

Linking Faith-Based Organizations with Victim Services

Needs Assessment Report

Comprehensive Services to Crime Victims: A County-wide Initiative
Prince George's County Maryland

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Sponsored by:
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Authored by:
Debra L. Stanley, Ph.D.

Division of Criminology, Criminal Justice & Social Policy
University of Baltimore
Baltimore, Maryland 21201

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides the results of a needs assessment based on focus group participation to identify gaps in victim services in terms of faith-based needs and spiritually based programming for crime victims in Prince George's County Maryland. A total of 24 community members who represent faith-based organizations, victim service agencies, law enforcement agencies, victims, social service agencies, youth leaders, education, and other community leaders participated in a total of three focus group sessions.

A common theme throughout the focus group discussions is that both the service and faith communities have a wealth of resources for assisting crime victims. However, a major concern is that the service and faith communities have differing organizational missions and therefore different approaches to serving victims. In addition, there are different priorities with regard to victims in each community. Service providers prioritize victims' safety and target appropriate services. Whereas, the faith community's priority is spiritual connection. Faith leaders encourage keeping the family intact, while at the same time attempting to assist both the victim and the offender within the same community. Participants believe that differing philosophies create major challenges in linking the two communities together.

Structured questions addressed models of treatment, responses to victim needs, and access to resources. Participants were asked how they view the role of faith-based organizations in serving crime victims. In addition, they offered suggestions on how to enhance faith-based services, and how to build a network between the service and faith communities. Five primary recommendations are provided based on participants' responses and expertise.

I. INTRODUCTION

This report describes the results of a community needs assessment in terms of the gaps in faith-based resources for crime victims in Prince George's County Maryland.

The Maryland Crime Victim Resource Center, Inc. (MCVRC) received a grant entitled, "Comprehensive Services to Victims" to increase the scope of crime victim services provided in Prince George's County Maryland. The MCVRC was tasked with piloting a community education program, based on the scope of services outlined in the grant. The grant focuses on two primary areas of services, *mental health* and *faith-based* violence prevention and intervention services. The targeted population is faith-based organizations and educational institutions, youth services organizations, relevant government agencies, and law enforcement. The program would educate the community about the effects of victimization, sensitivity to victim dynamics, and violence prevention services.

One of the grant's primary objectives was to conduct a needs assessment to determine what the specific needs of the community are in terms of crime victims and faith-based services. This report describes the results of the needs assessment that was conducted to achieve this objective. Details of the needs assessment procedures, participants, outcomes, and recommendations are provided in this report.

Purpose of the Needs Assessment

The primary purpose of the needs assessment based on focus groups is to have community members identify gaps in victim services in terms of faith-based needs and spiritually based programming for crime victims in Prince George's County Maryland. Focus group participants would represent the faith communities, victim service programs, law enforcement agencies, victims, social services, youth leaders, education, and other community leaders within victim services.

Goals of the Needs Assessment

The three primary goals of the needs assessment are to:

- 1) Identify the gaps in crime victims' services in Prince George's County.
- 2) Capacity Building - Identify criteria for building collaborative relationships between faith communities and victim service providers to better serve crime victims.

3) Close the Gap in Services. Determine how to enhance crime victim services that address faith-based needs and help to spiritually connect victims.

Brief Description of the Needs Assessment Process

Focus groups were conducted at three different locations throughout Prince George's County in October and November 2004. The focus group facilitator, Dr. Debra L. Stanley, is a faculty member at the University of Baltimore with a research background in the area of victimology, domestic violence and violence against children. Scott Beard, the director of the grant for MCVRC, provided an overview of the grant project, its goals and objectives, and the purpose of the needs assessment at the beginning of each focus group session.

Participants were provided with a brief summary of the purpose and goals of the needs assessment prior to attending the focus groups. The same agenda was used for each focus group. Specific questions were used to guide the discussion and to ensure that each goal was addressed. The needs assessment was conducted using the same structured discussion questions at each of the three focus sessions to guide the participant discussions. *(Please refer to Appendix A for a list of the research questions.)*

