The Complexities of Victim Research: *Implementation Lessons from the Victim Impact Evaluation of Nonprofit Victim Services in the STOP Program*.

Janine M. Zweig and Martha R. Burt

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s public awareness regarding violent crimes against women grew and many federal legislative changes resulted in increased funding for services for women (Bureau of Justice Assistance, 1993; Department of Justice, 1984; Harrell, Roehl, and Kapsak, 1988; Newmark, Harrell and Adams, 1995). In 1994, The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) was passed and included funding to states under the STOP Formula Grants Program. One of STOP's chief purposes is to "…develop and strengthen victim services in cases involving violent crimes against women." The long-term goal of the STOP Program is to effect institutionalized system change, such that victims encounter a positive and effective response from the criminal and civil justice systems, and from community agencies offering services and supports. As of October 2000, STOP funding has supported 3,444 distinct projects, many of which have received multiple years of funding, in the 50 states, the District of Columbia and five territories (Burt, Zweig, Andrews, Van Ness, Parikh, Uekert, & Harrell, 2001). Funding for the STOP program has totaled approximately $531 million. The passage of the Violence Against Women Act of 2000 ensures continued funding and growth for the STOP program.

Despite the increase in funding for victim service programs, little evaluation research addresses the impact on women of the services provided by such agencies (Garner & Fagan, 1997; Gordon, 1996; Koss, 1993). It is widely believed that studying victims of domestic violence and sexual assault is difficult at best and impossible at worst. While a number of evaluations have included program staff or agency representatives as respondents, few actually have tried to identify victims and interview them about their experiences. Of the few studies that examine women's reactions to services, most have had small samples and examined only one or two service modalities from one or two programs (Gordon, 1996; Sullivan et al., 1991, 1992, 1994).

Evaluations of federal funding programs such as STOP face a variety of challenges. Some challenges reflect the nature of the victim service programs and activities funded through STOP. This evaluation focused on the impact of private nonprofit victim service agency assistance on the women who receive it. The agencies under study vary greatly in size, configuration, complexity, stability, management style, professional training of staff, crisis orientation, array of services, crime focus (domestic violence, sexual assault, or both), and collaboration with other agencies serving the same women. At both federal and state levels, the STOP program offers only the sketchiest classification of services and activities eligible for funding. The breadth of possibilities means that each state can to some extent make its own decisions about what to fund, leading to a rich array of program offerings but none of the consistency of intervention over time and in different places that evaluation designs usually require. States also vary in their commitment to multi-year funding and the size of their subgrants, so some programs receive a significant and predictable amount of money over several years, while others receive very small amounts of money for one year only.

Other challenges stem from the nature of formula grant programs. Federal agencies have no real way to assure that states receiving formula grants and the programs and activities they fund will establish and maintain the data systems necessary to provide the basis for evaluation work. Lack of consistent data is the rule, even when states and funded programs have a contractual commitment to "cooperate with evaluation efforts" as in the case for STOP. In this evaluation we could not rely on agency records as a consistent source of evaluation data or even, as it turned out, to describe the universe of funded programs accurately for sampling purposes.

Nevertheless, the VAWA requires evaluation, and the Department of Justice (DOJ) is charged to provide it. From the beginning of the STOP program, the Violence Against Women Office (VAWO) and the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) in DOJ have supported evaluations to examine the implementation and impacts of STOP-funded programs (Burt et al., 1996, 1997a, 1998, 1999, 2000a, 2001). These include the National Evaluation conducted by the Urban Institute; purpose area evaluations conducted by the Institute for Law and Justice, the National Center for State Courts, the University of Arizona Tribal Law Program, and the American Bar Association; several evaluations of single programs; an Evaluation Guidebook for STOP grantees and subgrantees (Burt et al., 1997b); and the Victim Impact Evaluation by the Urban Institute (Burt, Zweig, Schlichter, & Andrews, 2000b). Of these, only two focus specifically on service outcomes for victims: the project conducted by the American Bar Association and the Victim Impact Evaluation. The American Bar Association project was limited to victim services based in criminal justice agencies and thus did not address issues related to nonprofit victim service programs.

The Victim Impact Evaluation, of which this report is a part, was designed to help fill the gaps identified above by focusing on nonprofit victim service agencies and by recruiting and interviewing women victims of violence who used these agencies. Tackling such a study has proved to be a challenge even for experienced evaluators. The purpose of this report is to document how we approached the design of the Victim Impact Evaluation based on our past experience studying violent crimes against women, and how that design needed to change over the course of the project. Even though both co-PI's have extensive experience working with (and in) private nonprofit victim service agencies, and had taken pains to structure our proposed approach to work for them, changes still proved necessary to accommodate the difficulties these agencies had in recruiting women victims of violence, as well as the time it took to cover all relevant topics in the subsequent interviews. We also would like to share the lessons we learned about doing this work in the interest of helping future projects avoid as many pitfalls as possible. This report describes our experiences during the Victim Impact Evaluation from the point of view of project staff. It is not a "research" report, as it does not include standard forms of data and analysis. Rather, it relies on the perceptions and understandings of researchers reflecting on their project experiences.

THE ORIGINAL DESIGN AND PROCEDURE

The original Victim Impact Evaluation had three hypotheses relating to program effects on women:

1. Women benefit from the services of private nonprofit victim service agencies;
2. The benefit is enhanced when those agencies work in collaboration with justice system and other relevant agencies in their community; and
3. State STOP administrators (those who distribute STOP funds within a state) can increase the level of collaboration within communities through funding requirements and technical supports.

Testing hypothesis 1 required interviewing women who had used STOP-funded private nonprofit victim service agencies *and* comparing them to women who faced the same circumstances of violent victimization but who did not use such services. To assure that we had some women who had used victim service agencies, some who had sought other help but not victim services, and some who had not sought help, our design called for recruiting women from different venues. These venues were victim service agencies and legal system agencies in the same community (police, prosecutor, and/or courts), and households (to get a sample of women who where not known in advance to have had victimization experiences, or to have sought help for them). We designated women recruited from agencies as the Help Seeker sample, and those recruited from households as the Community sample. Recruitment into the Help Seeker sample is described at length below. The Community sample was selected using random digit dialing (RDD), screening for women aged 18 to 35 in the victim service program catchment area.

Testing hypothesis 1 also required that we link service configurations with victim outcomes, which in turn required us to learn a good deal about the service offerings of STOP-funded programs. To be able to test hypotheses 2 and 3 we had to be sure that the women we recruited for interviews came from communities with significant variability in the level of collaboration among victim service and justice system agencies. Within states, we defined a "community" as the catchment area of a private nonprofit victim service program, which usually encompassed at least one city or county. We also needed variability in the extent to which state STOP agencies demanded and/or promoted collaboration as a condition of receiving funding. These requirements led to a design proposing hierarchical linear modeling as its analytic strategy, with women/victims nested in programs and communities, which in turn were nested in states.

Thus the original Victim Impact Evaluation design was a multi-level, multi-method structure. Levels of investigation were states, STOP-funded private nonprofit victim service agencies and their communities, and two samples of women—the Help Seeker and the Community samples. States were selected first. Resource constraints led us to the decision to restrict ourselves to relatively few states; the final number was eight. We used information from site visits[1] and consultations with experts to select states that appeared from official documents, interviews, and technical assistance contacts to have very different levels of emphasis on creating local collaborative structures to help victims. The states selected were Colorado, Illinois, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Texas, Vermont, Washington, and West Virginia.

Information about STOP-funded programs, their services, and their community linkages was collected second. It came from telephone interviews with program directors or the person in the program most knowledgeable about STOP-funded activities. With this information in hand we were able to select the programs to include in the phase of the project dealing with women's experiences with service receipt. We were aiming for five programs in each of the eight states (40 programs/communities in all). Selection procedures are described in more detail below.

The final phase of data collection involved telephone interviews with the Help Seeker and Community samples of women to learn about their experiences with services. In total, we

[1] Site visits were conducted as part of the National Evaluation of the STOP Violence Against Women Formula Grants Program.

hoped to have 1,800 completed Help Seeker interviews – 25 from victim service agencies and 20 from legal system agencies in each of the 40 communities (225 per state), and 1,200 completed Community interviews – 30 in each community (150 per state). This report focuses on issues encountered while recruiting and collecting data from STOP-funded victim service programs and their clients, the Help Seeker sample.

