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THE VICTIM ASSISTANCE FIELD AND THE PROFESSION OF SOCIAL WORK

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Victims of Crime: A Social Work Response: Building Skills To Strengthen Survivors, a 3-year demonstration project from 1999 to 2002, was funded through a discretionary grant from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime (OVC). Its goal was to enhance the capacity of professional social workers to respond to the needs of adult victims of violent crime. The grantee, the Texas chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW/Texas), collaborated with the University of Missouri–Columbia School of Social Work and the University of Texas at Austin School of Social Work to develop the project. It pilot-tested materials at the state level that can be used and replicated by state National Association of Social Workers (NASW) chapters; other national, state, and local professional associations; and social work degree programs across the Nation.

The project was based on the assumption that all social workers need information

about the needs of crime victims because, at some point during their careers, they will come into contact with individuals who have been victimized. At a minimum, social workers should have basic knowledge about the rights of crime victims, victim compensation programs, the criminal justice system's structure, crisis intervention with crime victims, and safety planning. Most important, social workers must know how to respond to the immediate needs of crime victims and provide clients with links to institutions, agencies, and professionals who provide crime victim services.

The project was unique in its systemic approach to reaching social workers in various phases of professional development, from practitioners in the field to students in the classroom. The project looked at the profession of social work to determine the fit between its knowledge, skills, and values and victim assistance work and its current capacity to train and maintain social workers in the field.

Message From THE DIRECTOR

Although we understand that there is never closure for victims of violent crime and their loved ones, we know that helping victims understand and assert their rights and access needed services is critical. It takes a community to ensure that victims have the support to report the crimes committed against them, assert their rights, and receive the services and compensation to which they are entitled. Social workers identify and assist victims in many community settings, including human service agencies, child welfare and adult protective service agencies, mental health clinics, and hospitals and medical clinics.

Social workers have indicated a need for training in such areas as crime victim compensation, helping victims through the criminal justice process, assisting with victim impact statements, and helping survivors of terrorist actions or multiple shootings. Therefore, it is critical that the victim assistance field work closely with social work educators to develop appropriate and effective training tools for students and practitioners. OVC funded this initiative to fill a critical gap in social workers' professional and continuing education training.

John W. Gillis
Director

The objectives of the project were to—

- Conduct a professional awareness campaign to increase social workers' knowledge of the victim assistance field and the needs of crime victims.
- Develop and provide introductory training to social workers on crime victims' rights and services.
- Develop links between professional social workers and the victim assistance field.
- Replicate the project with other NASW chapters. (This objective was added during the project's second year.)

During its first year, NASW/Texas collaborated with the University of Texas at Austin School of Social Work. In the second year, personnel changes necessitated replacing the University of Texas at Austin with the University of Missouri—Columbia School of Social Work.

NASW/Texas formed a statewide advisory committee composed of representatives from state agencies and organizations such as the attorney general's office, crime victim compensation programs, state police, coalitions against domestic violence and sexual assault, and Mothers Against Drunk Driving chapters. Committee members had an average of 14.5 years of experience in the victim assistance field; five members had 20 or more years of service. They represented a range of experience at the local, state, regional, national, and federal levels and at all levels of practice—volunteer, basic, specialized, independent, and advanced. They worked in direct practice, supervisory positions, local and state agency administration, national direct service (e.g., National Domestic Violence Hotline), state advocacy organizations,

All members selected discussing sensitive emotional subjects in a nonthreatening supportive manner as the most important of the 12 social work skills presented.

consultation, teaching, training, and research.

The committee assisted the project by reviewing curriculum materials, contributing information about the field, and participating in an exercise to rate generic social work competencies for their applicability in the victim assistance field. In addition to rating competencies for generic social work knowledge, skills, abilities, and values, members also were encouraged to list the knowledge, skills, abilities, and values they felt were specific to the victim assistance field.

In the area of social work knowledge, all members of the expert panel agreed that of the 25 knowledge items, the one encompassing crisis intervention theories and techniques was the most important. For social work skills, all members selected discussing sensitive emotional subjects in a nonthreatening supportive manner as the most important of the 12 items presented. In the area of social work abilities, all members of the panel agreed that the ability to function under stress was the most important of the 14 items presented. Three social work values tied for the most important: a strong commitment to a high standard of personal and professional conduct, a willingness to keep personal feelings and needs separate from professional relationships, and respect for the confidentiality of relationships with clients. Ironically, the lowest rated generic

value was a commitment to the primary importance of the individual in society. Only 2 of the 61 total competencies were rated below a “somewhat important” classification. The project concluded that professional social work and the field of crime victim assistance would make an excellent fit. If social workers wanted to enter the field of victim assistance, their generic social work competencies would serve as a good foundation for the knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes they would need to function successfully; however, they would need to learn competencies specific to the victim assistance field.

