The author(s) shown below used Federal funds provided by the U.S. Department of Justice and prepared the following final report:

Automated Victim Notification: Awareness and Use Among Service Providers and Victims

Seri Irazola (PI), Emily Niedzwiecki, Sara Debus-Sherrill, and Erin Williamson

STUDY OVERVIEW

This issue brief is the result of a U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) National Institute of Justice (NIJ)-funded evaluation of the Statewide Automated Victim Information and Notification (SAVIN) programs administered by the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA). Funded in fall 2009, the purpose of this evaluation was to explore the implementation and operation of automated victim notification (AVN) systems in supporting victims of crime..

This issue brief provides evaluation findings on the awareness and use of AVN services among service providers and victims, including their satisfaction with, perceived benefits of, and challenges using AVN systems. To capture the experiences of service providers and victims, researchers employed a two-pronged approach, surveying service providers and victims.

RESPONDENT BACKGROUND

Service Providers

Surveys were received from 1,246 service providers in all 50 states and the District of Columbia.[1] Respondents represented a diverse range of organizations, geographic service areas, types of victim services provided, and victim populations served. Nearly two-thirds (63%) of service providers worked for community-based organizations, one-third (33%) worked in criminal justice government agencies, and 4% reported working in non-criminal justice government agencies. The majority of respondents reported serving counties, cities, and other localities (83%), with 12% of respondents serving state or regional areas, and 1% serving victims at the federal level.

Many respondents reported serving multiple victim populations, with the most common types of victimization including domestic violence (91%),

sexual assault (82%), stalking (73%), child abuse (65%), assault (60%), and elder abuse (57%). Service providers also reported providing a diverse array of services. The most common types of services provided by respondents included information/referrals (94%), court accompaniment (83%), crisis intervention (81%), criminal justice system advocacy (73%), compensation claim assistance (71%), and legal advocacy (62%).

Victims

There were 1,355 respondents to the survey of victims, of which 723 (58%) were completed by self-identified crime victims and were included for analysis.[2] Surveys were received from 35 states and the District of Columbia. A large majority (89%) of the respondents were female. Less than half were White (49%), with nearly one-quarter African American (23%), 15% Hispanic, and 13% identifying as another or multiple races.

Most respondents (72%) reported seeking services for non-violent offenses, including domestic violence;[3] 68% of all respondents reported being a victim of domestic violence. Just over one-quarter (28%) reported seeking services for a violent crime (i.e., murder and non-negligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault).

AWARENESS AND USE OF AUTOMATED NOTIFICATION

The majority of service providers (74%) reported using AVN systems for registering and/or referring victims. In contrast, less than one-quarter (23%) of victim respondents were registered to receive AVN services. Of victims who were registered, 59% first heard about AVN through a service provider, and 42% reported registering through a provider.

---

[1] A total of 1,248 surveys were completed and 2 were excluded due to duplication.

[2] Of the survey respondents, 1,258 responded to the question *Which of the following best describes you?* (i.e., self-identifying as a victim/survivor of a crime, relative of a victim/survivor, friend of a victim/survivor, or other visitor).

[3] Domestic violence is defined as a non-violent crime by the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting Program.

Three-quarters (75%) of victims who were not registered for AVN services reported that they were unaware of any way to receive automated notification in their jurisdiction.[4] Furthermore, just over half (53%) indicated that they would be interested in receiving automated notifications. Among non-registered victims who were aware of AVN services in their jurisdiction, the most common reasons cited for not registering was a lack of interest in receiving automated notifications, followed by privacy/security concerns.

AVN System Characteristics and Features

Whether or not service providers choose to use automated notification was strongly associated with the characteristics and features of the AVN system in their jurisdiction. Seamless registration, which allows registered users to receive AVN services across multiple branches of the criminal justice system without having to reregister, was the strongest predictor of AVN use among service providers. Service providers in jurisdictions offering this feature were more than two and a half times more likely to use AVN services than those in jurisdictions without this feature. In addition, service providers in jurisdictions with higher levels of participation among branches of the criminal justice system and those in jurisdictions that offer notification services in multiple languages were also more likely to use AVN. These findings suggest the importance of system comprehensiveness for AVN use among providers.

These features, however, did not have a significant impact on the likelihood of registration among victims, indicating that victims may be less aware of the level of services they are receiving and the features of their jurisdiction's AVN system.

Demographic and Organization Characteristics

The only demographic variable found to be a significant predictor of victim registration was age, with older victims (60+) less likely to register than their younger counterparts. Other demographic characteristics, including gender, race/ethnicity, and victimization type, were not strong predictors of victim registration. In addition, victims receiving services through criminal justice-based agencies were more likely to register than those seeking services through a community-based provider. This finding may be linked to several factors, such as requirements for victim notification in criminal justice government agencies. Although organization type did not impact AVN use among service providers, the type of jurisdiction they serve did have an effect. Respondents serving local jurisdictions were more likely to use automated notification, which may be associated with the increased provision of direct victim services at the local level.

Use of Manual Notification Services

The majority of service providers who reported registering and/or referring victims for AVN services (60%) indicated that they continue to provide manual notifications to victims. Similarly, half of registered victims also reported receiving manual notifications. The provision of manual notification proved to be strongly associated with AVN registration and use among both service providers and victims. Service providers offering manual notification were more than twice as likely to use their jurisdiction's AVN system, while victim respondents who receive manual notifications were nearly 14 times more likely to register for AVN services. These shared findings suggest that both victims and service providers often prefer to use automated and manual notification concurrently rather than automated notification serving as an alternative to manual notification or vice versa.