The Program Survey. The Program Survey adhered to the original design and was completed in spring 2000. The sample included 200 nonprofit victim service agencies that were nationally representative of all private nonprofit victim service agencies that had received STOP funds for direct services, but also had a concentration of programs in the eight focal states. The 200 agencies had to meet two criteria to be included—they had to have received at least two years of STOP funding, for a total of at least $10,000. These criteria were selected to assure that the activities funded by STOP would have been around for long enough, at a high enough level of intensity, to make it reasonable to expect some impact from them.

The sample of 200 included at least 10 subgrantees from each of the eight focal states,[2] with the remaining programs in the sample representing the range of STOP-funded programs in the rest of the country. Analysis of Program Survey data served three purposes. First, we were able to describe the service offerings of programs and how they collaborated with other agencies in their community. Second, we were able to test hypotheses (not listed above) that STOP funding increased the number and variety of victim services, increased new services, allowed victim service agencies to participate in more cross-agency interactions, and filled substantial gaps in services needed by victims; and that state STOP agency support for collaboration led to more multi-agency collaborative structures.[3] Third, we used the data from the eight focal states to select the 40 communities to include in the next stages of our design – the Help Seeker and the Community Surveys. Results from the Program Survey are documented in an earlier report (Burt et al., 2000b).

Selecting the Programs/Communities for the Help Seeker and Community Samples. In the original design, we proposed to include five communities from each of the eight states and interview relatively few women from each. We did this to maximize the diversity of program types supported by STOP, as well as to obtain a wide diversity in the community and state contexts in which these programs offered their services.

To choose the 40 communities, we examined the 90 completed program surveys from the eight focal states. We needed to select five programs/communities per state, and were looking for maximum diversity on the level of community-wide interagency collaboration within each state. Interviewers coded responses on program surveys on the level of communication, coordination, collaboration, and coordinated community responses described.[4] These ratings were combined to provide an overall rating of 1 to 5, with 1 representing a coordinated community response and 5 representing little or no coordination between agencies in the community.

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[2] A total of 90 agencies were interviewed from the eight states. To reach the goal of 10 agencies in Vermont, sampling requirements were relaxed as few programs could meet the $10,000 funding level.
[3] All of these hypotheses were supported.
[4] For a complete description of how the communities were rated see Burt et al., 2000b.

Our ideal set of five programs for any state would have been one at each rating level, from 1 to 5. Other desiderata for selecting programs within states were to assure a mix of domestic violence and sexual assault programs, and to select programs with enough clients to meet our recruitment needs. We ended up having to relax each of these criteria because the reality of programs within states sometimes meant we could not get our ideal mix.

Once we identified the five programs per state we thought we wanted, based on the criteria just described, we contacted them by phone, described the study, reminded them that they had participated in the program survey the previous year, and asked about their willingness to participate in the client phase. When one of our first choice agencies declined to participate, never returned phone calls, or did not have enough clients to fulfill recruitment goals, we substituted an agency from the remaining group that kept us closest to our original criteria. We were not able to get our top five agencies in any state. In several states we contacted all available agencies before getting five to agree, and in one state we only got four. Reasons agencies refused to participate included concerns about subjecting their clients to an intrusive survey about their experiences during crisis periods of their lives, concerns about the women's safety when taking the survey, concerns about our ability to protect the confidentiality of the women who participated, bad experiences with past evaluators that made them reluctant to be a part of another study, lack of interest in evaluation results, participation in other evaluations at the same time this one was being implemented, and lack of staff time to devote to the project despite any interest they may have had in participating.

Identifying the Legal System Partner Agency. Once a victim service program was recruited, decisions about whether to recruit women from police, civil court, prosecution, or other legal system locations were made separately for each community, depending on cooperation of the agencies involved and ease of sampling. Communities could also combine the legal system sampling points (e.g., including both the local police department and prosecutor's office) in order to reach their recruitment goals.

Recruitment Goals and Procedures. Recruitment goals were to sign up twice the number of women for the study as the desired number of completed surveys. Recruitment was set at double because women victims of violence move, hide, leave town and the state, and also may decide even after consenting to be interviewed that they do not want to do the interview once they are contacted. Based on other research trying to reach women victims of domestic violence or sexual assault, we were concerned that we would not be able to find women even after they had given their consent to be interviewed. We wanted to have enough women recruited that we could lose some and still make our desired sample size. Therefore, sites were asked to recruit 50 women from each nonprofit victim service program and 40 from each legal system agency.

Recruitment processes involved reviewing with women an informed consent document that provided a description of the study, the benefits and potential risks of participating, the confidentiality procedures, the stipend for participation, and their rights as participants in the study. Once a woman agreed to participate she was asked to provide her own contact information and contact information for up to three other people who she was comfortable having someone contact and who would likely know where she was if she were to move.

Prospective Recruitment. Recruitment for the Victim Impact Evaluation was *prospective*, starting on a specified date and attempting to recruit all women using or contacting the recruiting agencies until the quota was filled. One's choices in recruiting program clients are either this prospective approach, or searching agency files for former clients and attempting to contact them (retrospective recruiting). Prospective recruiting has a number of advantages that made us choose it. First, there are no sampling issues, or issues of stratifying by type of problem or service need, length of contact with the agency, recency of contact, or other potential characteristics of possible interviewees. One simply takes everyone who comes in. All agencies, however situated, can do this, can start on the same date, and can finish soon or late depending on their client flow. Second, one can get informed consent without having to recontact clients when the agency may not be in the habit of doing this or be willing to do it. Third, the woman's whereabouts are known very shortly before the interview is due to take place (an average of three weeks from recruitment to interview). The short time frame coupled with multiple contact points supplied by the woman herself increase the odds of finding her and completing the interview. Finally, and of great importance, prospective recruiting reduces recall and memory problems, hopefully leading to more accurate responses. In addition, women's descriptions of their experiences are less likely to be influenced by the reinterpretation that inevitably accompanies recovery from victimization, or to be affected by the perceptions of family and friends.

Agencies were to extend the opportunity to participate to every woman who used their program for three months from the recruitment start date — a period we calculated was enough time for agencies to recruit the target numbers of women, given their client flow. Systems were developed to assign women to appropriate recruitment agencies because some agencies worked together closely and/or victim service advocates who were housed in legal system agencies recruited for the legal system. Victim service programs that participated in the study were paid $200 stipends for their efforts. Women who completed surveys were paid $30.00 stipends.

State Coordinators. We hired a respected evaluator or victim advocate in each state to serve as a state coordinator for the Help Seeker sampling in that state. We felt this was necessary because a great deal of work was involved in assuring that the Help Seeker recruitment worked. State coordinators finalized program recruitment approaches, made arrangements with victim service and legal system agencies, visited them in person for a day or more to train them in recruiting procedures, established and helped maintain acceptable informed consent and privacy/confidentiality procedures, helped staff to identify opportunities in their service structures to recruit women and set up staff systems for recruiting, helped some communities select the legal system agency that would serve as their partner for the recruiting, kept in regular touch to encourage recruitment, collected and in many instances sought corrections or clarifications on the information on consent forms, and conveyed names and contact information to the interview firm conducting the survey. There is absolutely no way that all of this activity could have been carried out by two or three research staff operating long distance from Washington, DC. Further, we felt that a known and trusted local person would help to assure programs that participation in this research would not harm their clients in any way. Through the state coordinators we tried to follow many of the principles of collaborative research described in recent publications (Block, Engel, & Naureckas, 1999; Campbell, Dienemann, & Kub, 1999; Lennett & Colten, 1999; Levin, 1999; Urban & Bennett, 1999).

The state coordinators contributed immensely to the success of this project; without them, sample recruitment would have been vastly more difficult than it was, and our final sample would have been even less satisfactory. Once client recruitment was over, we conducted an extensive debriefing conference call with the eight state coordinators to get their perspectives on the challenges and barriers encountered during the Victim Impact Evaluation, their solutions to them, and implications for conducting victim research in general. Lessons learned and recommendations included later in this report incorporate the viewpoints these eight state coordinators, as well as those of Urban Institute researchers.

THE REVISED DESIGN AND PROCEDURE

The design we actually implemented for the Victim Impact Evaluation differed from what we proposed, for three reasons—small programs, slow (or no) recruitment, and interviews that took longer than we expected (or could afford).

