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RESEARCH AT THE
VICTIM SERVICES AGENCY
Available Reports

Victim Services Agency
2 Lafayette Street
New York, New York 10007
June, 1983

The Victim Services Agency (VSA) is a division of the Metropolitan Assistance Corporation, a not-for-profit corporation, that works to reduce the inconvenience, cost and trauma experienced by crime victims. The Agency, started by Mayor Koch in 1978, evolved out of the Victim/Witness Assistance Project (V/WAP) of the Vera Institute of Justice. Its funds come from a variety of government and private sources.

VSA provides free services to victims of all types of crime. In addition to a 24-hour hotline, the agency operates units in four criminal courts, three family courts and eight neighborhood locations. Trained counselors at these offices provide crisis intervention, counseling, criminal justice information, social service referrals, lock repair and replacement and help with emergency food, shelter and transportation. VSA also operates special programs for the elderly, battered women, rape victims and the families of homicide victims.

VSA has conducted several evaluations of agency projects and studies on issues relating to victimization. The following document provides the names and short summaries of research reports available from VSA. The reader will note that some of the studies listed were conducted before 1978, when V/WAP was part of the Vera Institute of Justice.

A fee for the research reports must be charged to cover the costs of reproduction, and mailing. Should you wish copies, please send a check to the Victim Services Agency, 2 Lafayette Street, New York, N.Y. 10007.

RESEARCH REPORTS

(1) AN IMPACT EVALUATION OF THE VICTIM/WITNESS ASSISTANCE PROJECT'S APPEARANCE MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

December 19, 1975
Vera Institute of Justice
45 pages
Cost: \$4.00 per copy

This report describes the impact of improved witness notification procedures introduced by the Victim/Witness Assistance Project (V/WAP) on attendance rates of civilian prosecution witnesses in Brooklyn Criminal Court. The report also examines V/WAP's impact on case outcomes that was expected to result from increased witness attendance and from the feedback of information about witnesses to prosecutors (whether witnesses had been notified and whether they were expected to attend court).

The report found that civilian witness attendance at court hearings affected court outcomes. When witnesses were present in court, guilty pleas increased and cases were much more likely to be sent to the Grand Jury; dismissals and continuances declined. The report also found that V/WAP achieved a modest increase in court attendance of civilian witnesses at the first scheduled court date after arraignment, and that as a result, more cases were disposed at that stage than had been previously. The report recommended that the Project direct more resources towards reducing a "disturbingly high" level of non-attendance among civilian witnesses.

(2) IMPACT EVALUATION OF THE VICTIM/WITNESS ASSISTANCE PROJECT'S APPEARANCE MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

May 20, 1976
Vera Institute of Justice
35 pages
Cost: \$3.50 per copy

This report examines the impact of the Victim/Witness Assistance Project (V/WAP) on (a) reducing the number of times police and civilian prosecution witnesses had to appear in court, (b) increasing the court attendance rate of civilian witnesses whose presence was needed by the prosecutor, and (c) reducing continuances and dismissals resulting from the failure of civilian witnesses to attend court when required by the prosecutor.

Results indicated that V/WAP's telephone standby procedure was highly successful in saving trips to court for both civilian witnesses and police officers. But, V/WAP did not have the same success in increasing civilian attendance in court. The report shows that there was a marginal improvement in civilian witness court attendance at the first scheduled court date after arraignment as a result of the comprehensive witness notification system V/WAP introduced. But this advantage was lost by the next court date. Not surprisingly, therefore, V/WAP also had no success in reducing continuances and dismissals resulting from witness absence.

(3) AN EVALUATION OF THE VICTIM/WITNESS ASSISTANCE PROJECT'S COURT-BASED SERVICES

November 18, 1976

Vera Institute of Justice

Adina Even-Zohar, Victor Russell, Carmen Reyes, and Robert Davis

17 pages

Cost: \$3.50 per copy

This report examines four of the services provided by the Victim/Witness Assistance Project (V/WAP) to crime victims in Brooklyn Criminal Court: the victim/witness reception center (which provides a secure waiting area for victims and witnesses); the children's center (a daycare facility); a transportation van (which provides rides to the elderly, handicapped, or others having difficulty getting to court); and the service counselor (who provides counseling and referrals to other social service agencies). Evaluation results included the following:

- V/WAP was reaching only a small proportion of persons eligible for its services.
- Service users tended to rate the service and staff very highly.
- Most users would have had difficulty finding alternative ways of meeting the needs addressed by these services.
- The services did not seem to significantly influence users' attitudes towards the court or their willingness to attend court.

