing to increased workload

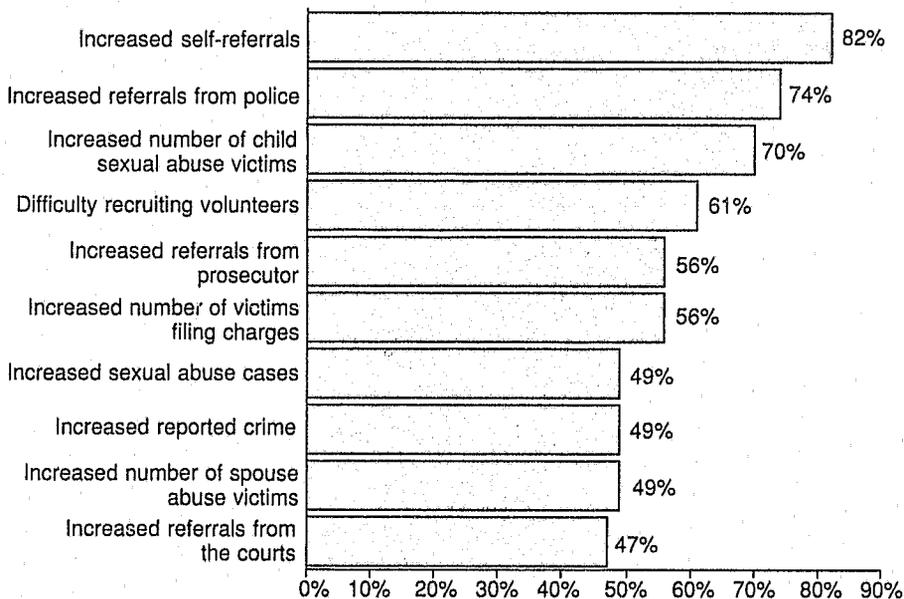


Exhibit 9

Victim notification needs

	Percent reporting a need for improvement in procedures (%)
Charging and plea-bargaining decisions	89
Parole hearings, decisions, or dates	89
Bail decisions	86
Court dates and schedule changes	81
Status of police investigation	79

- Fundraising and proposal writing (60 percent).
- Advocacy and negotiation skills (58 percent).

Thirty-nine percent of the respondents report a need for improved training on crisis intervention and counseling, and one-third cite a need to improve staff knowledge of the local criminal justice system. The majority of agencies (67 percent) indicate they are satisfied with their access to information about model programs and professional contacts. Many respondents who report improvements in staff training mention increasing the number of training sessions and conference opportunities for staff, and holding cross-training sessions with other agencies.

The survey of independent programs included a series of questions to determine how criminal justice and social service system policies and procedures affected victims' needs for information, protection, and participation. Respondents were also asked to identify problems regarding other professionals' understanding of victims' needs.

Clearly, the survey respondents feel that many of victims' needs for information and notification are not being met. The two areas cited as

needing the most improvement were (1) notification about charging and plea-bargaining decisions, and (2) notification of parole hearings, decisions, and dates. Exhibit 9 shows that more than three-fourths of the respondents believe there need to be more effective procedures for ensuring notification of important dates, decisions, and case status.

In an effort to improve notification, several agencies report regular, or even daily, communication with the prosecutor's victim-witness unit. They also report benefits to victims that have resulted when prosecutors use computerized case-tracking systems.

Agency directors were also asked about the need to improve measures to protect victims from threats, harassment, and revictimization. As shown in Exhibit 10, three of the four greatest needs for protection relate to domestic violence.