Small Programs. Because some communities would not be able to recruit enough women for the study in the time period allowed (due to low anticipated client flow), we let some states include more than five sites in order to retain the goal of 225 completed surveys from Help Seekers in that state. Further, in one state most of the potential programs (those for which we had program surveys) declined to participate or never returned phone calls, leaving us with only four programs to include. Therefore, when recruitment began (approximately June 15th, 2001), 44 communities were participating in the study.[5]

Slow Recruitment. About one and a half months into recruiting it became clear that projects were not recruiting women as quickly as we had anticipated they would, or as they themselves had thought they could. On average, we expected — and had discussed with communities — that they would be able to recruit at least 30 women per community per month. All programs included had agreed that they could meet those recruitment goals with their client flow, or other arrangements had been made (as in Vermont) to lower the goals and include more programs. We anticipated that large programs would be able to recruit 90 women for the survey in a matter of a few weeks, and anticipated that smaller programs might need the whole three-month period to recruit 90 women altogether.

We were wrong. Halfway through the designated recruiting period, some sites had not recruited *any* women and only seven communities had recruited 30 or more women (i.e., at least a third of their overall goal). Size of community was hardly a factor in how quickly sites were able to recruit women. Instead, staff motivation to be a part of the study was the deciding factor . Some communities with large programs were recruiting few or no women and some with smaller programs were recruiting at a steady pace. It was clear, however, that three months would not be enough time although three months was what we had budgeted, and what Westat had planned on.

Lengthy Surveys. NIJ's request for proposals for this project required the researchers to address a broad array of issues that could only be covered through interviews with women. Our initial

[5] The number of sites per state were: 5 in IL, MA, WV, and PA; 6 in WA and TX; 4 in CO; and 8 in VT.

estimates for the time each survey would take to complete (32.5 minutes) were based more on budget constraints and the limits of tolerance we expected for lengthy telephone interviews. NIJ had a dollar limit ($800,000) for all parts of this three-year study that made it very difficult to squeeze all required issues into the budget constraint. As it was, just the data collection from women (the Help Seeker and Community interviewing, not including protocol development, pretesting, revision, or analysis, and initially not even including payment for respondents) took half of the available resources. As we did not have an existing instrument when we wrote the proposal, interview time could be only a guess. It turned out to be a bad one. The first version of the survey actually took about an hour and a half in pretests. Much work went into winnowing it down to 52 minutes, which was still almost twice as long per survey as the budget allowed. As time is money in survey work, the consequence was that we had to cut the number of interviews. Although we did get more money to enable us to pay women for completing interviews, we knew we would not get enough more money to collect the original number of interviews with the longer time to complete. The implications are to reduce the number of issues a study is required to cover, or increase the resources to allow for adequate interviewing time.

The Consequences. We had to make adjustments to our study design due to recruitment difficulties and because more time per survey on a fixed budget meant fewer surveys.[6] We discussed our options with our partner, Westat, Inc, our NIJ program manager, and our state coordinators. At this point we had some experience with the different programs, and could tell which ones had done little or no recruiting. We relied on the perceptions of state coordinators as to which sites might be able and willing to recruit the women needed and which would not. The combination of slow recruiting and longer interviews led to the decision to drop whole programs/ communities, rather than to have fewer women from each community. Therefore we dropped 16 communities that seemed to be experiencing the most difficulty or unwillingness to recruit women and retained 28 communities in the study.

We still had to reduce the number of completed surveys we would have per community, so we were also able to reduce the total number of women that programs would need to recruit. As an added bonus for the recruiting agencies, our response rate for completed interviews for women who had given consent was about 80 percent than the originally expected 50 percent, so we were able to reduce the target number for recruiting even further. Therefore, the new target number of completes was 35 per community: 20 from victim service programs and 15 from legal system partners. Recruiting goals changed to 33 women from victim service programs and 23 from legal system agencies (46 instead of the initial 90 recruits). We also extended the recruiting period from three months to four and a half months.

Even with this redesign and eliminating the weakest sites completely, many of the remaining sites still struggled to recruit the number of women we needed. Only 14 of the 28 communities that we kept in the study had at least 35 completed Help Seeker interviews by the end. Four communities had between 25 and 35 completed surveys, four communities had between 20 and 24 completed surveys and six had less than 20 completed surveys. Instead of 1,800 completed surveys from 40 communities we ended up with 900 completed surveys in 28 communities (plus

[6] Despite all efforts of this nature, the project required additional funding from NIJ and corporate support from Westat to obtain the data we collected.

58 completed surveys from the sites that were dropped). As a result, we only paid $200 to those victim service agencies whose staff had recruited at least 25 women for the study.

THE TROUBLES ENCOUNTERED

As is obvious from the foregoing, many sites in the study had difficulty recruiting women to be interviewed. The core difficulties were strongly associated with the basic nature of the agencies that receive funding under the STOP program. Nonprofit victim service agencies are often extremely fragile in a number of different ways. In many of these points of fragility they resemble other small nonprofit agencies. The nature of the work they do and their concern for the well-being of the vulnerable women they serve adds another dimension to the challenges of this type of study.

Even with the influx of STOP money, nonprofit victim service agencies often have infrastructures that are vulnerable to changes in the agency and to local crises, have overworked and underpaid staff, and are not well-equipped to do something outside the range of their normal activity. These agencies usually work with few resources and high stress. The sites in the Victim Impact Evaluation had little capacity to take on new tasks such as recruiting women for the study. Local crises and staff turnover sometimes made it impossible for the agencies to continue to recruit women for the study. In addition, some agencies had substantial turnover between the Program Survey and the Help Seeker recruitment, leaving little or no institutional memory regarding the evaluation. Without additional resources provided through the evaluation (which we could not supply within our own limited budget), it is challenging for these agencies to participate in studies such as the one described here. These constraints present a sometimes intimidating task for evaluators, and a significant challenge even for the agency (in this case NIJ) that is charged with purchasing evaluations that meet scientific standards.

Specifics

Low client flow was the primary difficulty for some of the communities in this study — the agencies simply did not encounter enough women to recruit. This was particularly true for the few sexual assault programs in the study; however, when these agencies did have women to recruit most agreed to participate.

For most agencies, however, the difficulties were not about low client flow, nor were they about client refusal. A number of other issues challenged the ability of these agencies to recruit:

- Many agencies included in the study faced problems typical of service providers in the domestic violence and sexual assault field in general. The basic issue of these agencies' fragility has just been described. These problems interfered with recruitment.
- Some agencies failed to reach recruitment goals because of procrastination. These staff had the best intentions to do the work, but the crisis nature of their day-to-day work prevented them from being able to make the study a priority, and no one took on the task of setting and maintaining a schedule.

- Some agencies resented being asked to do work for which they were not being paid (although they had agreed to do it and were given a stipend of $200). This is a common problem for victim service agencies around the country. These agencies are often asked to do unpaid work such as providing training to law enforcement, providing community education programs, or being part of a study of victim services. Because these agencies do not want to let rare opportunities pass them by, they are faced with the predicament of doing the work and not being paid or not addressing a need or a request in their community. Our study represented another instance in which agencies were asked to do something of value for free and felt compelled to participate.
- Some agency staff were reluctant to recruit women victims of violence because of concern about the women's vulnerability and fear that participating in the study would either place them at risk for further harm or retraumatize them. This concern was evident in victim service agencies more so than legal system agency partners, and occurred despite their awareness of the safety mechanisms that the evaluation study staff had established for women if they feared for their safety or if participating in the study upset them. The informed consent process told women of the risks of participating, indicated what the survey would be about so women knew what they would be asked, and described the benefits of participating. Upon contacting a respondent, the interviewer made sure that she was in a safe, private location before the interview began, told the woman to hang up if at any time they felt they were in jeopardy, and provided a toll-free number for the woman to call back if they wanted verification of the study or if they needed to terminate prematurely. In addition, women were given referrals to local services at the conclusion of the survey if they appeared upset or disturbed by the process. Indeed, our response rate indicates that women who were recruited for the study *wanted* to participate in it. Of the women recruited, 82 percent completed surveys. If agencies are truly working from an empowerment perspective then staff should be giving clients the option of participating and letting them choose for themselves. By not offering the option (i.e., by not being willing to ask women if they wanted to participate), agency staff have made the decision for the women rather than allowing them to make their own decisions.
- Some agency staff were not reluctant to recruit women in general, but were reluctant to recruit women in certain service situations such as initial meetings with clients or actual crisis moments. For example, no agency was willing to recruit during crisis calls and some staff were not willing to recruit during contacts at civil protection order hearings or while law enforcement responded to emergency calls. Staff felt these service situations should be focused on assisting the women and not on trying to fit in an informed consent process. We understood this concern and state coordinators worked with sites to incorporate recruitment into other service scenarios or develop ways that staff would feel comfortable recruiting women in more crisis-oriented situations. For example, staff might not recruit during the hearing for the civil protective order, but might recruit during follow-up meetings with the women they first meet in court.
- Some agency staff were simply unwilling to recruit women for the study although their agencies had agreed to be a part of the study. There were a number of reasons for this. Some did not see the value of the study and did not connect how participating in the study could help them and the services they provide. Other staff had participated in previous evaluations and had bad experiences. Their previous experiences colored their perspectives on this evaluation and made them less willing to cooperate. Some agency staff had low morale,

were burned out, overstretched, and underpaid. Recruiting women for the study was just one more thing to do along with too many other things to do. Still other agencies had staff that did not get along with each other, which adversely affected recruitment. For instance, if the staff who were to recruit women did not respect the supervisor who oversaw the project, they would choose not to do the recruitment or would do it reluctantly, lessening the chances of women agreeing to participate.