- (4) SATURATION STUDY: VICTIM/WITNESS ASSISTANCE PROJECT
February 15, 1977
Vera Institute of Justice
Frances Kunreuther and Robert C. Davis
7 pages
Cost: \$1.00 per copy

This study describes the impact on witness attendance and court outcomes of intensified efforts to notify witnesses of court dates and to obtain information for prosecutors on witnesses' willingness to attend court. It also provides information on the likelihood of contacting witnesses by phone at different times of day and the probability of reaching witnesses on successive phone calls.

The experiment was conceived in response to evaluation results that indicated V/WAP's improved notification system had not reduced witness absence from court proceedings. There had always been a substantial group of witnesses with whom the project was unable to establish personal contact. It was hypothesized that if this group of witnesses could be contacted, it would still be possible to realize an increase in witness attendance.

The results of the experiment indicated that although significantly more witnesses were contacted, no commensurate improvement in witness attendance occurred. Furthermore, there was no evidence (in terms of decreased adjournments or increased dismissals) that prosecutors used the additional information provided concerning witnesses who were unwilling to cooperate with the court. The report concludes that the court system is failing to offer civilian witnesses enough in terms of 'results' to encourage their participation.

- (5) PROVIDING INFORMATION ABOUT WITNESSES: THE EFFECTS ON CASE PROCESSING DECISIONS IN BROOKLYN CRIMINAL COURT
July, 1979
Vera Institute of Justice
Robert C. Davis, Victor Russell, and David Tichane
43 pages
Cost: \$4.00 per copy

This report analyzes the effects of the provision of three kinds of information about prosecution witnesses by the Victim/Witness Assistance Project to officials in Brooklyn Criminal Court. The provision of each kind of information was intended to have a different effect. Information provided to courtroom prosecutors about the willingness of absent witnesses to cooperate was intended to enable prosecutors to determine what course of action to follow in these cases and to encourage them to seek continuances in cases in which absent witnesses remained interested in prosecution. Information provided to an administrator in the District Attorney's Office about cases with chronically uncooperative

witnesses was intended to hasten dispositions in these cases, which otherwise often proceeded through numerous, needless continuances. Finally, information provided to prosecutors and court officers about the duty schedules of police witnesses was intended to reduce instances in which continuances were scheduled on dates when police officers were unavailable to attend court. The paper attempts to illustrate how and why the provision of each type of information affected decisions made by court officials in individual cases, based upon an understanding of the dynamics of decision making in the court.

(6) MEDIATION AND ARBITRATION AS ALTERNATIVES TO PROSECUTION
IN FELONY ARREST CASES: AN EVALUATION OF THE BROOKLYN
DISPUTE RESOLUTION CENTER (FIRST YEAR)

March, 1980

Vera Institute of Justice in cooperation with the Victim Services Agency
Robert C. Davis, Martha Tichane, and Deborah Grayson

117 pages

Available from the Vera Institute of Justice, 275 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10016, Telephone: (212) 986-6910

This report describes the results of an evaluation of an experimental project which mediated felony class offenses that occurred between victims and offenders who knew each other. All project cases came from custodial arrests which were screened for project eligibility by prosecutors, judges, and defense attorneys. The evaluation employed an experimental design in which cases approved for diversion to mediation by the screening prosecutor were randomly assigned to either mediation or criminal court prosecution. The evaluation examined (a) the case screening process (which types of cases were diverted to mediation and which were not), (b) the dynamics of mediation sessions, (c) perceptions of the adjudication process of disputants whose cases were handled in mediation compared to disputants whose cases were handled in the traditional manner in criminal court, and (d) recidivism in cases referred to mediation compared to cases referred to the court for prosecution.

- (7) THE ROLE OF THE COMPLAINING WITNESS IN AN URBAN CRIMINAL COURT
July, 1980
Robert C. Davis, Victor Russell, and Frances Kunreuther
Vera Institute of Justice/Victim Services Agency
116 pages
Cost: \$8.00 per copy

This report examines the role of complaining witnesses in the criminal court adjudication process. Set against a background of how decisions are reached within the court, the report examines (a) the degree to which complaining witnesses are allowed to participate in the adjudication process, (b) how the adjudication process affects the perceptions of complainants and their willingness to cooperate with the prosecutor, and (c) whether complainants' withholding of cooperation increased case deterioration and court delay. The report argues that these issues must be analyzed separately in stranger-to-stranger cases versus cases in which complainants and defendants are acquainted.