III. DESCRIPTION OF FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

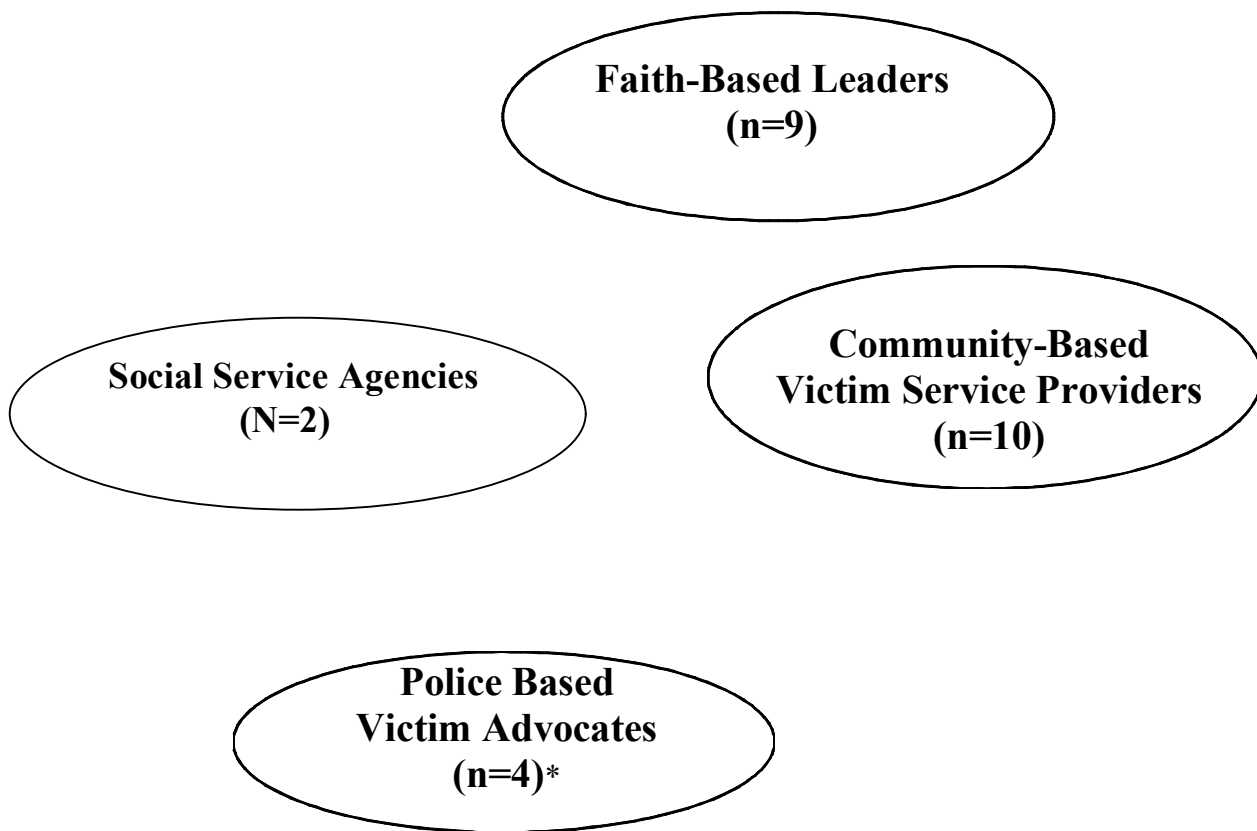
Participants were selected from local agencies in Prince George's county representing victim service agencies, social service agencies, faith-based organizations, and law enforcement agencies. To ensure that each of the three focus groups included a diverse pool from both the faith-based community and the victim services community, participants were invited to attend a specific focus group session. A total of 24 participants (eight per group) attended the focus groups. *(Please refer to Appendix B for a complete list of participants, their affiliation, and contact information.)*

The focus group discussions began with introductions where participants identified their agency and described the types of services their agency provides to crime victims. An informal discussion followed the introductions where participants briefly described their experiences working with specific types of crime victims and discussed their reaction and any concerns they had about creating a linkage between the faith community and the victim service community to better serve crime victims. A summary of the participants' responses is presented below.

1. Participant Expertise.

Of the 24 participants, nine members represent the faith community and 16 represent the victim services community. Of the 16 service providers, four were from law enforcement agencies, two from the county social service agency, and ten represent community-based victim service agencies.

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS BY AREA OF EXPERTISE



*One participant is a Chaplain for law enforcement and was counted under both the faith--based leaders and the police-based victim advocates.

2. Participants' Experience with Crime Victims.

A majority of participants representing both the faith community and the victim services community report having in-depth experience working with crime victims at various levels. Although most participants have experience working with all types of crime victims, Chart 1 indicates the most prevalent types of victimization experience. The three most common types of victimization encountered are domestic violence (or overall family violence), child abuse, and homicide.

Chart 1. Type of Victimization



3. Type of Agency Services.

Victim Service Providers.

The majority of victim service providers represent agencies that work with all types of crime victims. However, several agencies limit their services to specific types of victims, for instance, at least two agencies target domestic violence victims, while one agency is specific to sexual assault victims, and another serves child abuse victims.

Some of the services offered by participating victim service agencies include: family crisis counseling, child advocacy, shelter, legal counsel, individual and group counseling, victim advocacy, housing and financial assistance, education, support programs, faith-based outreach services, family life services, networking with the community, mental health services, and referral services.