- Recruitment took place throughout the summer and early autumn—timing that overlapped with staff vacations. For these agencies that are normally understaffed, employee vacations represented another disruption in the flow of day-to-day work and made it impossible to take on the work of recruiting for the study.

IF WE WERE TO DO IT ALL AGAIN…THE LESSONS WE'VE LEARNED

Having presented what we intended to do and what happened in reality, we would like to offer insights gained throughout the study process that would certainly have increased our own success and may provide some useful suggestions for other researchers faced with the same challenges. Doing victim research is an incredibly complex process. But we were not inexperienced, nor were we naïve. We had worked in these types of agencies ourselves, and visited hundreds of them in the course of various research projects. We knew what they were up against, and tried to plan for it. But even after anticipating the pitfalls and barriers that might have been in our path, we found more that we had not anticipated. Below we describe what we consider to be lessons to take away from our study, drawing on the experiences of Urban Institute staff and of our eight state coordinators who spent the time in the trenches.

The Benefits of Using State Coordinators

We have already described all the work the state coordinators did to make this project as much of a success as it was. Their efforts were essential to the process. As we have detailed above, state coordinators were able to work closely with programs on site and over time, and to be available for troubleshooting and problem solving on a daily basis. We had eight of them, each working half time for four or five months with four to eight communities in their own states. Two of us located in Washington DC could never have duplicated the sheer volume of their work, let alone brought to it the familiarity with programs and staff that was critical to doing as well as we did. Without their help we would not have been able to overcome barriers we encountered with recruiting to reach the number of recruits that we did. Having a local presence in the state to contact staff and visit them face-to-face made the evaluation more real to the agency staff and served as a constant reminder to reach recruitment goals.

In addition to the ways that we did use state coordinators, we believe future studies could capitalize even further on their expertise and connections by bringing them into the process of site selection from the beginning. The state coordinators we were able to hire had strong connections with one or more of domestic violence and sexual assault coalitions in their state and the state STOP administrator. They had been involved in evaluation activities for one or more of these entities, and often had personal experience as program directors or other professional positions related to direct victim service. They knew their states, and programs in their states knew them. They could have helped us, and could help others, to understand the nature and capacities of all programs potentially eligible for an evaluation, and the challenges and advantages of selecting some rather than others. This knowledge could help an evaluator select a reasonably unbiased sample but still one that would work. The state coordinators had valuable information about the agencies in their state that we could not have known just based on agency responses to the Program Survey. They had some sense of the personalities within these agencies and how to work with them to increase the likelihood of cooperation. As we had many refusals from program directors *without* achieving much sense of the biases introduced by these refusals, the ultimate design could only have benefited from the fuller knowledge and access of our state coordinators.

Recruiting Sites

A number of lessons were learned and recommendations made about recruiting sites to participate in the study. First, evaluators may want to bring some larger body (e.g., a state coalition) that is effective with and trusted by programs in the state into the project from the beginning. This agency can assist in bringing visibility to the project, add credibility to the project from the local site perspective, elicit responsiveness from sites, and provide insight into choosing sites for the study (for both the Program Survey and the Help Seeker recruitment).

As there is some danger that involving coalitions might introduce some biases into sample selection, evaluators would have to take care not to let this happen. Coalitions might suggest only sites that represent the better organized and managed agencies in the state instead of representing the universe of agencies, and researchers might be tempted to take these suggestions, as it would make the immediate job easier. Or, the set of sites initially suggested by coalitions might not contain enough variation for a study such as ours in the extent to which sites coordinate with other agencies, as our design required. Thus it would be important for the researchers to work with the coalitions to learn as much as possible about all the programs, to reduce the likelihood of bias in final sample selection. Evaluators would need to work closely with coalition staff to maximize cooperation from sites while at the same time balancing cooperation with avoiding bias through rigorous methodologies and design elements.

Second, the connection that state coordinators had with sites might have given us the edge to convince them to participate. State coordinators on the job before final program selection occurred could visit candidate programs, work with directors and staff to assure full understanding of the project and agreement to cooperate at all levels (especially from those who would have to do the actual recruiting), and begin immediately to craft ways for agencies to fit recruitment into their service structures and daily activities. Some sites did not see how to fit the evaluation into their work or service structure without the help of the state coordinator. The continuity of the same contact person throughout the study would also be helpful to sites. State coordinators reported that agency staff felt an abrupt switch when the state coordinators took over contact with the sites from the Urban Institute staff who had made the initial recruitment contacts.

Third, to the extent possible, the agencies included in a sample should reflect the range of program size that actually exists in the state. It is important to include both larger and smaller agencies, urban, rural, and suburban agencies, just to be sure that they are represented in the sample, as victim experiences might be different across them. Bigger does not necessarily mean better when it comes to willingness or ability to recruit. Some of our smaller sites were more successful at reaching recruitment goals than the biggest sites. We did not think it was an option initially to gear the target recruitment numbers to the size of the agency, and we still don't. We might have met our recruitment goals this way (and we might not), but we certainly would not have had as good representation from smaller programs, and would not have had enough women in the sample from each program to be able to use program and community characteristics as contextual variables to help us understand the impact of victim services.

Fourth, the team of individuals identifying sites and contacting them to participate in the study should consider a number of critical factors:

- The individual personalities of people doing the project and agency issues that may come up throughout the course of the project and affect numbers recruited (although you cannot anticipate everything).
- The morale of agency staff.
- Whether the legal system partner has a positive working relationship with the victim service agency. If so, they were generally more cooperative and willing to recruit women for the study. However, a degree of cooperation is one important aspect of community coordination, so one would not want all sites to be highly coordinated.
- Whether the legal system partners (or advocates that are housed in legal system agencies) provide follow-up services. This is important for actually finding a time to initiate recruitment activities in this context. It was difficult for agencies to recruit women when they were only with them during the police response or their protective order hearing. If the legal system agency does not have a system to provide follow-up services, then researchers may not want to include them in the study. If they only provide assistance during crisis situations, then they will likely fail to reach recruitment goals.
- How best to approach the agency and get staff buy-in for the study. When we approached agencies to participate, we discussed the evaluation with the executive directors. However, it would also be helpful to discuss the evaluation with line staff and seek their approval too. Early state coordinator involvement would facilitate doing this. Because the line staff will likely be the ones to doing the actual recruiting, it is important to have their interest and support. Some staff who felt coerced to participate by their executive director resented the evaluation from the start. Evaluators may want to get permission from the executive director to talk with the whole staff about the project at once. Because they explain the study, and they also detail the actual steps of client recruitment, it may be useful at these early recruitment stages to use some of the materials we designed for training the sites, to show agency staff what participation would mean in very concrete terms (see Appendix A for examples of training materials used during the current study).
- Whether sites need to get approval to participate from their boards of directors. Many of our sites did need to get board approval. Therefore, evaluators may want to work with sites to engage all levels of the organization — the board, the directors, and the line staff — in order to have full buy-in and support for the project. This all takes time, and will have to be done with more programs than you eventually are able to recruit. But we think the investment will

pay off in the long run, by being able to include programs that have a firm commitment to fulfilling the terms of their agreement to participate.