- (8) ADMINISTERING RESTITUTION PAYMENTS IN BROOKLYN AND BRONX CRIMINAL COURTS: A REPORT ON ACTIVITIES OF THE VICTIM SERVICES AGENCY
October, 1980
Victim Services Agency
Robert C. Davis, Susan Schraga, Jan Chytilo, and Lindley Huey
63 pages
Cost: \$4.75 per copy

This report describes the results of an evaluation of a program (operated by the Victim Services Agency) which administers restitution payments made by offenders to victims in Brooklyn and Bronx Criminal Courts. The program was begun in an effort (a) to increase offenders' compliance with court-ordered restitution, and (b) to increase the willingness of judges to order restitution payments. The evaluation examined the program's success in obtaining offenders' compliance with restitution orders; surveyed the attitudes of victims, offenders, and court official toward the program's activities; and assessed the impact of the program on judges' willingness to order restitution. In addition, data collected for the evaluation were used to develop a model predicting the likelihood of offenders' compliance with restitution orders, based upon their community ties, their criminal records, the length of time they were given to pay, the amount of the restitution award, and the experience of the judge in ordering restitution.

(9) FIRST YEAR EVALUATION OF THE VICTIM INVOLVEMENT PROJECT

October, 1980

Victim Services Agency

Robert C. Davis, Martha Tichane, and Elizabeth Connick

106 pages

Cost: \$8.25 per copy

The Victim Involvement Project (VIP) was conceived in response to research findings (reported by Davis, Russell, and Kunreuther, 1980) which showed that victims were often ignored by criminal court officials. The goals of the project were (a) to encourage the prompt dismissal of cases in which the victim was unwilling to cooperate with the prosecutor, (b) to induce case outcomes more reflective of the interests of victims who did want to prosecute, and (c) to reduce crime victims' disaffection with the court system. The project aimed to give victims greater involvement in decisions made about their cases through the creation of a spokesperson for victims. The spokesperson presented victims' interests to the prosecutor and assisted victims in negotiating the court process. Prosecutors, as well as victims, were expected to benefit from the project through VIP's provision of information concerning the facts of the case and the victims' willingness to cooperate.

The first year evaluation of VIP revealed that VIP did much to humanize the court process for victims through explanation of the court process to victims and assistance provided to victims in court. Further, VIP increased orders of restitution and the use of judicial admonishments (orders issued by the judge that advised the defendant to stay away from the victim). Still, overall, VIP's victims were not significantly more satisfied with their case outcomes or with the court system than were other victims. Furthermore, the provision of information concerning the facts of cases and victims' willingness to cooperate had no apparent impact on the rate or type of case dispositions.

(10) EVALUATION OF CASE FOLLOW-UP AND ENFORCEMENT ACTIVITIES
BY THE BROOKLYN DISPUTE CENTER

December, 1980

Victim Services Agency

Robert C. Davis, Jan Chytilo and Susan Schraga

20 pages

Cost: \$2.50 per copy

Mediation is becoming increasingly popular as an alternative to court processing of minor criminal and civil matters involving acquaintances. In Brooklyn, the Victim Services Agency and the Institute for Mediation and Conflict Resolution established the Brooklyn Dispute Center in 1977. The Center's purpose was to mediate offenses between acquaintances in lieu of prosecution in Brooklyn Criminal Court.

A first year evaluation of the Center (Davis, Tichane and Grayson, 1980) found that most disputants were satisfied with the handling of their cases in mediation and that, in general, recidivism following mediation was low. But the study also showed that certain types of mediated cases had a high rate of recidivism and that violations of mediation agreements were frequently not reported to the Brooklyn Dispute Center.

In response to this problem, an experiment was conducted in which disputants in 210 randomly-selected mediated cases were contacted several weeks after the mediation session. These disputants were asked if the agreement had been violated and, if so, enforcement procedures were begun. In addition, 191 cases were randomly assigned to a control (no follow-up) condition. The follow-up procedure, did not significantly increase the number of violations that were brought to the attention of Dispute Center staff, nor did it significantly reduce the continuation of problems between disputants.

(11) CASE DISPOSITION AND RECIDIVISM IN PRIOR RELATIONSHIP
CASES IN THE BROOKLYN COURT SYSTEM

March 17, 1981

Victim Services Agency

Elizabeth Connick and Robert C. Davis

52 pages

Cost: \$4.75 per copy

This research was performed as a subcontract to the Institute for Social Analysis in its study of the criminal courts' response to non-stranger violence. The research had two foci. First, combining data from previous VSA studies of Brooklyn Criminal Court with new data collected from Brooklyn Supreme Court yielded a system-wide view of the processing of prior relationship and stranger-to-stranger robbery and assault cases. The study examined how and at what stages the different cases are disposed, and how satisfied victims in the two types of cases are with the way their cases are handled. The second part of the research involved an examination of the recurrence of problems between disputants who were interviewed two and a half years earlier for the Vera/VSA evaluation of the Brooklyn Dispute Resolution Center (Davis, Tichane, and Grayson, 1980). Based on new interviews with disputants and rearrest data collected, the study concluded that continued hostilities between disputants were exceptional, regardless of whether their cases were mediated or disposed in criminal court.