SATISFACTION WITH AUTOMATED NOTIFICATION

In general, satisfaction was high among both victims (76% were very or extremely satisfied) and service providers (63%), although victims reported significantly higher satisfaction ratings. In addition, 94% of victims indicated that they would encourage other victims to use AVN services.

AVN System Characteristics and Features

Similar to predicting AVN registration and use, AVN system features and characteristics were again more important for predicting satisfaction among service providers than for victims. Service provider respondents from jurisdictions with greater participation among branches of the criminal justice system were more likely to report high satisfaction. The fact that this was not also significant for victims

---

[4] It is unknown whether this is due to the service not being available in the jurisdiction, eligibility exclusions, or the victim being unaware of the available services.

may suggest that they are not aware of the level of coverage their jurisdiction's AVN system offers; lack of awareness regarding gaps in system coverage could have an important impact on victim safety. In contrast, a larger number of triggers, which is another indicator of system comprehensiveness, was related to less satisfaction among service providers. This surprising finding may be linked to various factors. For example, notification triggers that are offered beyond the basic notifications (e.g., release, escape) may be perceived as intrusive.

Automated Notification Services

Not surprisingly, both victims and service providers who had experienced problems with the system in the past rated their satisfaction lower. Other system usage factors also influenced satisfaction for victims, including having previously received a notification and using text notifications. These findings suggest that victims who have experienced the AVN system first-hand are more satisfied, while also confirming the emergence of text notifications as a valued mode of notification among victims.

CHALLENGES

In general, a relatively small number of victims and service providers reported experiencing challenges with AVN (e.g., difficulty registering, delayed or outdated notification). However, service providers (38%) were significantly more likely to have encountered problems with AVN than victim respondents (18%). Service providers may be more likely to encounter problems, in part, because of the higher frequency with which they register clients for AVN services and/or receive notifications on behalf of their clients. Service providers may also coordinate with other agencies that provide services or participate in various stakeholder activities where AVN problems may be discussed, which may, in turn, increase their awareness of the limitations of their jurisdiction's AVN system.

Two features of service providers' organizational affiliation significantly predicted challenges. Service providers in community-based organizations were less likely to experience challenges than those working in criminal justice government agencies. In addition, providers with smaller caseloads (less than 31 clients per month) were significantly less likely to experience challenges. Both findings may be linked

to the level of exposure to AVN systems, as well as awareness of AVN features and limitations among these groups of service providers.

Regression models predicting whether or not victims experienced challenges had poor fit; therefore, the results are not presented here.

SUMMARY

Generally, survey results demonstrate that the overall concept of automated notification is important to service providers and victims, and that AVN provides a valued service. Service providers and victims expressed high satisfaction with and perceived benefits from their jurisdiction's AVN system, and the majority of victims indicated that they would recommend the system to others. Findings also seem to indicate that system characteristics are important for predicting AVN use and satisfaction among service providers, but this does not hold true for victims. This finding should be explored further as it could indicate that victims may lack awareness of the services that they are or are not receiving, which, in turn, may impact victim safety.

METHODOLOGY

Researchers employed a two-pronged approach, surveying service providers and victims, to better understand awareness, use, and perceptions of AVN by victims and victim service providers.[5]
The survey of service providers targeted individuals providing direct services to victims of violent crime. Service providers were identified through multiple data sources (e.g., service provider directories, previously interviewed system administrators, the National Sheriffs' Association[6] listserv), and the use of snowball sampling.

Using a stratified sample of respondents from the survey of service providers, researchers worked with over 200 victim service provider offices to

---

[5] An impact study with true control groups was outside the scope of this evaluation.
[6] The National Sheriffs' Association is a professional membership organization that provides training, education, and resources to sheriffs' offices and other public safety professionals and agencies nationwide. The expansive scope of the association's member agencies, both geographically and in types of agencies represented, and its strong reputation within and relationship with the law enforcement community allowed the research team to reach a diverse contingent of public safety professionals.

disseminate the survey of victims to their clientele. In order to protect respondents' privacy and minimize burden on participating service providers, researchers employed a convenience sampling method, asking participating organizations to display the surveys in a public area where they could be completed by anyone visiting the office for an issue related to victim services.

The survey of service providers was administered online; the survey of victims was primarily administered through hard copies, but was also available electronically. All survey instruments were reviewed and pilot tested for readability, sensitivity, and applicability prior to administration. Researchers analyzed survey data using a combination of descriptive statistics, simple comparison tests (e.g., t-tests, chi-square tests), and regression analyses.

The survey of service providers and the survey of victims were both limited by their self-report aspect, which relied on respondents' perceptions and memories. In addition, the ability to assess representativeness and generalize findings from the survey of service providers and victims was hindered by the lack of an existing list of all eligible service providers, the use of snowball sampling in the survey of service providers, and the fact that the survey of victims was distributed through service providers using non-probability methods, thus limited to victims seeking services who actively volunteered to complete the survey. Also for these reasons, a valid response rate could not be generated for either survey, and the extent to which findings were representative of service providers' and victims' experience with AVN is unknown. Therefore, readers should use caution when interpreting findings.

There are also limitations related to the survey instruments. Previously validated instruments could not be used due to the lack of existing measures related to AVN, and the format of the surveys did not facilitate the use of interreliability tests due to the varying format of questions and the small number of items for scales (e.g., four items for the 5-point satisfaction scale on the victim survey).