Why Social Workers?

The profession of social work celebrated its 100th anniversary in 1998.

From its early beginnings in the settlement house movement in the late 19th century to the present day, the profession has evolved and diversified to provide services and responses to almost every conceivable challenge to the human being and spirit. The preamble to NASW's Code of Ethics¹ describes the historic and present-day mission of the social work profession:

The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty. A historic and defining feature of social work is the profession's focus on individual well-being in a social context and the well-being of society. Fundamental to social work is attention to the environmental forces that create, contribute to, and address problems in living.

Social workers promote social justice and social change with and on behalf of clients. “Clients” is used inclusively to refer to individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Social workers are sensitive to cultural and ethnic diversity and strive to end discrimination, oppression, poverty, and other forms of social injustice. These activities may be in the form of direct practice, community organizing, supervision, consultation, administration, advocacy, social and political action, policy development and implementation, education, and research and evaluation. Social workers seek to enhance the capacity of people to address their own needs. Social workers also seek to promote the responsiveness of organizations, communities, and other social institutions to individuals’ needs and social problems.

An estimated 300,000 licensed social workers in the United States strive to fulfill this mission.² Currently, 146 graduate and 430 undergraduate social work programs located at U.S. colleges and universities are accredited, and an additional 22 baccalaureate and 25 master’s programs are candidates for accreditation.³

Only 2.3 percent of respondents identified the primary focus of their work as “violence—victim assistance.”

The social work profession is characterized by its diversity of practice modalities, practice settings, and client groups. Social workers help people from all points on the lifespan: children, adults, and the elderly. They are employed in settings such as public schools, hospitals, mental health clinics, nursing homes, substance abuse treatment programs, child and family services, and employee assistance programs.

More clinically trained social workers (192,814) are in the U.S. labor force than the other three core mental health professions—psychologists (73,018), psychiatrists (33,486), and psychiatric nurses (17,318)—combined.⁴ According to a study completed in 1995, nearly 38 percent of all social workers identified their primary practice area as mental health services, 25 percent specified family services, and 13 percent named medical clinics. Only 2.3 percent of respondents identified the primary focus of their work as “violence—victim assistance.”⁵ Because of the high rates of violent victimization in the United States and social work’s focus on helping vulnerable populations and disenfranchised groups, it is surprising that a larger percentage of social workers do not primarily practice in this field. Historically, victims of crime have been a disenfranchised group frequently victimized twice, first during the actual crime and then when they come into contact with law enforcement and criminal justice systems.⁶ A partnership between social work and the victim assistance field would seem like a natural alliance and would fulfill recommendations proposed for mental health professionals in *New Directions from the Field: Victims’ Rights and Services for the 21st Century*.⁷

Why NASW?

The National Association of Social Workers, the world’s largest organization of professional social workers, has approximately 153,000 members with 56 chapters across the United States, its territories, and abroad. Full membership in NASW is open to anyone who has an undergraduate or graduate degree in social work from a university program that is accredited by the Council on Social Work Education. NASW’s mission includes advancing the quality of social work practice, promoting unity and recognition of the profession, advocating for standards that protect consumers, and proposing and supporting public policies that improve the human condition.

Two NASW initiatives have raised the collective awareness of the profession about violence and the connection between violence around the world and violence in the United States. The Violence and Development Project, which operated from 1993 until 1997, was a collaboration of NASW, the Council on Social Work Education, the Benton Foundation, and the U.S. Agency for International Development. The project helped social workers understand the relationship between trauma and violence. NASW also developed a partnership with the American Red Cross in 1997 to promote disaster training for practitioners. This social work training kit builds on these two projects by providing the link from preventing and responding to violence and trauma to responding to the individual and collective needs of victims of violent crime.

Texas was selected as a pilot site to test the training kit because it had both a well-established victim assistance movement and a well-established NASW state chapter with 5,500 members and 21 local branches across the state. Links between the victim assistance movement and NASW members already existed. Several social workers who were active in association activities also were pioneers and leaders in several branches of the victim assistance movement, particularly in the areas of domestic violence and sexual assault. In 2000, with its mix of rural and urban areas, Texas provided a natural laboratory for pilot testing such a project and its various products.