Almost as important to the respondents are the needs for secure court waiting

Exhibit 10

Victim protection needs

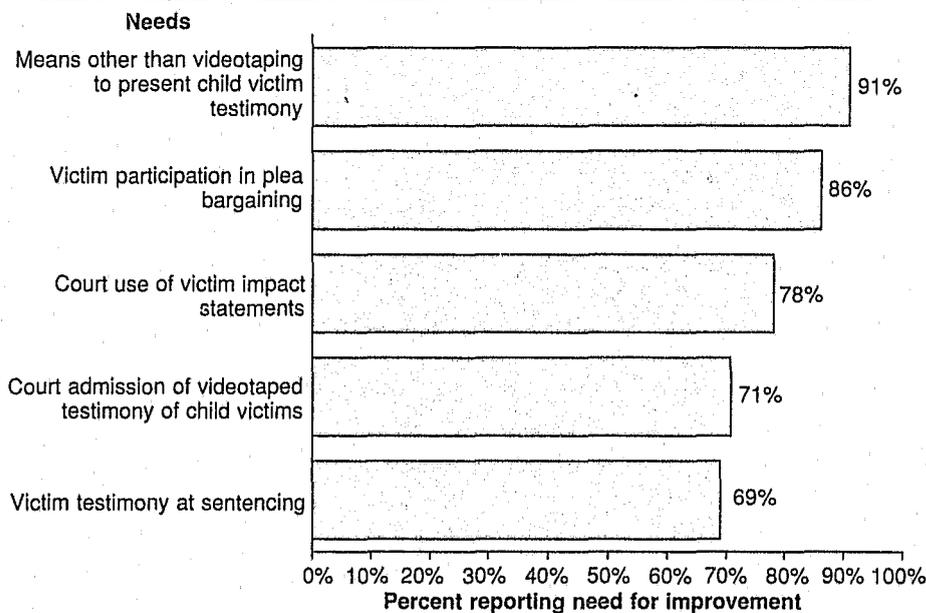
	Percent reporting a need for improvement in procedures (%)
Increased arrests for domestic assault	88
Investigations of threats and harassment by suspects	83
Police system to track and record domestic assaults	80
Procedures to remove batterers from the home	76

areas for victims (cited by 72 percent) and a system to check criminal records of people who work with children (60 percent). Forty-four percent still see a need in their communities for measures to keep domestic violence victims' locations confidential once they leave their homes.

The respondents cited several additional measures they have taken to

Exhibit 11

Victim participation in the criminal justice process



Victim assistance programs report increased workloads

Exhibit 12

Improvements needed in professional response to victim needs

	Percent identifying need for improvement (%)
Training for mental health professionals in:	
Assisting spouse abuse victims	61
Treating spouse abusers	72
Handling victim trauma	72
Hospital personnel handling of:	
Rape/sexual assault victims	53
Spouse abuse victims	68
Families of homicide victims	70
Other assault victims	71
Law enforcement training in victim crisis reactions	84
Social service agency sensitivity to victims	86

protect victims from further harm, including the following:

- o "Our early outreach project involves daily contact with the police to identify new victims."
- o "We provide police training on the spouse abuse law and police coordination with the clerk's office."
- o "We hold classes once a month for police officers."

Victim advocates also stress the need for increased victim participation in the decisionmaking processes of courts and prosecutors. According to the survey respondents, developing appropriate ways to handle child victim testimony is the most critical issue related to victim participation. Additional needs for increased victim participation are shown in Exhibit 11.

Training for victims in becoming better witnesses, often in cooperation with the prosecutor's office, was one of the most frequently cited projects to improve victim participation. Related activities

included working with the prosecutor to develop a victim-witness handbook, and meeting regularly with the county attorney to discuss information flow. One agency provided a unique service: Preparing restitution evaluations for the municipal court on request.

A lack of understanding of victims' needs by other professionals can also present obstacles to providing needed services. The majority of victim assistance program directors indicate that improvement is still needed in how victims are treated by mental health professionals, social service agencies, law enforcement, and hospital personnel. Exhibit 12 shows some areas in which the respondents report the need for improvement in how other professionals respond to victim needs.

Overall, agency directors believe professionals need to make fundamental changes in their beliefs about crime victims. One respondent expressed the view that "mental health centers need to make some major changes in their intake procedures and their theoretical basis for treatment of clients prior to

any training." Another emphasized the need for professionals to "recognize that the vast majority of crime victims are not, nor do they become, mentally ill as the result of victimization."

Notably, the hospitals' handling of rape and sexual assault victims is viewed more favorably by the respondents than is the handling of any other kind of victimization by any type of professional. These encouraging results reflect the success of more than a decade of effort by victim advocates.

To increase the public's and other professionals' understanding of victims' needs, agency directors emphasize three techniques they consider successful:

- o Providing professional training to hospital personnel, law enforcement officers, mental health workers, and social services providers.
- o Assisting victims with preparing impact statements.
- o Making community presentations and sponsoring media campaigns.