Faith Based Organizations

Some of the resources provided by the participating faith leaders include: counseling and support services, educating other faith leaders and lay persons, youth leadership, job referrals, homeless partnerships, grief support groups, spiritual guidance, educating the community, and referral services. The faith community for those in need of emergency and temporary housing assistance maintains several shelter services including “Ark of Safety” and “The Warriors for Christ Refuge”.

IV. PARTICIPANTS’ REACTIONS TO LINKING TOGETHER.

There are three primary areas of concern when attempting to link service providers with the faith community, they include 1) A Victims’ Safety, Confidentiality, and Protection; 2) Quality of Services; and 3) Community and Cultural Issues. Each of these issues is discussed in detail below.

1) Victim Safety, Confidentiality and Protection.

The safety, confidentiality, and protection of crime victims are noted as primary concerns among focus group participants.

“The practical safety of victims and issues associated with maintaining safety are areas that need to be addressed.”

Anyone providing assistance to crime victims should be educated in the areas of safety, confidentiality and general protection of victims. When assisting victims safety should *always* be considered the first priority.

Although faith leaders may want to assist victims, they may not consider the safety issues of a victim or have a clear understanding about their safety and protection.

“Sometimes the spiritual and practical needs of victims are the priority within the faith community, but that doesn’t always involve a safety plan.”

The general consensus is that while most agree that faith communities *should* be a safe haven that may not always be the case if issues of safety are not clearly understood. Victim service providers are concerned that individuals, who are not educated about the safety of victims and attempt to work with them, might place them at greater risk.

“Victims will often go to the faith community to seek assistance because they believe it is a safe place to seek help. But if the offender is part of that same community, the victim may not be adequately protected.”

If a victim does not feel safe they may not seek assistance. The basic philosophy of the faith community might steer victims away. One of the primary goals of a faith community is to keep the family together at all costs. Consequently, some victims may not believe their faith leader will support them when they are trying to escape their offender. If the focus of assistance requires the victim to forgive their offender, they may not ask for help if they are fearful of their offender. Sometimes a clear distinction between spiritual support and presence versus the immediate forgiveness of the offender is difficult to separate.

“Service providers stress that the safety of victims should be the first priority, not the forgiveness of the offender.”

Sometimes a victim may not seek assistance because they fear exposure within the faith community.

“Victims may be afraid that others within their faith community will learn about their victimization. The fear of being shunned by others or the fear of their offender may keep a victim from seeking help.”

Although a faith community could be a safe haven, victims may not know how to connect and reach out for help. For some, they may feel “anger toward god” due to their victimization, and for others they may have disconnected from their faith community prior to the victimization and don’t know how to reconnect.

Confidentiality is another major concern when crime victims are treated outside the conventional service models. Confidentiality may assume to be both a legal and moral obligation of anyone working with crime victims. However, not everyone is aware of these obligations.

“If the faith community could ensure confidentiality, victims might be more willing to seek assistance and trust their faith leaders.”

Historically, faith leaders are more closely associated with supporting offenders through the criminal justice system. The image of the faith community has been more closely linked to prison outreach programs than victim support services. Sometimes the basic philosophy of supporting offenders creates barriers to building a common thread and working relationship with victims and victim service providers.

“The faith community could learn a great deal from victims and survivors if they would stop denying the problem of victimization, and take the time to listen. Sometimes the inability to accept the problem, prevents us from reacting appropriately to the issues.”

Another concern regarding victim safety led to a discussion among the focus group participants on whether or not faith leaders should fall into the mandated reporting criteria for professionals.

“Where does the fine line between the division of “state and church begin and end, when it comes to the protection of victims”?”

Some believe that there is a lack of accountability or legal responsibility within the faith community versus the controls of governmental regulations that bind most service providers. Participants question what the legal versus moral responsibility of faith leaders should be, and what it actually is in the local community, especially when they are the first responders to victimization? Discussion led to numerous questions such as the following,

“If the victim’s safety is at stake, isn’t it a moral issue to report the victimization?”
“Why don’t faith leaders fall into the same mandates as service providers?”
“Should they fall into the same mandates of the law?”

Focus group participants agreed that reporting victimization is an important topic of discussion that should be addressed when building a link between the faith community and service providers. Guidelines for victim safety and confidentiality issues should be established to encourage standardized protections for victims within the faith communities.

On the opposite side of this discussion was the concern for too much regulation and loss of trust. As one participant states,

“How can you ensure that victims will continue to trust faith leaders, if they are mandated to report certain types of victimization?”

2) Quality of Victim Services.