These data, along with data from criminal courts in Charlotte, North Carolina, Los Angeles, California, and Minneapolis, Minnesota are presented in the report Non-Stranger Violence: The Criminal Courts' Response, by Barbara E. Smith, 1982. The report is available from the Government Printing Office in Washington, D.C.

(12) VICTIMS AND HELPERS: REACTIONS TO CRIME

February, 1982

Victim Services Agency

Kenneth Friedman, Helen Bischoff, Robert Davis, and Andresa Person

292 pages

Cost: \$20.00 per copy

The purpose of this study was to investigate (a) the problems victims face as a result of crime, (b) the sources of aid available to crime victims, (c) the extent to which victims use informal social supports rather than formal assistance programs, (d) victims' knowledge of formal assistance programs, and (e) the consequences of victims' choices for themselves and their supporters. The data were derived from interviews with 274 crime victims, four-month follow-up interviews with 182 of the same victims, and 152 interviews with supporters named by the victims. Major findings of the study were:

- The most common problems, reported by three-quarters of the victims, were psychological, including fear, anxiety, nervousness, self-blame, anger, and shame.
- Although crime-related problems had declined in severity four months after the incidents, half the victims continued to have problems.
- All but two of the 274 victims in the sample got some help to deal with their problems from friends, relatives, and neighbors. In providing aid, supporters suffered many of the psychological responses (increased fear and anxiety) that the victims endured. Eighty percent of the supporters reported experiencing some form of secondary or indirect victimization.
- Formal assistance agencies had a limited impact on helping crime victims since only one in five victims knew of such agencies.
- On all measures, victims who were indigent, from ethnic minorities, lived in the inner city, or had limited education, suffered more than other victims. They had more psychological and practical problems as a result of the victimization; problems persisted longer; they were less likely to get all the help they needed; and their helpers were particularly burdened by providing assistance.

The report concludes with a discussion of the programmatic implications of the findings and suggests new areas for research.

- (13) THE EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN WITH SERVICES FOR ABUSED SPOUSES
IN NEW YORK CITY
February, 1982
Victim Services Agency
Elizabeth Connick, Barbara Bryan, Deobrah Grayson, Andresa Person,
Jan Chytilo and Robert C. Davis
138 pages
Cost: \$15.00 per copy

This study examines the experiences of 112 battered women with a variety of services in New York City: the police; medical services; criminal court; family court; legal services; counseling; shelters; and public assistance. The report reviews contemporary theories on spouse abuse. It also describes the battered women interviewed and identifies several factors associated with women's decisions to leave abusive relationships. The report concludes with a variety of recommendations to improve the services available to battered women in New York City.

- (14) WITNESS INTIMIDATION: AN EXAMINATION OF THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE
SYSTEM'S RESPONSE TO THE PROBLEM
April 7, 1982
Victim Services Agency
Elizabeth Connick
121 pages
Cost: \$15.00 per copy

This study -- the first research conducted in the nation on witness intimidation -- examines the response of criminal justice officials to intimidation of witnesses involved in the Brooklyn court system. The report presents information the frequency and severity of intimidation; the criminal justice system's response; the impact of intimidation on the prosecution of cases; and the effectiveness of the criminal justice system's response in reducing recurring problems. The data were derived from interviews with 109 threatened witnesses from Brooklyn Criminal Court, 31 threatened witnesses from Brooklyn Supreme Court, and 13 threatened witnesses from Brooklyn Family Court. In addition, the report presents the perspectives on intimidation of 25 criminal justice officials from the three courts who were interviewed. The study concludes with a variety of recommendations to improve the criminal justice system's response to witness intimidation.

- (15) VICTIM'S OF JUVENILE CRIME: THEIR ROLE IN THE FAMILY COURT PROCESS
July, 1983
Victim Services Agency
Cost: \$15.00 per copy

This study examines the role of the victim in the processing of juvenile delinquency cases in family court. As background, the report summarizes the historical development of the family court and how cases proceed through the system. Secondly, based on interviews with 243 victims and 37 family court officials from two New York City family courts, the report describes the interactions between victims and the police and family court officials, and discusses the problems victims experience as a result of their cases. The following chapter of the report focuses upon the role of victims in case attrition. It examines the reasons why victims drop out of the court process and court officials' perceptions of victim-precipitated case attrition. The next chapter discusses four issues relating to victims in the family court process: inadequate communication between court officials and victims; case screening; the demands made by the court on victims; and victims' interests in case outcomes. The study concludes with a variety of recommendations aimed at increasing victims' satisfaction with the family court process and encouraging their cooperation in court cases.