Project Objectives

From 1999 to 2002, the Victims of Crime: A Social Work Response demonstration project worked to fulfill its three objectives:

Objective 1: Conduct a Professional Awareness Campaign

To conduct the professional awareness campaign, the NASW project developed and disseminated articles for professional association newsletters, a special NASW newsletter edition, a crime victims and social work Web site, surveys targeting social work practitioners and schools of social work, and manuscripts for publication in professional journals.

Newsletter Articles

The project was given high visibility in state and national NASW newsletters. An article highlighting victim assistance as an emerging field of practice was published in the February 2000 edition of *NASW News*, the association's national newsletter. Additional articles on National Crime Victims' Rights Week

and universal screening in domestic violence were disseminated to all NASW chapters. Articles about the project also appeared in the fall 1999 issue of *VISIONS*, a publication of the Crime Victim Services Division of the Texas Office of the Attorney General; the Texas District and County Attorneys Association magazine; and the March 2000 issue of *Psychotherapy Finances*, a newsletter for behavioral health providers.

Special Insert

A special 8-page insert entitled "Responding to the Needs of Crime Victims: An Introductory Guide for Social Workers" was published in the June 2000 issue of *NASW/Texas Network*. It contained information on the history of the crime victims' movement, victim compensation, victims' rights, crisis response to crime victims, Web sites, books, national and state resources, needs of special populations, victim impact statements, safety planning, universal screening for victims, posttraumatic stress disorder, and vicarious trauma for social workers. The well-received guide was distributed at workshops, conferences, state and national NASW leadership meetings, and state child welfare network meetings.

Web Page

A social work and crime victims Web site, developed especially for the project, contained information about the project, newsletter articles, the introductory guide, project advisory committee members, the Texas Crime Victim Assistance Social Work Directory, and links to other victim assistance organizations and resources. The Web site received an average of 200 hits per month and was closed when the project ended.

Surveys

The practitioner survey, used as a training needs assessment, was sent to all

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licensed social workers in Texas and 1,497 (18 percent) responded. Social work practitioners were asked about their current involvement with crime victim services, the level of training they had received, their continuing education needs, and whether they were currently practicing in the victim assistance field.

The survey also looked at the personal factors that contribute to crime victim assistance self-efficacy; that is, social workers' self-appraisal of their capacity to respond to crime victims' needs. Respondents felt most capable of identifying elder abuse, helping trauma survivors, identifying victims of violent crime in their caseloads, and assisting victims with safety planning (table 1). Respondents felt less capable of assisting with victim impact statements, helping survivors of terrorist actions or multiple shootings, helping survivors through the criminal justice system, and helping fill out crime victim compensation applications.

Survey questions about personal factors relating to social workers' self-efficacy included the amount of personal and professional experience working with victims of crime, academic preparation, and continuing education (table 2). Nearly 82 percent had professional experience working with crime victims, and more than 50 percent said they personally had been affected to some extent by violent crime. Almost 61 percent said they had little to

Table 1: Crime Victim Assistance Self-Efficacy Survey Responses (n = 1,497)

Item	n ^a	% ^b
I am confident in my ability to help victims of crime through the criminal justice system.		
Strongly agree	178	11.9
Agree	229	15.3
Somewhat agree	475	31.7
Disagree	399	26.7
Totally disagree	207	13.8
I am capable of identifying victims of violent crime in my caseload.		
Strongly agree	365	24.4
Agree	439	29.3
Somewhat agree	479	32.0
Disagree	151	10.1
Totally disagree	59	3.9
I am capable of helping trauma survivors.		
Strongly agree	431	28.8
Agree	474	31.7
Somewhat agree	417	27.9
Disagree	130	8.7
Totally disagree	40	2.7
I am capable of helping child witnesses to violent crimes.		
Strongly agree	254	17.0
Agree	297	19.8
Somewhat agree	400	26.7
Disagree	325	21.7
Totally disagree	215	14.4
I am capable of helping persons who have survived terrorist actions such as bombings or multiple shootings.		
Strongly agree	139	9.3
Agree	230	15.4
Somewhat agree	412	27.5
Disagree	387	25.9
Totally disagree	326	21.8
I am capable of identifying elder abuse.		
Strongly agree	435	29.1
Agree	502	33.5
Somewhat agree	390	26.1
Disagree	122	8.1
Totally disagree	42	2.8
I am prepared to help clients write victim impact statements.		
Strongly agree	158	10.6
Agree	270	18.0
Somewhat agree	322	21.5
Disagree	400	26.7
Totally disagree	344	23.0
I am capable of helping my clients apply for crime victim compensation benefits.		
Strongly agree	257	17.2
Agree	291	19.4
Somewhat agree	368	24.6
Disagree	327	21.8
Totally disagree	252	16.8
I am capable of assisting my clients with safety planning.		
Strongly agree	401	26.8
Agree	411	27.5
Somewhat agree	432	28.9
Disagree	174	11.6
Totally disagree	66	4.4

a. Not all respondents answered all questions.

b. Percentages may not add to 100 because of rounding.