Faith leaders are beginning to understand the complexity of the problems associated with crime victimization and have increased the scope of services provided to victims. However, there is some concern among focus group participants over some of the service models provided to victims by the faith community.

For example,

“Service providers would not advocate group counseling in a domestic violence victimization.”

Service providers encourage separation of the victim and offender and stress the importance of safety and the need for healing while separated. However, some in faith communities encourage family counseling or partner counseling as an attempt to keep the family together.

Another area of concern regarding faith-based services is with the type of grief support services provided to survivors of homicide. Service providers participating in the focus groups noted that grief support services might vary widely for specific types of homicide survivors. For example,

“Male and female homicide survivors often have opposite needs throughout the grieving process, that require very different methods of counseling and healing through the grief process.”

Another example stresses the length of services, as one participant states

“Faith leaders may want to assist homicide survivors up to the point of the funeral, but then expect the victim to be over the grief after the funeral. There is little support six months after actual death of their loved one. Victims feel betrayed and left on their own.”

By addressing these concerns such as the type and length of grief support, the healing of survivors' may be enhanced. Focus group participants suggest that all service models for victims should be reviewed to further enhance the healing of all victims.

3) Community and Cultural Issues.

This needs assessment addresses the concern with the faith community's knowledge of and involvement with issues relating to victimization.

“The faith community should be educated about and have an overview of all the social, cultural, and economic issues in the local community.”

Although most faith organizations are an important element of their neighboring community, their involvement may not be inclusive of all issues. Sometimes a faith community may have limited involvement simply because they don't understand some

of the deeply embedded social, cultural, economic, and crime-oriented issues. Or, it may just be a matter of interpretation of a problem. Another reason for limited involvement may depend on a faith leader's individual experiences.

For example,

“A faith leader may have a negative experience with the criminal justice system, which may then reduce the level of trust that a victim has toward the system.”

When faith leaders don't have a solid understanding and working relationship with all aspects of their neighboring community, it often has an impact on victims. As stated in the following example,

“When a faith leader views the crime problem as a racial problem, there may be an unfounded assumption that race will be an issue in the processing of a case in the criminal justice system. Therefore, a minority victim may be deterred from reporting a victimization experience or seeking assistance from the criminal justice system. These views may jeopardize a victim's safety even further if they continue to be at risk and can't protect themselves from further victimization.”

Social and economic changes, shifting crime problems and overall juvenile related issues entrenched in the local community have altered the focus and type of interaction between the faith communities and youth. There is an increasing need for mentoring and youth counseling, as well as youth programs and activities within the faith community. Young people are reaching out to the faith community as a primary source of support.

Other areas of concern expressed among focus group participants centered on cultural issues. The numerous denominations of faith communities generate diverse cultural beliefs that often limit faith leaders involvement in some aspects of the community. Other concerns focus on how cultural and language barriers may prevent crime victims from seeking assistance outside their faith community. Participants also reported concerns associated to working with immigrants.

“Immigrants may fear that they will lose their status to remain in the United States if they speak to someone outside of the faith community.”

Immigration issues seem to be a growing problem within the local community because of the increasing diversity of the county's population.

The overall cultural related issues seem to be common areas of concern that many faith leaders find difficult to surpass when encouraging victims to seek assistance from local victim service providers. Faith leaders participating in the focus groups report that they

are not knowledgeable enough to surpass this barrier. When victims do seek assistance from their faith community, that person may not be able to refer the victim to appropriate services.

V. KEY FINDINGS

The results are presented in sequence with each of the structured questions addressed in the focus groups. (*Refer to Appendix A for a complete list of questions.*) The results are combined together for all three focus group sessions and discussed in detail in the following paragraphs.

1. Are there a significant number of victims who exclusively seek assistance from faith communities when they are in need or in crisis?

There is general agreement that there is a “growing need to work with crime victims” within the faith community. The primary types of victims that faith leaders encounter are domestic violence and child abuse victims, homicide survivors, and victims of community related violence.

“Faith leaders are feeling overwhelmed by the increasing demands for victim assistance.”

The number of incidents and increasing need for assistance is placing a strain on faith communities. Faith leaders are often over tasked and are not able to meet all the demands of their parishioners.

Faith leaders have particular concerns when victimization involves another family member and the victim’s immediate safety is at issue. Increasingly, incidents reported to faith communities involve victims and offenders within the same faith. A victim’s unwillingness to seek assistance outside the faith community is not always founded on their religious beliefs, but instead centered on family beliefs. Particularly when the victimization involves another family member. When there are family breakups due to victimization, the overall faith community often experiences a division of support for the victim and offender.

“One of their greatest challenges is having both the victim and the offender in the same parish.”