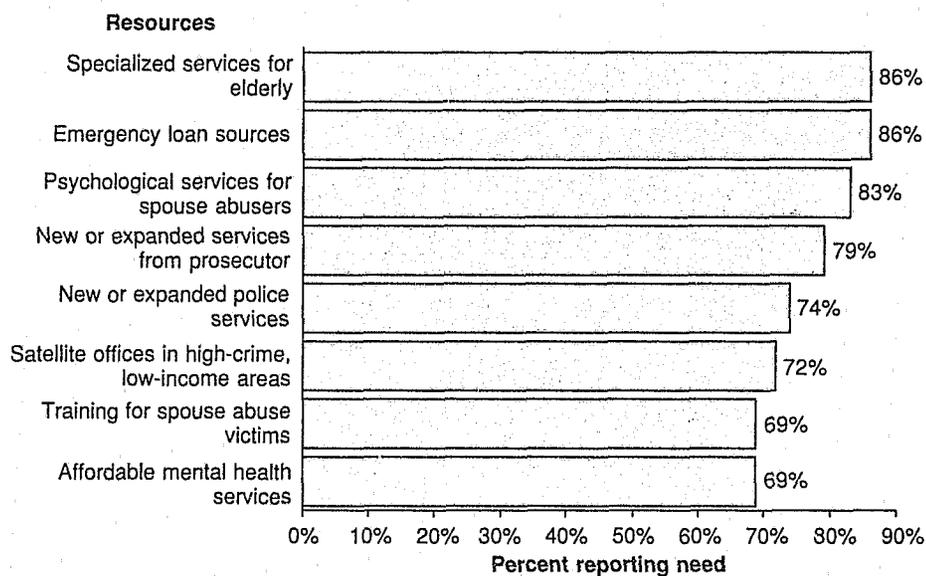
Independent program administrators were asked to rate their communities' needs for 12 different support services for victims. The community resources rated as most needed are listed in Exhibit 13.

To address shortages of community resources for victims, respondents mentioned the following as useful approaches:

- o Forming community task forces and coordinating councils, including specialized groups, e.g., a child sexual assault core team, a domestic violence task force, and a county victim-witness policy board.
- o Using decentralized approaches, e.g., creating satellite offices; and using "a decentralized model of community groups running neighborhood-based victim projects with support from the DA's office."

Exhibit 13

Community resources needed for victims



- Developing a victim fund.
- Advocating to establish a police sex crimes unit.

The questionnaire results were sharply divided regarding the need for less restrictive eligibility requirements for State victim compensation. Thirty-seven percent of the respondents do not consider this important, while 63 percent report it as a significant need. Comments on State compensation also mentioned the needs for larger rewards and reduced processing time, and the desire to include hit-and-run and drunk driving victims among those eligible for compensation.

Summary

Crime victims need a wide variety of services in the aftermath of trauma and throughout the criminal justice process. This survey included only two types of programs—those sponsored by law enforcement agencies (police, sheriffs, and prosecutors); and independent, multiservice victim assistance agencies.

Victims of violent personal injury crimes and property crimes are served by both types of programs.

The survey results do not include the views of those who administer specialized programs such as battered women’s shelters and rape victim companion programs. Not surprisingly, however, increased domestic violence arrests and increased reporting of child sexual abuse have resulted in special challenges to the programs that were surveyed.

Several directors of independent agencies emphasized the need to serve all victims. Nevertheless, most independent programs—like those sponsored by law enforcement agencies—are focusing their limited resources on victims of rape, domestic violence, assault, child abuse, and child sexual assault.

At the end of the survey, independent agencies were asked to list the most pressing problems in the criminal justice system that prevent them from serving victims adequately. The issues

most frequently cited (by approximately one-third of the respondents) are:

- Lack of referrals, particularly from the police. Considerable progress in obtaining police referrals was noted earlier; however, continued work in this area is reported as a significant need.
- Territoriality and poor interagency coordination.
- Lack of public and other agencies’ awareness of victims’ needs.

Different problems emerge as a primary concern 3 years down the road:

- Funding.
- Jail and prison crowding.

A number of agencies see their efforts to improve their credibility and communication with law enforcement agencies as resulting in increased referrals. Ten agencies list lack of referrals as a current problem, compared to only three who see this problem continuing 3 years from now.

Increased media attention and recognition in the community has also resulted in increased program utilization. However, while many program directors are encouraged by the results of their outreach efforts, they also anticipate “the inability of the criminal justice system to meet increased levels of victim participation.”

Although victim assistance program directors express considerable frustration, their responses to questions on successful projects indicate significant progress over the years in fostering a greater public and professional awareness of victims’ needs.

Notes

1. The first National Assessment Program survey was conducted for NIJ in 1983 by Abt Associates, Inc., Cambridge, Massachusetts. The 1983 survey did not include questions specifically about victim assistance.

Victim assistance programs report increased workloads

2. The National Organization for Victim Assistance (NOVA) helped construct the questionnaire, reviewed the draft, and provided the consultants with access to its mailing lists to develop the survey sample. In addition, several NOVA board members who also administer victim assistance programs pretested the questionnaire and provided valuable comments on how to

improve the final product. The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence also provided expert advice in developing the questionnaire.

Points of view or opinions expressed in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

The Assistant Attorney General, Office of Justice Programs, coordinates the activities of the following program Offices and Bureaus: National Institute of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, and Office for Victims of Crime.

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