- Whether other evaluations on issues related to victimization are going on/have been conducted in the same region. Sites may have already been approached or involved in an evaluation. For the Victim Impact Evaluation, some sites were not willing to participate in the study because they were already sites in other evaluations. Others hesitated due to bad experiences with past evaluators.
- The time it takes to build relationships with sites and the timing of recruitment. Evaluators need to allow enough time to build relationships, but not leave programs dangling for long periods of time before actual recruitment begins. In our study our first contact with programs was for the Program Survey, in the winter and spring of 2000. Although respondents were told at that time that involvement in the Program Survey made their program a candidate for involvement in the Help Seeker phase, the knowledge probably did not penetrate in any meaningful way. The next contacts began in October 2000, with program recruitment for the Help Seeker phase continuing into March and April 2001. Program recruitment went on that long because that's how long it took us, working from Washington DC with only one person devoting significant time to recruiting, and with having to start over with new programs if we were turned down by the first five programs we invited to participate. The consequence was that some programs that agreed early didn't hear from us again for several months, which was not good. One absolutely needs to give sufficient time to build relationships, but one also has to assure continuity of contact, keeping sites informed of where the study is, following decisions by sites to participate with training and actual recruitment as soon as possible after agreement. State coordinators can help make this happen.

Prospective or Retrospective

Another important issue to consider when recruiting sites and finalizing the research design is whether to recruit women prospectively as we did for the current study, or to retrospectively identify help seekers through client records. It appears that recruiting women prospectively increases the participation rates in studies such as this one. For example, 82 percent of eligible women who were recruited for this study actually completed the survey. Alternatively, participation rates were 72 percent in the National Evaluation of the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) Grant Programs, which recruited known victims of crime (but not necessarily of domestic violence and sexual assault) by using agency records of former clients (Urban Institute report on VOCA-funded victim assistance programs, in preparation). Although prospective recruitment seems to be more fruitful than retrospective recruitment, both participation rates are relatively high, and evaluators should consider which recruitment process works best for the type of research they are interested in conducting. Both would require staff time in agencies, but time constraints around when women would need to be recruited and how much time would be required for recruitment might be different and might affect the evaluation design and/or resource allocation. We have detailed our reasons for preferring prospective recruitment earlier in this report (p. 6), and will not repeat them here.

The Research Interest in a Service Community and the Reality of Women's Lives

In addition to issues around choosing which sites may be best to include in a study and whether prospective or retrospective recruitment is most appropriate, we also discovered that our focus on a particular geographical area and the programs and services it provided for women victims of violence was sometimes confusing for women describing their actual experiences. We knew that we had recruited women for the Help Seeker sample from agencies in a particular community, defined geographically as the catchment area for the victim service program in that city, town, or county. We designed the interview so we could ask women about their experiences with each piece of the service network in that community, which program staff had also described for us, and which we had characterized as to its level of collaboration. These service networks included law enforcement, prosecution, the courts, and hospitals (for sexual assault), in addition to victim services. We asked women to describe in detail the most recent experiences they had with law enforcement and prosecution, assuming (sometimes erroneously) that they would be talking about the police and prosecutors in the victim service agency's community. In reality, because domestic violence victims tend to experience many violent episodes with the same partner and because they are often very mobile, the most recent experiences with law enforcement and prosecution may be for different violence incidents and be with agencies from different communities altogether, sometimes in different states. A number of women had experiences with law enforcement in one community and then sought assistance from victim service providers in a different community to which they had moved. As a result, it became clear that it is very difficult to accurately represent one woman's experience in a particular service network without the time and interview structure to probe the respondent's history of violence and service involvement. She may have been served by and be continuing to receive services from agencies within more than one service network.

Therefore, researchers should carefully consider how they ask about experiences with different services and agencies, and take steps to assure that they will know in which community those services were accessed. Program Surveys might want to obtain more detailed descriptions of relationships between particular agencies in the community identified by name. For example, researchers will not be confused about which law enforcement agency is being referred to if they can identify the agency by name. Also, Help Seeker interviews could be designed to reflect the complexity of events experienced by women victims of violence. Women should be allowed to respond to questions about a number of service types in a variety of different communities. While this will increase the length of the survey quite dramatically, it will also allow researchers to map more accurately the network of agencies in which women received services and be better able to estimate the effects of various network types. Another alternative would be to constrain women to answer only about the services they received from particular agencies in an area. This approach would let researchers know clearly which agencies are being described and do a better job of linking the Help Seeker information with the Program Survey information.

Strategies for Success

Once sites are committed and the decision to recruit victims prospectively has been made, a number of strategies can be employed to maximize the chances that programs will recruit the number of participants required for the study.

First, it is critical to find one individual with some authority at each site who has the commitment to do this work. One person at each site should take a leadership role, which involves the responsibility and ability to hold the recruiting personnel accountable for recruiting the number of women required for the study. S/he should set concrete goals for the number of recruits per week, and monitor weekly to assure that those goals are being met. If they are not being met, s/he should quickly identify the reasons why not, and work to get the schedule back on track. This person should be a supervisor or someone that already has some authority to leverage cooperation from staff. S/he should be someone who has good relations with the staff who will be recruiting, and be able to motivate staff to reach their goals.

It may also be helpful to have a second staff person designated to assist with monitoring recruitment who can also motivate staff to reach their goals. This person may be someone who has access to only a portion of the staff. For example, the site recruitment supervisor may be an assistant director of the whole agency who is well liked by staff and the secondary leader may be the shelter director who works with some but not all of the staff.

Second, during the Victim Impact Evaluation, successful sites divided up the total number of recruits needed from their site and assigned a target number of recruits to each person doing recruiting, along with a schedule. For example, each of five staff was assigned to recruit ten women. The schedule depended on expected client flow. If they each averaged only one new client a week then they would have to recruit her, but if they averaged three new clients a week they might be expected to recruit two a week. By splitting the job, no one staff person was burdened with the whole responsibility of recruiting women and the overall recruitment goal of 50 did not overwhelm the staff.

Third, it was important that state coordinators were seen as partners in this work with the sites. State coordinators needed to show the site staff that they understood the hard work required in recruiting women and openly show appreciation to the staff. In addition, it was good for state coordinators to stay upbeat and positive and have a sense of humor with the site staff.

Fourth, when sites had questions about specific design issues or recruiting women it was important to be as responsive as possible. This meant making an effort to have little or no lag time between questions from sites to state coordinators to the evaluator and back again. It is respectful to respond quickly to sites, perhaps further motivating them to cooperate.

Our Preferred Strategy, If We Had the Money. We have discussed at length the difficulties that victim service agencies—usually small nonprofits—have in complying with the needs of a study like ours. Staff are overworked, crises abound, the project is not providing extra resources for data collection, it is questionable whether the program, without additional staff, could use the extra resources if they got them, and so on. What we would like to do, and recommend to others, is to budget for hiring a recruiter at each site. You would probably need someone part time for the duration of the recruitment period. You would need to find someone knowledgeable about the agency and about the experiences of women victims of violence. That person would have to be trusted by program staff and their clients, which means program people must be called on to supply you with candidates. The obvious place to look for such a person is among former staff members and current and former volunteers. It might also be possible to use a current staff member who is working less than full time, but such a person is more likely to have difficulty allocating her time appropriately between her staff work and her recruiting responsibilities. Each site would have to work out how the recruiter would fit into the daily routine of client contacts. Doing this would become part of the state coordinator's job. The goal would be to place as little burden on staff as possible. Staff would make the initial request of clients, which could be as simple as getting permission for someone to contact them the next day. The recruiter would have the time to explain the study and consent procedures at a non-crisis time. She would also be able to keep track of all women contacting the agency, and be able to report what proportion were approached, what proportion agreed, and whether there were any biases in either of these selection points (something we could not do, and therefore do not know). The most important characteristic of these recruiters is that they would answer to the research effort and the state coordinator, and not to the program. So they would be less likely to be affected by upheavals in the program that made the recruitment work more difficult for quite a number of our sites.

Reaching Recruitment Goals

Recruiting women for the Victim Impact Evaluation admittedly took a lot of effort., even though the state coordinators worked diligently to find ways to streamline recruiting and keep staff engaged in the process. From the earliest stages of interaction with sites, engaging staff is important. Training should not only include the introduction to the evaluation and the logistics involved in recruiting, but also should include general ways to motivate individuals and monitor progress. For example, starting with the total recruitment goal may be too overwhelming for staff, so it may be more helpful to set small goals with staff to recruit a certain number of women in a certain number of days and then go from there. Another way to avoid overwhelming staff would be to get everyone, at all levels of the agency, involved in recruiting to split up the responsibility. Or, as just described, the researchers could hire a non-staff person specifically to recruit.