When clergy preach about crime and victimization issues, it may provoke victims to come forward and seek help. Faith leaders and lay persons within the faith community are not always certain about what to do when a crime victim is not willing to speak with anyone outside the faith community. Therefore, it is important for them to be educated and become aware of the type of resources and services available to victims in their community.

2. As a service provider, when a crime victim has had a spiritual need, how have you responded? Are service providers generally comfortable with dealing with victims' spiritual needs?

Although several service agencies have direct contact with faith communities to network and provide referrals, some experience difficulty with referring victims to faith organizations because of the conflict with their agency's mission and the faith community's mission. However, a victim's spiritual need is often misunderstood or overlooked in the traditional models of victim services.

"Sometimes there is a conflict between the traditional secular model of victim services and the faith-based model."

Although the need for spiritual support is an individual choice, that choice is often taken away simply by participating in the traditional service models. Service providers admit that they don't always know how to address spiritual needs.

One participating service provider representing the County Department of Social Services (DSS) spoke about the recent development of a faith-based initiative to collaborate with faith organizations in referring victims to services.

"The DSS office manages a clearinghouse of faith-based organizations and referral resources for crime victims. The database lists more than 200 faith organizations located in Prince George's County. Staff tracks the types of victim service requests made by the faith community. The database serves as a referral resource for the faith community to connect to victim services, and identifies gaps in services. DSS staff conducts quarterly meetings with faith leaders to share and assess local resources for crime victims. DSS continues to expand the number of faith organizations and the list of resources for victims."

Most focus group participants agree that service providers and faith communities need to integrate more and educate one another about the needs of victims.

3. As a faith leader, what is the general response or type of assistance provided to a crime victim who seeks your assistance? What type of general assistance is provided? Are faith leaders comfortable with their responses to victims in crisis or in need of assistance?

Faith-based participants report that their own organization attempts to provide assistance to crime victims whenever they are approached. While the primary objective for faith communities is to provide assistance as early as possible, most agree that it can be challenging due to limited resources. Some provide general guidance to crime victims and their families through newsletters and other literature. Others network with local service providers and other support agencies to enhance their level of assistance to crime victims.

Most faith leaders admit that they don't always know how to help victims and aren't aware of the comprehensive level of services that they require. They also agree that faith leaders need more guidance and formal training in dealing with the complexity of victimization.

Historically, the faith community hasn't been well informed about the scope of services. Most become aware of specific resources in the local community through word of mouth or personal contacts. No one was aware of a resource directory. Members of the faith community need referral sources and contact information for local service providers so that their resources can expand beyond whom they know or happen to encounter through their own contacts.

Another general belief among focus group participants is that the faith community is often not aware of the continuing process and the complexity of the problem of victimization.

For example, one faith leader stated,

"I thought I was helping a domestic violence victim and their children until I discovered the honeymoon phase of the domestic violence cycle and came to understand the cyclical process of domestic violence."

Some service providers believe that leaders in the faith community are not well informed about the specific needs of certain crime victims. Some faith leaders are too busy or they are unwilling to become more knowledgeable. Sometimes the lack of interest in learning more about victim services is because they believe the primary solution in dealing with crime victims is to advocate for keeping families together, regardless of the type of victimization experienced.

4. Is there a clear understanding among both service providers and faith leaders as to how each provides assistance to victims?

Both the faith and victim service communities are not always aware of the available resources that each may provide to crime victims. Faith leaders have concerns about not having enough knowledge about services, and service providers are not clear about what type of assistance the faith community can provide to victims. Everyone agrees that both have valuable resources that should be shared across the two communities.

One participant notes that,

“Many crime victims are forced to repeat their crime victimization story too many times as they pass through the criminal justice system and seek assistance.”

Some participants believe that if the faith community’s role was limited to supporting victims through spiritual leadership, and they referred victims out to the local community for services, the two communities could eliminate redundancy.

“If the community works together, then we may be able to reduce how many times a victim has to re-experience their victimization. A basic knowledge of when and where to refer victims is critical in preventing revictimization.”

Others feel that a greater understanding and awareness about what each community can offer to victims would greatly enhance the quality of overall services to victims.

A. Are professionals in faith communities aware of the available resources to victims of crime? Referral agencies, treatment programs, legal advocacy, etc.

Faith leaders often have limited knowledge about the scope of services or the importance of and need for specific services. For example, the need for comprehensive mental health and physical health, family support, shelter, food, other forms of medical assistance, and financial assistance are all common needs among crime victims. However, most agree that faith leaders are unaware of the wide array of need; consequently they don’t refer victims outside their faith community.

“Victims are not accessing resources beyond what is offered within the faith community. Some crime victims will only seek help from their faith leader, who may not know how to help.”

