Incorporating Victim Voices into Research: Examples from the Field

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NIJ Overview

• Research, evaluation, development arm of the Department of Justice
• Three main sciences:
  – Social sciences
  – Forensics
  – Technology
Victim-Centric Research

• Supported work in this area since the 1970s
• Collaborative projects with Federal Program offices (e.g. OVC, OVW)
• Violence Against Women Portfolio
  – Compendium of NIJ VAW & Victim research

NIJ
National Institute of Justice

National Center for Victims of Crime
2012 NATIONAL CONFERENCE
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Project Examples

• Evaluation of Crime Victim’s Rights Legal Clinics

• Adaptation of risk assessment measures for intimate partner violence victims

• Examination of criminal justice experiences of crime victims with cognitive and physical disabilities
Research to Practice

- Researcher-Practitioner Workshops and Solicitations
- Dissemination through web, video, print, and in-person formats
- Grantee and NIJ partnerships with field
Overview of Projects

The National Evaluation of Statewide Automated Victim Information and Notification (SAVIN) Programs

The Study of Victim Experiences of Wrongful Conviction
National Evaluation of Statewide Automated Victim Information and Notification (SAVIN) Programs

Presented by:
Sara Debus-Sherrill
Emily Niedzwiecki
SAVIN Methodology

• Stage 1: Implementation and Process Study
  – Collection of background information
  – State administrator interviews
  – Interviews & focus groups with vendors

• Stage 2: Outcome Evaluation
  – Victim advocate survey
  – Service recipient survey

• Stage 3: Best Practices and Sustainability Study
  – Site visits to states with promising & unique practices
  – Exploration of costs and sustainability efforts
Automated Victim Notification

- Notification is an essential victim right
- Victims* register to receive notifications
- Automated systems linked to CJ agencies’ databases

- Notifications sent in near real-time by multiple modes
- BJA’s SAVIN program assists states in implementing automated notification
States that have automated notification but have not received SAVIN funding (includes the District of Columbia)

States that have automated notification and have received SAVIN funding (includes Puerto Rico)
Service Characteristics

• Phone & email provided for nearly all systems; texts are emerging service
• Variation in triggering events
• 98% have system open to public
• Outreach/Awareness
  – Trainings
  – Public service announcements or news stories
  – Public ads
  – Brochures & other materials
  – Promotions at public events (e.g., fairs)
Pertinent Themes and Issues

• Wide diversity of systems
  – Scope/coverage, triggering events, modes, languages, use of manual notification to supplement, funding mechanisms

• Coverage of systems & gaps in service

• Need for seamless registration

• Quality of data

• Anonymous users
Background of Respondents

Crime Typology

- Domestic Violence: 68% (Crime Victims, n=715), 88% (Victim Advocates, n=1,246)
- Stalking: 13% (Crime Victims, n=715), 71% (Victim Advocates, n=1,246)
- Rape/Sexual Assault: 13% (Crime Victims, n=715), 79% (Victim Advocates, n=1,246)
- Assault: 12% (Crime Victims, n=715), 57% (Victim Advocates, n=1,246)
Awareness and Use of Automated Notification

Use of Automated Notification Among Victim Advocates (n=1,203)

- Non-System Users, 26%
- System Users, 74%

Registration for Automated Notification Among Victims (n=716)

- Registered, 23%
- Non-Registered, 77%
Benefits of Automated Notification

Benefits of Automated Notification for Victims

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Victims*</th>
<th>Victim Advocates (n=852)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helps victims to make decisions about their safety</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helps victims feel more empowered</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increases sense of safety</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhances victims' participation in their related legal case</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The victim sample size for each question varied from 134 to 138.*
Challenges and Recommendations

- Inaccurate notifications: 47%
- Not enough notifications: 21%
- Trouble with PIN: 25%
- Difficulty registering: 13%
- Difficulty using the website to check offender status: 13%
- Delayed or outdated notifications: 48%

Challenges Experienced by Victims (n=24)

Challenges Experienced by Victim Advocates (n=150)
Evaluation Next Steps

• Case Studies of jurisdictions with promising automated notification systems
• Ongoing dissemination of evaluation results through presentations, webinars, and journal publications
• Issue Briefs
• Final Evaluation Report
Study of Victim Experiences of Wrongful Conviction

Presented by:
Erin Williamson, Project Manager
Purpose and Methodology

• Why
  – Enhance understanding of the range and frequency of issues victims face as they proceed through the exoneration process
  – Inform the development and improvement of policies and practices impacting this population

• How
  – Literature review of known cases
  – Survey of victim advocates
  – Comprehensive case studies
Wrongful Conviction vs. Exoneration

- **Wrongful Conviction** - A case in which a government entity has determined that the originally convicted individual factually did not commit the crime

- **Exoneration** - The process by which a government entity concedes that a convicted person is indeed innocent
Notification

• Current Practices
  – Who
  – What
  – Where/How
  – When

• Impact on the Victim

• Victim Recommendations
Impact on the Victim

- Emotional
- Psychological
- Physical
- Financial
- Social
Influential Factors

- Participation in the original trial(s)
- Support systems
- Access to services
- Reaction from the media/community
- Acceptance of the wrongful conviction
- Identification and prosecution of the actual offender
Conducting Victim-Centric Research: Respecting the Voices of and Protecting Victims

Presented by:
Seri Irazola, Ph.D., Principal Investigator
Conducting Victim-Centric Research

Developing the tools and instruments

- Type and mode of instrument: different techniques are appropriate for different types of research and populations.
- The importance of using sensitive, easy to understand language.
- Reducing burden on the respondent by collecting only data that is deemed critical.
Conducting Victim-Centric Research

- **Identification of potential subjects** – How to identify and approach potential participants.

- **Time and location** – Providing a safe and convenient environment.

- **Informed consent** – Promoting victims’ right to self-determination.

- **Maintaining and ensuring privacy** – How the research team will record and store data; how data will be reported.
Conducting Victim-Centric Research

Exercising techniques to reducing the risk of further victimization

- Identification of respondents through third parties.
- Providing a safe and private location.
- Allowing third parties to be present.
- Skilled interviewers with sensitivity training.
- Ensuring Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval.
- Providing available resources to support victims post-participation.
Questions & Closing Comments
For More Information

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