Table 2: Personal Factors Survey Responses (n = 1,497)

Item	n ^a	% ^b
Extent of specific coursework on impact of violent crime on individuals and families.		
Not at all	367	24.5
Little bit	542	36.2
Somewhat	374	25.0
Moderate amount	158	10.6
Great deal	53	3.5
Extent of specific coursework on crisis intervention with adult victims of violent crime.		
Not at all	396	26.5
Little bit	543	36.3
Somewhat	323	21.6
Moderate amount	179	12.0
Great deal	52	3.5
Overall social work educational preparation for working with adult survivors of violent crime.		
Not at all	387	25.9
Little bit	495	33.1
Somewhat	364	24.3
Moderate amount	176	11.8
Great deal	67	4.5
Overall social work educational preparation for working with child survivors of violent crime.		
Not at all	442	29.5
Little bit	456	30.5
Somewhat	314	21.0
Moderate amount	197	13.2
A great deal	87	5.8
Extent of continuing education on working with adult victims of violent crime.		
Not at all	402	26.9
Little bit	356	23.8
Somewhat	276	18.4
Moderate amount	271	18.1
Great deal	191	12.8
Extent of professional experience in working with adult survivors of violent crime.		
Not at all	275	18.4
Little bit	388	25.9
Somewhat	286	19.1
Moderate amount	308	20.6
Great deal	236	15.8
Extent of professional experience in working with child survivors of violent crime.		
Not at all	342	22.8
Little bit	324	21.6
Somewhat	263	17.6
Moderate amount	245	16.4
Great deal	304	20.3
Extent of social worker or family having been personally affected by violent crime.		
Not at all	728	48.6
Little bit	350	23.4
Somewhat	177	11.8
Moderate amount	137	9.2
Great deal	89	5.9

a. Not all respondents answered all questions.

b. Percentages may not add to 100 because of rounding.

Source: F.S. Danis, 2003, "The Emerging Field of Crime Victim Assistance: Are Social Workers Ready?" *Professional Development: The International Journal of Continuing Social Work Education*, 6(3): 13–19.

Table 3: Environmental Factors Survey Responses (n = 1,497)

Item	n ^a	% ^b
Extent of access to expertise in crisis intervention with victims of crime.		
Not at all	408	27.3
Little bit	279	18.6
Somewhat	211	14.1
Moderate amount	247	16.5
Great deal	344	23.0
Extent of access to expertise in posttraumatic stress syndrome.		
Not at all	311	20.8
Little bit	246	16.4
Somewhat	234	15.6
Moderate amount	271	18.1
Great deal	418	27.9
Extent of specific questions on agency intake forms to screen for violent victimization of adults.		
Not at all	662	44.2
Little bit	232	15.5
Somewhat	211	14.1
Moderate amount	153	10.2
Great deal	196	13.1
Extent of specific intake questions to screen for violent victimization of children.		
Not at all	642	42.9
Little bit	214	14.3
Somewhat	165	11.0
Moderate amount	174	11.6
Great deal	261	17.4
Extent of agency participation in community coordination for victim assistance services.		
Not at all	627	41.9
Little bit	313	20.9
Somewhat	179	12.0
Moderate amount	167	11.2
Great deal	169	11.3
Extent of agency policies that address secondary trauma issues for social workers.		
Not at all	799	53.4
Little bit	310	20.7
Somewhat	184	12.3
Moderate amount	98	6.5
Great deal	66	4.4
Extent of agency policies that address violence in the workplace.		
Not at all	361	24.1
Little bit	342	22.8
Somewhat	275	18.4
Moderate amount	243	16.2
Great deal	227	15.2

a. Not all respondents answered all questions.

b. Percentages may not add to 100 because of rounding.

no coursework on the impact of violent crime on individuals and families, and nearly 63 percent said they had a little to no coursework on crisis intervention with

adult victims of violent crime. Almost 31 percent had a moderate amount to a great deal of continuing education on working with adult victims of violent crime.