Allowing sites to have some flexibility in how they approach recruiting is also key to reaching recruitment goals. Initially, we only allowed face-to-face recruitment of women, to get signed consent. But some sites rarely see their clients, and provide many of their services over the phone to clients who never come in person. So we allowed these sites to recruit over the phone and take as consent the woman's verbal agreement to participate plus getting contact information from her. State coordinators also worked with site staff to figure out when and during what services to do the recruiting. Many sites were reluctant to recruit during their more crisis-oriented services, but most provide many more service strategies during which it would be appropriate to talk with a woman about the study. State coordinators talked with the staff and/or supervising leaders about incorporating recruitment into their routine with every client. For example, agencies could develop a system by which advocates, or the researcher's recruiter, systematically recruit women after case management or counseling sessions.

Another strategy for reaching recruitment goals involves systematizing how progress will be monitored as well as systematizing the recruitment process itself. State coordinators would map out exactly how the supervisor will monitor the staff and the supervisor would then hold staff accountable for recruitment goals. The supervisor would work with staff to develop an agreed-on monitoring strategy, so that the process does not build resentment. One way to do this is by having a chart with recruitment goals and dates posted in the office. During the Victim Impact Evaluation, this process made it easier for some state coordinators to monitor progress within their sites. One particular coordinator would contact a site when she received a package of consent forms and let them know where they stood with their overall recruitment goal. By doing this she "modeled the monitoring process" for the site supervisor.

Providing incentives to the women participants and the sites was essential for reaching recruitment goals. Incentives took many forms. Providing $30.00 to every woman who participated was important both to the women themselves and to the agencies recruiting the women. In fact, the agencies seemed to care more about the women receiving money than the $200 we provided them, possibly because the $200 was seen as trivial. Paying sites substantially more or hiring someone to do the recruiting (as described above), or both, would have been a greater incentive to the agency, and might have reduced resentment. We would strongly suggest paying programs more (say $750 or even $1,000) to compensate for the disruption of the research process, in addition to hiring a recruiter.

Both women and site staff found incentives in non-monetary ways as well. Some women reported to sites that they felt incentive to do the survey simply because it was a good way to help the site and give back. They reported that doing the interview was a positive experience and it was positive to tell their story to someone. Site staff found incentive when state coordinators did face-to-face meetings to monitor recruitment goals and when they were provided information on completed survey rates for their specific site. In fact, coordinators reported that site staff would have more incentive if there had been even more ongoing feedback about completion rates during the recruitment phase. Especially at the beginning, there was too long a lag time between recruiting and feedback on completion rates. It would be useful to provide feedback to sites weekly, from one week after interviewing begins.

Finally, some sites and state coordinators used prize structures with staff to reach recruitment goals. Sites would set up a system that involved staff persons winning prizes for being the first to meet their recruitment goals or being the one to recruit the most women. One state coordinator gave a special box of candy to the site that met its recruitment goal first. She tracked the number of recruits across sites and reported their standings to sites on a regular basis. She did not identify sites by name but would indicate, for example, a particular site was third in the state for reaching recruitment goals. While these approaches may work for some, a word of caution is appropriate. Breeding competition between staff and/or sites may provide incentive for some, but may cause bad feelings for others. Site supervisors or state coordinators should examine the dynamics of their sites before implementing a strategy such as this to ensure that it is embraced in the spirit in which it is intended.

Time Matters

On a number of levels, we learned through this evaluation that time matters. Having the appropriate amount of time to identify and recruit sites is crucial. Often, funders do not want to support the time it takes to adequately choose sites and then build strong working relationships with them. Nor do they want to support the role of state coordinator to make it happen.

However, without time and a local presence, evaluators are setting themselves up to fail. Investing time to choose sites thoughtfully, build relationships with them, and develop mutual respect and understanding should increase their dedication to the project and the odds that they will recruit the numbers required.

Time also matters when it comes to recruitment. Originally, we had planned for a three-month recruitment period once sites were trained. Our partner, Westat, required us to have 200 contacts in the first pool of recruited names, and to keep names coming in at a rate of at least 100 a week, because with fewer contacts they could not support the number of interviewers needed for the whole study. They also needed the flow of recruits coming in to be predictable and steady throughout the process so they could schedule interviewers efficiently. Having only small numbers of recruits to send to Westat weekly made it difficult for Westat to balance the flow of the work to interviewers, or keep trained interviewers busy and assigned to our job. However, state coordinators reported that sites took about three to four weeks to implement their recruitment procedures once they were trained and, with the number of sites we started with, one could not expect to reach 200 contact names at the start until about six to eight weeks into the recruiting period. As a result, state coordinators recommended having about a four to five month recruitment period to start *after* the training. This would allow for the start-up time sites require, the time to get the initial number of contacts required by the interview firm, and the time needed to meet the overall recruitment goals.

Some state coordinators were concerned that adding more time would lead to procrastination in some sites. They reported that some staff were overwhelmed by the recruitment process or felt insecure about their ability to do it. A way to avoid this would be to set goals with sites as we outlined previously. In addition, it would help to get the recruiting started immediately because the first batch of recruits are all people already known to program staff (i.e., their current clients). This should be the easiest group to recruit, and having a few successes should build confidence among staff that they can indeed do this task.

A final recommendation about time from state coordinators was to avoid recruiting women during the summer. Summertime frequently coincides with staff vacations. It seems to be important to implement such a project during a time when staff are not routinely out of the office, since limited resources are already an issue for many of these agencies and since incorporating the efforts of all the staff is critical.

CONCLUSIONS

Conducting victim research is very complex. Many people across the country worked very hard to implement the Victim Impact Evaluation design and it still did not happen as it was originally planned. It is challenging to implement rigorous designs when researching domestic violence and sexual assault for a number of reasons. First, many nonprofit victim service agencies do not have the infrastructure to support research efforts to evaluate their service offerings. It is difficult to know for sure whether sites are going to be able to assist evaluators because their work is unpredictable and their agency structures are vulnerable. Second, funders often do not want to make the investment necessary for studies such as this one to be fully successful. We have pointed out several things that should have been better funded, including payments to sites;

payments to women respondents (respondent payments were not part of the original proposal); paying for significantly more state coordinator time, and at a level commensurate with the very experienced people we were lucky enough to recruit; and higher payments to programs. To ensure that the design is carried out as it was planned, evaluators need to spend time working with state coordinators and sites to get the commitment from the local agencies involved. More time is also needed during recruitment phases in order to have substantial numbers of victims in studies, making each individual survey a more costly investment but ultimately more valuable. . Last but not least, we needed to devote twice as much funding to the interview development process, and to conducting the interviews themselves, as they proved to be twice as long as originally budgeted for, and still did not get detailed information on many things of interest. Since cutting the interview further would have jeopardized our ability to test our research hypotheses, the only solution to get our desired sample size is more money.

Although the barriers to conducting victim research are not insurmountable, they do require that evaluators spend a great deal of time at the beginning brainstorming solutions to anticipated pitfalls. And because one cannot anticipate every barrier that might be encountered, evaluators (and funders alike) should also plan to have some flexibility in their design to be able to overcome problems without destroying the rigor of the research, running out of time to complete the work, and overrunning project budgets.

This study used prospective recruitment and only needed to contact women once. This was hard enough. Many of the same issues would surface in a study that used retrospective sampling from agency files. Longitudinal studies face still other issues, largely of tracking and maintaining contact with participants. But all studies of known victims that start with recruitment from service or legal agencies will encounter the issues we did. We hope this review of our experiences will be useful to them.

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APPENDIX A: TRAINING MATERIALS

THE URBAN INSTITUTE 2100 M STREET, NW - WASHINGTON, DC 20037

Victim Impact Evaluation Study
Training Packet for Recruiting Sites

- ✓ History and Highlights of Project
- ✓ Community Summaries, Survey Topics, and M.O.U.s
- ✓ Recruiting Agency Responsibilities
- ✓ Confidentiality Measures
- ✓ Informed Consent Checklist
- ✓ Informed Consent Form
- ✓ Recruitment Suggestions

THE URBAN INSTITUTE

VICTIM IMPACT PROGRAM EVALUATION

Who is conducting the study?

The Victim Impact Evaluation Study is being conducted by researchers at the Urban Institute under contract with the National Institute of Justice.

The Urban Institute is an independent non-profit policy research institute in Washington, D.C. It has served as the VAWA STOP Grant evaluator since the inception of the STOP programs. Both researchers, Martha Burt and Janine Zweig, at the Urban Institute have been direct service workers in the domestic violence and/or sexual assault movement and have many years of experience in research and evaluation.

The National Institute of Justice is the research and development branch of the United States Department of Justice.