In addition, faith leaders don't always distinguish between direct and indirect victims of crime, thus preventing some victims from receiving appropriate services.

"If victims do not receive appropriate services based on their individual needs, unresolved issues may fester and lead to more serious difficulties."

Traditionally, the faith community has had a limited relationship with service providers and often don't always know how to reach out in their local area. Consequently, access to comprehensive services is not always readily available to victims who seek help from the faith community.

The faith community often has to envision the value of a program or service to refer victims. Participants from the faith community voiced concern about referring victims to appropriate services.

"Inappropriate services can do more harm than good."

B. Are service providers aware of the level of assistance victims can receive from the faith community?

Service providers support the need for crime victims to seek spiritual support in the healing process, but there is some uncertainty about the spiritual aspect of healing. Although service providers strongly advocate for spiritual healing, some believe that victims need a support structure as well as a spiritual presence. In traditional faith-based models, the spiritual component of victim healing is typically separated from other mental and physical healing processes. Service providers agree that they need to become more knowledgeable about the religious aspects of victims' needs and learn how to address spirituality and culturally based needs. Some victims initially lose faith in their spirituality and don't want to seek support from the faith community until the healing process progresses beyond the mental and physical healing stage. Service providers need guidance in helping those who want to reconnect spiritually.

Most of the participating faith leaders believe that they have a wealth of resources that aren't tapped into by crime victims or service providers. Several participants discussed the need to expand the marketing of faith-based services and expertise.

Service providers are looking for ways to better understand the faith community and understand the type of assistance faith communities can provide to victims. The general agreement is that a more collaborative relationship is needed between both communities.

5. How do you see the faith community best serving crime victims? How can their level of assistance be enhanced?

The overall consensus among participants is that education and collaboration are the key factors that will lead to enhanced services. Focus group participants agreed that the faith community is an important link and they need an expanded role in serving crime victims.

With the appropriate knowledge, the faith community could create a safe and comfortable environment for victims.

“Making it okay to speak about victimization and more comfortable to share information through sermons, collaboration, capacity building, and former victims would help.”

Most believe that both communities need to be better educated about one another.

“Now that I am aware of the complex problem of domestic violence, I primarily refer crime victims to local community service providers to ensure they can access the appropriate services and assistance required to prevent future victimization.”

Prior to developing an educational component, a general understanding about the level of education and what elements are lacking will be necessary. For example,

“Are faith leaders starting at ground zero?”

“What are the core issues that need to be understood before you can educate the community?”

“Who needs to be educated?”

It is important that faith communities be educated in crime victimization and have better access to resources. Education may dispel some of the myths associated with crime victimization, for example, the belief that domestic violence equals divorce. Topics such as, “the culture of the problem”, “the seriousness of crime victimization”, and “a better understanding about victim and offender relationships”, may be realized through more formal education.

A clear understanding of the link between the legal versus cultural and ethical/moral issues of serving crime victims should be a key component in educating both service providers and faith leaders.

“We need to become aware of who in our [faith] community has the gift to provide services to victims.”

For example, many believe laypersons may be the primary link.

“Lay persons in the faith community are viewed as some of the strongest advocates for victims and can be the liaison between the faith community and the victim service community. “

“Lay persons should be viewed as the primary link to building relationships with the local community and expanding faith based resources for crime victims.”

In addition, faith leaders can play a key role in educating fellow faith leaders. Education should include all members of the faith community, faith leaders, laypersons, and the parish family. Anyone who has direct contact with victims, as well as anyone who has been a victim or who is at risk of becoming a victim should also be included.

6. How would you envision building a network between the faith community and victim assistance service providers?

Some of the key elements that were identified by the participants as leading factors to a more integrated network are listed in Chart 2. Participants suggest that if both communities work together in implementing most of these factors, crime victims would be served in a more holistic manner.

Chart 2. Elements in Building Integrated Services.

Communication	Outreach	Education	Knowledge
Resources	Networking	Trust	
Collaboration	Compassion	Empowerment	

Greater community outreach is necessary for both communities to share and exchange knowledge and resources. One of the most efficient ways to form a network of representatives from both the faith and service communities is a coalition. A coalition would promote communication, education, and assist in the exchange of knowledge and resources.

A collaborative and trusting relationship is required before services and assistance can be enhanced for crime victims within the faith community. Both communities are beginning to understand the growing need for collaboration. However, a trusting relationship is required before they can begin to collaborate. Historically, there has been a lack of trust between the faith community and the criminal justice system. Service providers are often associated with the criminal justice process, and consequently a lack of trust carries over into the service community. To build trust, there should be increased networking and open dialogue between the two communities.