Environmental factors are aspects within a social worker's practice setting that facilitate his or her self-efficacy (table 3). They include access to expertise, questions on intake forms that screen for

Table 4: Continuing Education Training Needs Survey Responses (n = 1,586)

Rank	Topic	n	%
1	Crisis intervention with crime victims	864	54.5
2	Impact of crime on individuals and their families	840	53.0
3	Developing culturally sensitive interventions with crime victims of all races and ethnic groups	755	47.6
4	Posttraumatic stress disorder	725	45.7
5	Treating trauma	724	45.6
6	Crime victim compensation programs	716	45.1
7	Overcoming secondary victimization	602	38.0
8	Working with sexual assault survivors	599	37.8
9	Developing culturally sensitive interventions with crime victims of all sexual orientations	598	37.7
10	Survivors and victims of terrorist acts such as bombings and multiple shootings	545	34.4
11	Domestic violence between intimate partners	539	34.0
12	Working with crime victims with disabilities	513	32.3
13	Hate crimes	510	32.2
14	Elder abuse survivors	465	29.3
15	Stalking survivors	434	27.4

Source: F.S. Danis, 2003, "The Emerging Field of Crime Victim Assistance: Are Social Workers Ready?" *Professional Development: The International Journal of Continuing Social Work Education*, 6(3): 13–19.

particular issues, agency participation in community coordination for victim assistance services, and agency policies on violence and secondary trauma. More than 44 percent said their agency’s intake forms had no specific questions to screen for adult violent victimization, and almost 43 percent said they had no specific intake form questions to screen for violent victimization of children. However, nearly 54 percent of respondents said they had somewhat to a great deal of access to persons with expertise in crisis intervention with adult victims and almost 62 percent in posttraumatic stress disorder, one of the most common mental health risks for crime victims. With the possibility for secondary trauma so critical, it was surprising and dismaying that more than 53 percent of respondents said their agency personnel policies did not address secondary trauma for workers.

Considering that so many social workers identify with mental health practice, it is not surprising that their top 10 training needs were focused on working directly with crime survivors. Perhaps to make up for the lack of academic training, the

number one request was for crisis intervention training with crime victims. Table 4 displays the 15 most often requested topics for additional continuing education training.

The social work education survey was sent to all 27 accredited bachelor of social work (BSW) programs and the 6 master of social work (MSW) programs in Texas. The survey yielded information on the extent to which content on victim assistance services had been incorporated into the required curriculum or offered through specialized electives. Additionally, faculty with practice, teaching, and research expertise in the victim assistance area and field placement opportunities for students were identified.

A total of 29 programs—23 BSW and 6 MSW—responded to the survey. They provided information on 52 courses; 11 were MSW level, 35 were BSW level, and 6 were cross-listed for both undergraduate and graduate students. Only 5 of the MSW courses were required, but 27 of the BSW courses were required. Victim assistance content seemed to be

evenly distributed among required courses in introduction to social work, human behavior and the social environment, social work methods or practice, and policy. Elective courses tended to be in criminology and domestic and family violence.

Required curriculum content courses were more likely to cover the psychological, social, and emotional impact of crime; policy issues such as the Victims of Crime Act and the Violence Against Women Act; crisis intervention; culturally sensitive practice; the impact of race, ethnicity, and gender; and perpetrator dynamics. They were less likely to address victim impact statements, victim restitution programs, victim-offender mediation, identification and screening techniques, death notification, and secondary trauma. Some of these issues may be considered more appropriate for elective courses or on-the-job training through field placements.

All but five of the responding programs indicated they had arranged internships for students in the victim assistance field. These field placements were in local police departments, prosecutors’ offices,

The continuing education workshop was conceived as a 60- to 90-minute program that could be delivered during local NASW branch meetings.

sexual assault programs, adult protective services, and local domestic violence agencies. Eight programs offered scholarships to students interested in the victim assistance field. Not all programs had faculty with victim assistance expertise; the 16 faculty members identified represented only 11 programs.

Findings from the education survey confirm that although social work faculties are aware of the opportunities for professional development of students in the victim assistance field, they may need additional resources to include more classroom content on crime victims and victim assistance. The limited number of faculty with expertise in this area severely limits the opportunity for its inclusion in the classroom. Providing schools with classroom curriculum materials may be an important step toward remedying this situation.

Articles for Professional Journals

To ensure that the project's work was a permanent part of the social work literature, the project developed and submitted for publication at least two manuscripts to professional social work journals.⁸ Additionally, a policy statement on crime victim assistance was published in *Social Work Speaks, Seventh Edition*,⁹ NASW's official publication on social policy positions and statements, which is widely distributed to NASW members and policy classes in professional schools of social work.