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of the study is to assess the impact of STOP funded projects on the women served.

Who is participating in this study?

Eight states are participating in the study. The eight states are Colorado, Illinois, Texas, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, West Virginia, Washington, and Vermont. The eight states reflect a range of size and geographical location. The states were also chosen because they participated in a previous study in 1999 by the Urban Institute which assessed outcomes resulting from direct victim services offered through private nonprofit victim service agencies. (See *Victim Service Programs in the STOP Formula Grants Program: Services Offered and Interactions with other Community Agencies*, Urban Institute, October 2000*).* That study focused on information gathered from Victim Service Programs. The states chosen represent varying approaches of state STOP agencies to promoting coordinated community responses to violence against women. The current study is designed to assess the experience of the victims served directly from interviews with them.

In each state, 5 communities will be selected or, as in the case of Vermont, enough communities to produce the same total numbers of victims completing the survey (225 per state). Within each community, the non-profit Victim Service

Program (VSP) will recruit a specific number of women who are willing to be interviewed. The VSP will designate one or more Justice Agencies (JA) as partners who will also recruit women to be surveyed. The VSP programs selected are those that are receiving or have received STOP funds, however the women they recruit do not need to be using a STOP funded service of the program. Justice Agencies do not need to have received STOP funding in order to participate.

Who will be interviewed?

The participants in the survey will be adult women, 18 years or older, who have used the services of the VSP or JA during the period of the study - late April to late August 2001. This means victims of sexual abuse or domestic abuse perpetrated against them when they were eighteen or older.

A Random Digit Dial survey of women ages 18-35 will also be conducted by the Urban Institute in each community for a total of 150 per state. The random survey will focus on what women know about services available in their communities.

Who will interview the women recruited?

The interviews will be conducted by telephone by WESTAT, a professional surveying firm, using a survey form developed by the Urban Institute. WESTAT has conducted other surveys in sensitive subject areas including surveys on victimization and drug use. All the surveyors will b e women.

What will women be asked?

The women surveyed will be asked about:

- The services they have used in their community
- Their opinions about the services - whether they were helpful and satisfactory
- Other services in the community they may know about, but have not used
- Their particular experience of violence
- Background information about them and their families
- Their general well being and life satisfaction

The interview will take about 40 to 60 minutes to complete.

Will participation be voluntary?

Absolutely. Women will be asked if they wish to participate. They may agree or refuse with **no** consequence to them or to the recruiting agency of any kind. They may agree to participate but decline to answer any survey question for any reason. They may withdraw their agreement to participate at any time.

Will the information be kept confidential?

Every precaution will be taken to keep the information the women provide absolutely confidential. The recruiting programs will not know which women completed the survey. The data collected by WESTAT will be forwarded to the Urban Institute without any identifying information. At this point, the actual consent and contact forms will be destroyed by the Urban Institute and WESTAT. When the database becomes available to public access it will have **no demographic information** which could possibly aid in identifying a particular woman. The publicly accessible database will contain information gathered about services only. It will have information on each state and from each participating community in that state but will not name the communities.

If requested by the VS Program, the Urban Institute will prepare a 2-3 page summary report for the community. It will not contain data in order to protect the confidentiality of the women participating. The community report will not be disseminated to any party or agency other than the VS Program or JA program(s) without their prior approval.

Will there be any compensation provided for participation?

VSP programs that participate will each receive a "token of appreciation" ($200 per program). The program may choose to distribute the funds to all women it recruits or keep the funds to help defray their costs in participating. Justice agencies will not receive compensation.

Women who complete the survey (even if they skip questions) will each receive a stipend of $30.00.

Why is this study important?

First, and most importantly, this study gives an opportunity to victims to express their views on services they received or should have received, what outcomes the services produced for them, and how their well-being and safety has been affected by services.

It is expected that the information will document the types of violence women experience, the appropriateness of services, the effectiveness of service approaches, and the benefit to victims of coordinated community services.

The information can be used to persuade Congress, state legislators, and other policy makers that services are needed and must be appropriately funded.

Participating VS programs can use the information to assist them in evaluating their services and, if they choose, they can use the information to educate other providers in the community of the need for services or improvement of services. They can also use the information, if they choose, to educate the public about services and/or to raise money from their local or state governments or from the public at large.

Why are women asked in the survey about their violence experiences?

These questions can be stressful for some women to answer. It is important to collect this information because:

- The nature of violence may be related to service use and outcomes. Services can be refined to respond effectively and appropriately to the particular types of violence

- The data are expected to document that most women using services are in escalating violence relationships where physical violence is coupled with power and control tactics. This information can be used to rebut backlash theories and “data” that claim that women are as violent as men

- The data are expected to uncover the degree to which sexual abuse exists in violent relationships which has been underreported and underserved.

The questions about violence experience are drawn from previous widely used surveys of victimization and have been modified to be less intrusive than some of those study instruments.

WESTAT is testing the survey with women similar to actual study participants before using it. All of the women the survey will be tested on are survivors. Their feedback will inform the nature of the survey ultimately used in this study. At the end of the survey, victims will be offered the names and numbers of agencies in their communities who can provide follow-up support if victims feel they need support.

Who will receive the information gathered and will it affect STOP funding?

Reports on communities will only be summaries of information. The VS program and their JA partner(s) can decide who will receive the report and how it will be used. Reports on states will not name communities included in the survey. STOP grants are formula grants awarded to all 50 states on a population basis. The study therefore will not affect a particular state's funding. The state's STOP agency, Vermont Center for Crime Victim Services, which funds projects in Vermont, will not be informed as to which communities participated.

For more information:

URBAN INSTITUTE VICTIM IMPACT EVALUATION STUDY

RECRUITING AGENCY RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Recruit women to participate in the study up to the agreed target number.

2. Participate in a 1-2 hour training on the recruitment and informed consent process.

3. Designate a staff member to forward the signed consent forms to the State Coordinator and to be the person in your agency for the State Coordinator to contact. The responsibilities of the designated contact person are to:

   - Collect signed consent forms from recruiters and make photocopies

   - Keep photocopies in a secure file

   - Forward signed consent forms to the State Coordinator by Federal Express or UPS in envelopes provided by the State Coordinator. Forms should be forwarded every two weeks or when 10 forms have been collected whichever comes first

   - Destroy photocopies when informed by the State Coordinator that she has received the originals

   - Be available to discuss problems, questions, or concerns with State Coordinator

4. Prepare a Memorandum of Understanding with your study partner(s) on how the Urban Institute's report on your community will be used or inform the State Coordinator if you do not wish to receive a community report.

URBAN INSTITUTE VICTIM IMPACT EVALUATION STUDY

CONFIDENTIALITY MEASURES

1. The program that recruited the women will never know who actually got interviewed unless the woman herself volunteers the information.

2. When the State Coordinator receives the original Informed Consent form she will call program which then should destroy its photocopied form.

3. State Coordinator will photocopy and send originals to the Urban Institute. The State Coordinator will destroy her copies when the Urban Institute confirms it has received the originals.

4. Urban Institute will place the consent contact information in a secure database which only WESTAT can access.

5. WESTAT will tell Urban Institute when the interview is done and the Urban Institute will then destroy the original consent form

6. When all interviews are completed WESTAT will destroy all the consent and contact information they have and send only the data to the Urban Institute so the Urban Institute will not know what individual women said in their interview. The Urban Institute will never have a woman's name connected to any data.

7. The dataset will be kept by NIJ and will eventually become available to public access. At that point it will show data by participating communities in each state but will not name the communities.

   Only services information will be available to be accessed by the public. **NO DEMOGRAPHICS (age, race, income, etc.) which could identify an individual woman will be included**.

8. If requested, in the Fall of 2002, the victim services program will get aggregated information on its program's services and all other provider services in their community in the form of 2-3 page summary of both the known and random call victims. To protect the confidentiality of the participants, it will not be given the raw data.

9. Information about which Vermont communities are participating in the study will be kept confidential by the Urban Institute, WESTAT, and the State Coordinator. The information will **not** be shared with other Network programs, other providers and or with the State STOP Agency - the Center for Crime Victim Services. The programs themselves may reveal whether they chose or declined to participate.