Contacts other than faith leaders may be more appropriate for networking with the community. For example, laypersons, parish nurses, youth leaders, and parishioners with professional experience in victim related issues, would be valuable liaisons to the service community. Service providers should expand community outreach and expand education programs to involve both clergy and parishioners.

Most faith leaders who seek assistance for crime victims do so only when someone in their congregation is in need. It is rare that faith leaders seek assistance before a victim approaches them for help or guidance. To change the culture within the faith community, people with solid credibility will need to guide dialogue and help build relationships to bridge the gap between the service and faith communities.

One of the challenges in building collaborative relationships with faith and service communities is getting the faith leaders to the table. Participation in educational workshops has historically experienced low attendance among faith leaders. There is an underlying belief that some faith leaders are in denial that victimization is going on in their congregation, and spiritual and cultural beliefs may play a role in their resistance to recognize victimization. Perhaps, increased collaboration among "interfaith" leaders would help to develop more common goals and more enhanced collaboration with service providers, while at the same time encourage greater support from the faith community leadership.

An interfaith collaboration would increase the level of understanding regarding the diverse issues associated with religion and spirituality. In addition to a stronger collaboration between the faith and service providers, an interfaith collaboration would be helpful in developing an integrative service structure.

Service providers could be an important component in helping the faith community better understand victimization issues and ultimately bringing together victims and the faith community. Having a clear understanding about safety issues will encourage faith leaders to make appropriate referrals based on victims' needs.

Service providers are beginning to interact more with the faith community, some provide victims with referrals to local faith organizations, and others provide information on a

regular basis to faith organizations. One participant states that,

“Faith leaders and service providers need to “switch roles” to educate one another, build trust, and develop a stronger relationship between the two communities.”

Participants recommend that an exchange of knowledge and experience between service providers and faith leaders will increase understanding and open communication between the communities. By exchanging information, a trusting relationship will develop and improve collaboration.

Some suggestions made by the participants of the type of tools needed for building a network are listed in Chart 3 shown below.

Chart 3. Tools for Building a Network:

Databases	Websites
Newsletter	Literature
Church Conferences	Training
Discussion Boards	Best Practices
Faith-based Advocates	
Bible School Curriculum	
Youth Leader Retreats	

Focus group participants agreed to be members of a coalition and to begin meeting on a regular basis to establish a continuity of communication and sharing.

7. How can we educate and network better with youth leaders in the faith community?

There is a growing need for crisis intervention and support services for youth. The specific type of assistance and support structures are an emerging need in the local community. Prince George’s County experiences a very high rate of violence among youth and has an increasing demand to expand resources for children and youth within the community.

Youth leaders within the faith community need to be educated as well. Information can be passed on through newsletters, trainings, conference, summer programs, and

retreats. The Youth Life Ministries can be a primary liaison for the local faith organizations to connect with youth leaders and young parishioners. Educational components could be added to faith programs such as the Youth Summits and conferences. Service providers should expand their outreach to include youth leaders, young parishioners, and parishioners who work with youth.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Everyone was in agreement that the faith community is an important resource in the healing process for most crime victims.

“A holistic model of services should involve a comprehensive and holistic approach to mind, body and spiritual healing.”

An integrated approach to treatment is required throughout the healing process. The three primary goals of the needs assessment include:

- 1) Achieving an integrated approach to victim services,
- 2) Capacity building, and
- 3) Reducing the gap in services.

Based on these goals the following five areas of recommendations are presented.

Recommendation #1 - *Coalition*.

The first recommendation is to build a solid partnership through a “**coalition**”. Coalition members should represent the faith community, victim service providers, and other professionals who are involved with victim related issues. Establish a liaison for each of the faith communities --a key layperson or youth leader-- so that faith leaders are not over tasked.

It was suggested by the participants that the collaborative process begin with the mid size churches. The mid size organizations typically have more hands-on interaction with their congregations and parish communities than the larger faith organizations. Also, the mid size communities have more resources than smaller faith organizations so they would be the more ideal starting place for passing on information and expanding the network. Smaller faith organizations have a limited amount of resources and

leadership and may not have the funding or the staff to offer as much assistance to crime victims.

One of the driving forces behind successful working relationships is to have common goals and missions. The coalition process should begin with the development of an implementation plan that establishes goals and a mission for the coalition. To achieve these goals, the coalition should focus on encouraging faith leaders to buy into the need to enhance the scope of victim services. To increase support, clear objectives should be delineated prior to bringing faith leaders to the table.

“Most believe that faith leader resistance to community-based services is one of the key barriers and limitations to expanding resources within the faith community.”

Recommendation #2 - Education.