Objective 2: Provide Introductory Training to Social Workers on Crime Victims' Rights and Services

The second objective focused on providing continuing education training to social workers in the field and designing materials to educate future social workers in the classroom. The continuing education workshop to educate social workers about the impact of violent crime and crime victims' rights and services was conceived as a 60- to 90-minute program that could be delivered during local NASW branch meetings.

Workshop Curriculum

The workshop curriculum included information on the prevalence of violent crime, the history of the victim assistance field, federal and state laws that encompass crime victims' rights, crime victim compensation, victim impact statements, the role of victim assistance advocates, victim reactions to crime, and an overview of intervention issues. Trainer and participant manuals and standardized evaluation forms for both participants and trainers were developed.

The curriculum was pilot tested at the local Denton, Texas, NASW branch, the November 2000 NASW national conference in Baltimore, and state conferences in Alaska, Florida, Missouri, and Texas. The project also received feedback on the curriculum and the project itself at the opening plenary session of the Missouri Victims Assistance Association conference in March 2001.

Trainers

To conduct the workshop, volunteer trainers were recruited through project advisory committee members, the practitioner survey, and Web site and newsletter notices. Preference was given to

individuals who were working in the victim assistance field. The goal was to find a social worker with victim assistance experience from each local NASW Texas branch. Although many people were interested in becoming trainers, not all the social workers had the necessary experience. It sometimes was more helpful to send a social worker from another community to conduct the training and discuss sensitive issues. If a trainer was not from a local victim assistance service provider, representatives from local providers were invited to attend the training. Trainers were given a small honorarium for their time.

Train-the-Trainer Sessions

Nearly 100 volunteers attended 5 train-the-trainer sessions conducted by project staff. Each volunteer was given a trainer's manual, participant manual, evaluation forms, and additional brochures and pamphlets from statewide victim assistance organizations. The participant manual included the workshop agenda, its goal and objectives, and information on victims' general reactions to crime, crisis intervention issues, services provided by victim assistance programs, victims' resiliency, violent crime and special populations, crime victims' rights, and state and national organizations' Web sites and phone numbers. Pamphlet topics included crime victim compensation, protective orders, sexual assault and domestic violence, and state and local resources.

Trainings were certified for continuing education units and delivered in 70 NASW local branches in 5 states. An overwhelming majority—80 percent—of participants at all training sites felt the workshop information would be helpful in their work. Respondents identified services and resources for crime victims, crime victims' rights, and crime victim compensation as the top three areas of

newly learned information. They also learned about victim impact statements, the emotional impact of crime and victims' responses, and working with the criminal justice system. Several participants noted that they did not know violent crime included domestic violence. Respondents also mentioned the role of victim advocates and the VINE (Victim Information Notification Everyday) automated hotline service.

Evaluations

A review of more than 300 workshop evaluations showed that as a result of the training, 86 percent of participants now are able to identify rights of crime victims, 83 percent can describe the emotional impact of violent crime on individuals and their families, 75 percent can describe services to crime victims, and 86 percent understand the role of victim impact statements. Additionally, 92 percent said the handouts were useful, and 86 percent said they would recommend the training to other social workers.

Participants said additional training was needed on topics such as clinically oriented skill building, crisis intervention, domestic violence, safety planning, forensic interviewing, working with child victims of crime, and working with victims of clergy abuse.

Volunteer trainers felt their communities benefited from the workshop. When asked how it will help participants assist crime victims, trainer comments included the following:

- “Participants will now be much better prepared to assist crime victims, understand their needs, and have referral information at their fingertips.”

- “Our court system [tribal] currently has no victim statement restorative justice program. This is groundbreaking information I could share as a change agent so victims could be heard.”

Trainers also recommended that the curriculum be shared with a diverse group, including students in social work classes, social service providers, medical personnel in hospital emergency rooms and local health departments, and criminal justice professionals (e.g., law enforcement and juvenile justice workers), and that volunteer training be conducted for advocates in crisis centers, workers in psychiatric hospitals and other mental health facilities, teachers, and those who provide services to people with disabilities and the elderly. Several trainers noted that the trainings would be appropriate for the general public. All trainers said they would be willing to conduct the workshop again.