URBAN INSTITUTE VICTIM IMPACT EVALUATION STUDY

INFORMED CONSENT CHECKLIST

1. Provide a private space and time where the woman's decision whether or not to participate can be completely confidential and voluntary

2. Allow 5 - 10 minutes

3. Read informed consent (IC) form to woman or give it to her to read
(Note: Form will be available in English or Spanish only and survey can be completed in English or Spanish only)

   You may also choose to paraphrase the contents of the IC form rather than read it. If so, you will need to cover all essential elements:
   - Voluntary
   - Confidential
   - Subjects survey covers
   - Decision whether to participate **will NOT** affect her services or her case or funding for the program she is using
   - Length of survey
   - The amount she will be compensated
   - That her contact information will be sent to WESTAT

4. Answer any questions about the consent form or the study

5. Complete contact information: Her primary contact information + 3 additional. (Try to elicit a minimum of two additional contacts) Ask her to rate the additional contacts in order of preference. Ask her if she wants to provide safety precautions to use for contact such as what to do if man answers. Remind her that, for her safety, WESTAT interviewers do not leave messages.

6. Ask her to sign the IC form and to print her name (If she is using an alias she can sign with alias and will need to remember which name she adopted for this purpose)

7. Copy form for woman to keep if she wants. (Note: It will have the Urban Institute logo and the name of the study so she may wish to discard the form)

8. Give her a form to keep with 800 # to call if she has questions and also if she prefers to initiate call or if she wants to withdraw her consent.

9. Remind her that when the interviewer calls, she can say "no," "no, Not interested" (as if to a telemarketer) or "no, I've changed my mind" and the interviewer will

hang up and not contact her again unless she indicates that she wishes to do the interview at a later time.

10. Complete the page headed “To be completed by Program Staff.”

11. Give the signed IC form to the member of your agency who has been designated to collect the forms.

THE URBAN INSTITUTE

VICTIM IMPACT PROGRAM EVALUATION

Informed Consent

Introduction/Purpose
My community is participating in a national study to understand how community agencies help victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. The study is funded by the National Institute of Justice.

Benefits of Participating in the Study
You want to know from people like me, who have (gone to the police, sought a protection order/used the [name of VS agency]/had a case go to court/etc.) (select the most appropriate, or insert something appropriate for the particular agency doing the recruiting) about my experiences with these agencies. My participation in the study is very important, because I can contribute information that may help to improve services for women throughout the country. Without this information, no one can be sure if the services help women and how they can be changed for the better.

Possible Risks to Me of Participating
I know that I will be talking about the violence that happened to me, and this may remind me of negative feelings or may trouble me in other ways. If this happens, I know that the interviewer will be able to refer me to resources in my community to help me if I need it.

Who Is Conducting this Study?
The Urban Institute and its partner Westat, Inc. are conducting this study. If I am interested in being a part of the study, an interviewer from Westat, Inc. will call me for an interview in the upcoming month. A trained staff person will interview me, and will keep all of my answers completely confidential.

What Will I Be Asked About?
I will be asked about:

- The services I have used in your community;
- My opinions about the services — whether they were helpful and satisfactory;
- Other services in the community I may know of, but have not used;
- My violence experiences;
- Some background information about me and my family; and
- My general satisfaction with life.

Procedure
Westat staff will be contacting me for a phone interview. They will not leave messages for me, and will follow my instructions for how to reach me safely by telephone. They will use my instructions to try to contact me up to seven times if they do not reach me at once. The interview should take about 40 to 60 minutes of my time to complete.

Voluntary Participation
I understand that my participation is voluntary and will have no effect on the services I receive or, if I have an active case, on my case in the criminal justice system. I also understand that my decision about participating does not affect the agency that is helping me or the money it receives to provide services. I can refuse to answer any question at any time during the interview.

Confidentiality
I understand that no researcher or interviewer will reveal the fact that I am participating in this study—no one will know unless I tell them myself. If someone picks up the phone during the interview, the interviewer will stop asking me questions and will pretend to sell me cosmetics. This will give me the chance to end the phone call safely, by refusing to buy items from a salesman. If I need to call you back, you will give me a toll-free (1-800) number that I can use for this purpose. My name will not appear on the interview and will not be identified in any reports of the study. No researcher or interviewer will ever tell anyone in my town how I answered the questions, or even that I participated in the study. I also understand that all of my answers will be stored in databases with secured password protection, to further ensure my privacy.

Compensation
Once I complete the survey, Westat will send me a check for $30.00 as a way to cover any expenses I may have from participating.

Contact Information
I understand that I will be asked to provide the study with safe ways to contact me by telephone, either at my home or through trusted friends and relatives who will know where and how to reach me. I know that Westat, Inc. will receive this contact information, and will use it only to contact me for the phone interview. Once I have completed the interview, all information that could let someone contact me or connect me to any of my answers will be destroyed.

Questions
If I have any questions about the study, I know I can contact Westat at 1-800-937-8281 ext. 5965 (1-800-WESTAT1).

Written Consent

I, ______________________________________ , am willing to participate in a study about agencies serving victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. I know that the contact information I provide will be given to Westat only for the purposes of reaching me by phone for an interview, after which it will be destroyed.

____ ____________________
(signature) (date)

Can we please have the telephone numbers of three locations where you can be reached? Please give these numbers to us in the order in which you are most likely to be found. Please provide us with your own contact information and the information of someone who will always know where you are and that you are comfortable with us contacting (for example, a friend or relative). If you are using an alias, please let the other contacts you provide know that you have done so.

Your Contact Information: **Rank Order:** ☐

Name: ______________________________

Telephone Number: ______________________________

Other number (e.g., cellphone): ______________________________

When are the best times to contact you (time of day, day of the week, etc.)?

____

____

Comments: (any safety precautions she would like to add)

____

Other Contact #1: **Rank Order:** ☐

Name: ______________________________

Relationship: ______________________________

Telephone Number: ______________________________

When are the best times to contact you through this contact person? Can Westat leave messages for you at this number? With whom?

____

____

Comments: (any safety precautions she would like to add)

____

____

Other Contact #2: **Rank Order:** ☐

Name: ________________________________

Relationship: ________________________________

Telephone Number: ________________________________

When are the best times to contact you through this contact person? Can Westat leave messages for you at this number? With whom?

____

____

Comments: (any safety precautions she would like to add)

____

____

Other Contact #3: Rank Order: ☐

Name: ________________________________

Relationship: ________________________________

Telephone Number: ________________________________

When are the best times to contact you through this contact person? Can Westat leave messages for you at this number? With whom?

____

____

Comments: (any safety precautions she would like to add)

____

____

<u>To be completed by program staff:</u>

Program Name:

____

Program Number:

____

Point of service contact (Please circle one):

Victim Services:

Catchment of STOP project

Another service area

Legal System:

Law enforcement

Prosecution

Courts

Other (which county for programs recruiting from multiple counties):
____

RECRUITMENT SUGGESTIONS

Recruitment of women to participate in this study is the critical element of the process. Women currently using services have been chosen as the target population since they are in contact with the service agencies. Past experience has shown that former service users are more difficult to recruit for various reasons - because they have moved and cannot be located or are back in relationships where contact may endanger them, or they do not wish to revisit the past experience of abuse.

However, recruiting women currently using services is also challenging. Many women will be in crisis when they access services and are not likely to want to participate in a research study. For this reason, it is not expected that women calling hotlines in crisis would be likely candidates. On the other hand, women who are using services, including the hotline, over a longer period after the immediate crisis may be interested, even eager, to share their experiences, views and perceptions.

Your agency will know best which women to approach and when. The following are some suggestions for recruitment :

1. Women who are using **on-going support services**, such as information, referral, advocacy and assistance on housing, welfare, medical or other social services.

2. Women who are receiving on-going **legal advocacy** services for domestic violence and sexual abuse situations, such as support during custody proceedings or during protracted criminal proceedings. Some women who have used your services for Relief From Abuse proceedings may also be interested in participating.

3. Women whose partners have been convicted and who are in continued contact (for non-crisis matters) with probation officers, victim advocates, or attorneys.

4. Women who have been in **shelter** for some time beyond the immediate post-crisis period.

5. Women who have been attending **support groups** for domestic violence and sexual abuse survivors for some time past their acute crisis period. *Note: If women in support groups are recruited, care should be taken that each woman can make the decision whether to participate privately, for example, before or after the group begins. If the recruiter chooses to explain the study and read and distribute the informed consent forms to an entire group, each woman should be given the opportunity to return the form <u>after</u> the meeting*.

6. It is important for each woman to understand that her participation is entirely voluntary and that her refusal will not have any negative implications to her, to her case, to the services she is using, or to your program's funding. At the same time, it is also important that women understand that this is an opportunity to have a voice about the service network in your community and that her input can make a difference to the way services are delivered in the future.