The second recommendation is to exchange knowledge and resources between the faith and service communities. The coalition leaders can work with the local community to **educate** both faith leaders and service providers about one another. Faith leaders will learn about crime victimization and comprehensive service models, and service providers will learn more about spiritual healing and resources available in the faith community. Program staff would work with community members who are currently involved with the faith community to educate and to provide support and access to services. Multilingual workshops, training, and educational presentations would be used to build knowledge and awareness of crime victim issues and their needs, and to provide availability of current services.

Recommendation #3 - Marketing.

The third recommendation is to develop **awareness campaigns** that will encourage faith leaders and service providers to buy into an integrated model of service. Develop a “template for care” - using uniform, consistent, and clear messages about the type and quality of services. The message should be about “victim services being a part of the fabric of the faith community.” Campaigns should help to encourage support and trust for specific programs and services, and increase the rate of referrals across the spectrum of services.

Recommendation #4 - Resource Directory.

The fourth recommendation is to develop a comprehensive **resource directory** for the local community. The coalition members can work with the local community to develop

a service directory of both faith-based and victim service resources.

Recommendation #5 - Website.

The fifth recommendation would be the establishment of a **Website**. This Website would be established as a clearinghouse for faith-based information and victim service resources. The Website would be helpful for centralizing and accessing resources. Included on the Web page would be a discussion board for inquiries and discussions on current issues and concerns within the community. A Website would also provide access to other electronic resources and technology.

Appendices

Appendix A
Focus Group Discussion Questions

Focus Group Discussion Questions*

1. Are there a significant number of victims who exclusively seek assistance from faith communities when they are in need or in crisis?
2. As a service provider, when a crime victim has had a spiritual need, how have you responded? Are service providers generally comfortable with dealing with victims' spiritual needs?
3. As a faith leader, when a crime victim has sought your assistance, how have you responded? Are faith leaders comfortable with their responses to victims in crisis or in need of assistance?
4. Is there a clear understanding among both service providers and faith leaders as to how each provides assistance to victims?
 - A. Are professionals in faith communities aware of the available resources to victims of crime? Referral agencies, treatment programs, legal advocacy, etc.
 - B. Are service providers aware of the level of assistance victims can receive from the faith community?
5. How do you see the faith community best serving crime victims? How can their level of assistance be enhanced?
6. How would you envision building a network between the faith community and victim assistance service providers?
7. How can we educate and network better with youth leaders in the faith community?

*All Questions relate to crime victims in Prince George's County Maryland.

Appendix B

Focus Group Participants' Contact Information

(n=24)

Participant Contact Information

Monica Player, monica@hruth.org
House of Ruth

Barton Stone, Bstone@EMCSVCS.com
Edgewood Management Community Services

Holly Bentley, DVICM1@msn.com
Domestic Violence Interfaith Coalition of Maryland

L'Tanya Brown, Lbrown7@DHR.state.md.us
Prince George's County Department of Social Services

Bonnie Cord, Bonnie@mdcrimevictims.org
Maryland Crime Victims' Resource Center, Inc.

Jocelyn Curley, Jcurley@ci.greenbelt.md.us
Victim Advocate - Greenbelt Police Department

Roberta Roper, rroper@toadmail.com
The Maryland Crime Victims' Resource Center, Inc.

Sandra Mizell Chaney, buildingfamiliesinc@hotmail.com
Building Families, Inc.

Rev. Terence Collins, tdcollins@cmpgc.org
Community Ministry of Prince George's County

Kathy Dougherty, Kdougherty@EMCSVCS.com
Edgewood Management, Community Services

Deacon Johnny Martin, faithtemple2@cs.com
Faith Temple #2

Elder Johnny Higgs, faithtemple2@cs.com
Faith Temple #2

Norma Harley, njharley@co.pg.md.us
Victim Advocate - Prince George's Sheriff's Department

Gail Jackson, gail.jackson8@Verizon.net
Pathfinder Project, Inc.

Participant Contact Information Cont'd.

Denise McCain,
Family Crisis Center
DMccain@familycrisiscenter-pgco.org

Ginny Beauchamp,
Prince George's County DSS
VBeauch@DHR.state.md.us

Rev. Wayne Price,
Grief/Victim Support Ministry
RevPrice@msn.com

Regina Rawnsley,
The Maryland Crime Victims' Resource Center, Inc.
Regina@mdcrimevictims.org

Maxine Ball,
Consultant - works with DVICM
(no e-mail address)

Portia Cox,
Victim Advocate, Prince George's Police Dept.
PJCox@co.pg.md.us

Sandy Bromley,
Maryland Crime Victims' Resource Center, Inc.
Sandy@mdcrimevictims.org

Capt. Ivey
Seat Pleasant Police Department
Chaplain for Chief's Association (IACP)

Robert Morgan
Parkview Baptist Church

Linda Morgan
Parkview Baptist Church