The only significant problem identified by workshop trainers and participants was the time limitation. Several workshops extended their time by nearly an hour because of the enthusiastic response of the participants and the quality of the discussions. As a result of this consistent feedback, the timeframe for the training was expanded to 2–3 hours (from its original 1–1½ hours), depending on whether the trainer includes a viewing of the videotape *New Directions from the Field: Victims' Rights and Services for the 21st Century*.¹⁰

Social Work Classroom Discussion Guide

The workshop curriculum focused on enhancing the knowledge and skills of practicing social workers; the discussion guide, which addressed the videotape *New Directions from the Field: Victims'*

Rights and Services for the 21st Century, was aimed at social work students. This 20-minute video reviews the current state of the victim assistance field, including the rights of crime victims, access to services, and continuing education and training. The discussion guide contains general questions to spark classroom dialog and specific questions for each of the video's three segments. The discussion guide also has an approximate script of the video so that the instructor can easily find specific scenes on the video.

The guide was developed with the help of focus groups of victim assistance professionals working in the field and social work educators and graduate students with experience in the victim assistance field. It was pilot-tested by a diverse group of social work educators during a curriculum development workshop at a Council on Social Work Education annual program meeting in 2001. The video is considered appropriate for viewing in both undergraduate and graduate foundation social work courses that include policy and direct practice.

The introductory workshop curriculum, *New Directions from the Field* videotape and discussion guide, and this OVC bulletin will be packaged as a crime victim assistance curriculum kit and disseminated to all accredited undergraduate and graduate schools of social work throughout the Nation.

Objective 3: Develop Links Between Professional Social Work and Victim Assistance Organizations

Organizational Links

Links among NASW and victim assistance organizations were developed on both state and local levels. Through statewide project advisory committees, the NASW chapters made contact with

Workshops that included local victim assistance advocates were more successful than those that did not involve them.

their state attorneys general, crime victim compensation programs, coalitions against domestic violence and sexual assault, state police, Mothers Against Drunk Driving chapters, and departments of criminal justice. These links led to the development of training programs and support for policy and legislative issues and provided access to additional written materials for dissemination at workshops. In states where links already existed, the project asked for social workers in the victim assistance field to work on a mutual project with their professional membership association.

At the local level, links were made by NASW branches with local crime victim service providers. Staff from domestic violence shelters, sexual assault programs, police departments, and prosecutors' offices participated in the trainings and brought materials on victim services they provided. Workshops that included local victim assistance advocates were more successful than those that did not involve them.

Texas Crime Victim Assistance Social Work Directory

In the practitioner survey discussed earlier, more than 350 social workers in 118 communities said they provided services to crime victims. Contact information for these social workers and information about their areas of expertise were included in the *Texas Crime Victim Assistance Social Work Directory*. This directory provided local victim assistance programs

with referral information for crime victims who need additional counseling. It also encouraged links among social work education and victim assistance programs and organizations. The directory contained information about Texas social work degree programs, including course content on victim assistance, field placement availability, and faculty members with expertise in the field. The directory was made available online at the NASW Texas chapter Web site (it is no longer available), announced in various victim assistance publications, and distributed at the state victim assistance academy training. Although the directory could foster links at the local level, limited resources did not allow the researchers to clarify or validate the information submitted. Additionally, the cost involved in collecting and verifying information precluded the researchers from recommending that the directory be duplicated by the replication sites.

Objective 4: Replicate the Project With Other NASW Chapters

Because the project was deemed successful in Texas, it was important to test whether it could be replicated in other NASW chapters. In the second and third years of the project, requests for proposals were disseminated to all NASW state chapter executive directors and presidents. Three members of the Texas advisory committee served on a replication site selection committee. Applications were ranked according to the ability of the chapter to address the project objectives. Based on the rankings, the New York State and Florida chapters were selected in year 2 and North Carolina and Alaska were selected in year 3. Each chapter was given a replication grant of \$7,500 to \$10,000 to help implement the project. Both the Florida and New York chapters are large and have well-

developed organizational structures and resources. The North Carolina and Alaska chapters are smaller, which enabled the project to be tested in more rural states.

A replication guide was developed and distributed to assist the four chapters in implementing the project. The guide addressed the project's objectives, including how to identify volunteer trainers, revise training materials for use in different states, increase professional awareness of the victim assistance field, link with state agencies and organizations, and develop recommendations regarding potential state advisory members and projects.

Each replication site adapted the project to its unique needs. In Florida, for example, the workshop was coupled with state-mandated continuing education on domestic violence to maximize attendance. In Alaska, a statewide teleconference was held to reach social workers who practice in rural and remote areas, and several trainings in rural and remote areas were open to the general community. The New York chapter was able to offer the workshop twice for each local NASW branch.

Both New York and Alaska developed special editions of their newsletters based on the Texas special 8-page insert. The New York edition included a quiz that could be counted toward continuing education credit. The newsletter was widely distributed, including at Career Day of the University at Albany, State University of New York. New York and Alaska also developed Web pages about the project that included the content of the special edition newsletter, links to other victim assistance resources, a list of project advisory committee members and trainers, and local training dates and times. State advisory committees were

developed in North Carolina and New York. As a result of the project, the New York State chapter planned to offer additional workshops on therapeutic interventions for work with trauma survivors and how to develop safety plans.

Replication kits were sent to all NASW chapters to encourage them to implement the project. The kits included the replication guide, workshop curriculum, and *New Directions from the Field* videotape and discussion guide.

Next Steps and Recommendations

The Victims of Crime: A Social Work Response project is an important first step in developing collaborative relationships between the profession of social work and the victim assistance field. Additional activities undertaken at the national, state, and local levels can continue to build on those collaborations. The chapter replication kits and the social work continuing education curriculum kits provide the professional associations and social work educators with tested materials that will increase the knowledge of social workers who are practicing in the field and those who are receiving their academic preparation in the classroom. To encourage the continued training of professional social workers, the Office for Victims of Crime is making available free training on how to use the materials through its Training and Technical Assistance Center (TTAC). TTAC will pay expenses for a trainer to provide the training or conduct train-the-trainer sessions. (See potential next steps for the social work profession and the victim assistance field under “Recommendations for the Social Work Profession” and “Recommendations for the Victim Assistance Field.”)

Recommendations for the Social Work Profession

- Based on the topics identified through workshop evaluations and the continuing education needs assessment, National Association of Social Workers (NASW) chapters should consider providing followup workshops on clinical skills for working with crime victims. These workshops should be available at local trainings and state conferences.
- Victim assistance professionals who are NASW members can work with their local and state chapter leadership to share their expertise through collaborative projects.
- NASW and other social work associations should continue to raise awareness of the importance of the victim assistance field by publishing articles in professional newsletters and giving presentations at local, state, and national conferences.
- NASW and other social work associations can spotlight victim assistance as an emerging field of practice and include it in public relations materials that explain the diversity of social work practice.
- Undergraduate and graduate social work programs should continue to recognize the wealth of opportunities for practice that the victim assistance field has to offer and develop ways to expose social work students to this option for professional practice.
- Social work educators can develop course content and assignments that integrate competencies specific to victim assistance into the social work curriculum. The impact of crimes against people of color, for example, can be added to cultural diversity courses.
- Elective courses in victim assistance could be offered in social work programs to help students learn the specific competencies necessary for practice in the field.
- To heighten exposure to the victim assistance field among social work students, social work textbooks, particularly introductory ones, can highlight the field and its contributions.
- Social work educators can invite victim assistance professionals into the classroom for guest lectures and other special presentations to make opportunities for practice in this field come alive. Law enforcement agencies and prosecutors’ offices should be approached to develop field opportunities for students.

Recommendations for the Victim Assistance Field

- The victim assistance field should consider recruiting professional social workers. Recruitment techniques include placing personnel ads in social work publications, exhibiting at continuing education conferences for social workers, attending student career fairs, and linking with local universities and colleges to offer field placement internships to undergraduate and graduate students.
- Because of the high percentage of crime victims from communities of color and the emphasis that social work education places on cultural competency, social workers of color should be particularly encouraged to enter the field.
- Representatives of the victim assistance field can present workshops at local, state, and national continuing education conferences for social workers that focus on specific competencies needed for work in the field.

Conclusion

The Victims of Crime: A Social Work Response: Building Skills To Strengthen Survivors project enhanced professional social workers' capacity to respond to adult victims of violent crime. The project raised awareness of the rights of and services available to crime victims among more than 29,000 NASW members in Alaska, Florida, New York, North Carolina, and Texas. Professional social workers received information about crime victim assistance through newsletters, Web sites, and direct training.

The profession of social work and the victim assistance field share much in common, including the knowledge, skills, abilities, and values necessary to assist and empower vulnerable people. According to seasoned victim assistance workers, the field is professionally challenging, stimulating, rewarding, and satisfying. Social workers whose specialties range from clinical to community practice will find this

a field that uses their talents to facilitate individual, group, organizational, systemic, and community change.

The impact of seeing the cruelty that some human beings can inflict on others, however, should not be understated and is a contributing factor to the secondary trauma experienced by staff and volunteers. Although the field may not be appropriate for everyone, many professional social workers may find a career in victim assistance the right fit for them.

For More Information

For more information on this topic and its relationship to the victim assistance field, please contact

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For copies of this bulletin and other OVC publications and information on additional victim-related resources, please contact

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