

**The author(s) shown below used Federal funding provided by the U.S. Department of Justice to prepare the following resource:**

**Document Title:**            **Short Summary: Findings from a Rigorous Evaluation of a Technology-Based Victim Helpline: Summary of the Implementation and Outcome Evaluation of the VictimConnect Resource Center**

**Author(s):**                **Ms. Jennifer Yahner**

**Document Number:**   **311971**

**Date Received:**        **May 2026**

**Award Number:**        **15PNIJ-22-GG-03290-NONF**

**This resource has not been published by the U.S. Department of Justice. This resource is being made publicly available through the Office of Justice Programs' National Criminal Justice Reference Service.**

**Opinions or points of view expressed are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.**

*Findings from a Rigorous Evaluation of a Technology-Based Victim Helpline: Summary of the Implementation and Outcome Evaluation of the VictimConnect Resource Center*

**PI: Ms. Jennifer Yahner**, Senior Research Fellow, Justice and Safety Division

---

## FINAL REPORT ABSTRACT

This report presents a comprehensive evaluation of the VictimConnect Resource Center (VCRC), a national hotline for individuals affected by all types of crime. Conducted between 2019 and 2025, the research used surveys, staff interviews, and direct observations to assess the center's effectiveness in providing trauma-informed support via phone, chat, and text. Findings indicate that VictimConnect significantly expands access to help, particularly for victims in rural areas or those experiencing less-addressed crimes like fraud and stalking. The reports highlight that the center's 24/7 operations and anonymity protections foster a safe environment that improves the emotional well-being and service awareness of its visitors. To further enhance impact, the authors recommend strengthening local referral databases and standardizing warm transfers.<sup>1</sup> to other service providers. Collectively, the evaluation validates the center's role as a critical and efficient pillar within the national victim services ecosystem.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

The evaluation of the VCRC highlights several key findings regarding its effectiveness as a national, technology-based victim helpline. The main takeaways from the sources are as follows:

### *Expanded Access and Reach*

- Filling Critical Gaps: VictimConnect successfully serves victims of all crime types across the United States and territories, many of whom have experienced multiple forms of victimization, such as stalking, harassment, and intimate partner violence.
- Serving Underserved Populations: The hotline is effective at reaching groups that often face service gaps, including youth, older adults, and rural residents.
- Impact of 24/7 Operations: Expanding to around-the-clock service led to a substantial increase in service volume, more than doubling the average monthly visitors and significantly reducing unclaimed or hang-up contacts.

### *Quality of Service Delivery*

- Trauma-Informed Support: Victim Assistance Specialists (VAS) consistently provide high-quality, empathetic, and respectful support. Approximately 80 percent of visitors perceived their interactions as helpful and felt their emotional and informational needs were addressed.
- Multi-modal Accessibility: Offering phone, online chat, and text options allows the center to meet diverse needs and preferences, which often vary by a visitor's age, sex, and time of day.
- Expert Knowledge: Staff demonstrate strong knowledge of national and state resources, with most visitors (80 percent) reporting that the referrals provided met their needs.

---

<sup>1</sup> A call-handling technique where an operator speaks with a colleague to explain a client's situation before connecting them to the call.

*Findings from a Rigorous Evaluation of a Technology-Based Victim Helpline: Summary of the Implementation and Outcome Evaluation of the VictimConnect Resource Center*

**PI: Ms. Jennifer Yahner**, Senior Research Fellow, Justice and Safety Division

---

*Positive Visitor Outcomes*

- Increased Knowledge: Interactions with a VAS lead to immediate and sustained increases in awareness of local resources and knowledge of victims' rights and safety planning.
- Improved Well-being: Connecting with staff is associated with a more positive outlook, including significantly higher perceptions of hope and a regained sense of control over their lives.
- Service Uptake: The hotline effectively facilitates pathways to further care; more than two in three visitors who received a referral had contacted that provider one month later.

*Privacy and Field Impact*

- Strong Protections: Privacy, safety, and anonymity are top reasons victims choose VictimConnect. The center uses robust technological and procedural safeguards to protect visitor confidentiality, and staff consistently communicate these safeguards.
- Strengthening the Ecosystem: Through its leadership of the National Hotline Consortium, VictimConnect fosters coordination, shared learning, and capacity building among 23 member hotlines.

*Enhancement*

- The reports suggest several areas to further increase impact, including updating local-level resource databases, establishing warm transfers as standard practice, and providing enhanced staff training on specialized topics such as victim compensation.

## **METHODS**

### **Primary Data Collection Methods**

- *Independent Observations*: Researchers observed 354 interactions between visitors and hotline staff (168 phone, 127 chat, and 59 text) to assess service quality, resource sharing, and protocol fidelity.
- *Staff Surveys*: VAS completed 268 surveys regarding their most recent interactions, providing their perspectives on visitor needs and demographics.
- *Professional Interviews*: Researchers conducted virtual interviews with 21 professionals, including National Center for Victims of Crime (NCVC) leadership, supervisors, VAS, members of the National Hotline Consortium, and frequently referred external service providers.
- *Longitudinal Visitor Surveys*: A voluntary survey was offered to visitors who connected with a VAS (treatment group) and those who did not (comparison group). This resulted in 972 valid initial surveys and 287 follow-up surveys conducted one month later to track sustained outcomes and service uptake.
- *Administrative Data Analysis*: The team analyzed three years of deidentified data from the hotline platform, website analytics (Google Analytics), and internal demographics databases to track service volume and reach.

### **Research Design and Frameworks**

The study was designed as a quasi-experimental outcome evaluation. It used two primary conceptual frameworks:

*Findings from a Rigorous Evaluation of a Technology-Based Victim Helpline: Summary of the Implementation and Outcome Evaluation of the VictimConnect Resource Center*

**PI: Ms. Jennifer Yahner**, Senior Research Fellow, Justice and Safety Division

---

1. Proctor et al., 2011: Used for the implementation evaluation to assess five key areas: acceptability, adoption, fidelity, penetration, and sustainability.
2. Kirkpatrick Model, 2006 & 2016: Used for the outcome evaluation to examine impact across four levels: reactions, learning, attitudes/behaviors, and organizational impacts.

### **Pilot Phase and Quality Control**

A pilot study was conducted from January to June 2024 to test protocols and instruments. Following the pilot, researchers implemented additional fraud-detection measures (such as IP addresses and completion-time checks) to filter out fraudulent "bot" responses in the visitor survey. Statistical analyses included descriptive statistics, t-tests, and regression models that adjusted for visitor demographics.

### **PROJECT DELIVERABLES**

In the original proposal, the awardee presented an extensive dissemination plan. For example, the research team proposed presentations at several conferences and meetings, and submitted ideas for publications, and where they would be disseminated and to whom (both academic and practitioner-oriented). The deliverables listed in the proposal included: an implementation evaluation research brief, an outcome evaluation research brief, two practitioner-oriented briefs, and a submission of a manuscript to a scholarly journal. In addition, the team acknowledged the requirement of a final research report. Proposed dissemination activities included posting products on the applicant organization's website (see <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/findings-rigorous-evaluation-technology-based-victim-helpline>) and sharing them with the Justice Policy Center, the NCVC, and the Center for Victim Research, each of which has a large practitioner following. Other proposed products include a webinar, conference presentations, and a blog post (i.e., *Urban Wire*).

As of May 2026, the project has produced the following presentations and publications (slide decks and factsheets were uploaded to the JustGrants System alongside the final research progress report:

- *Preliminary Findings*. Presented at the 2024 NIJ Research and Evaluation Conference, September 2024.
- *Applying Findings from the VictimConnect Evaluation to Improve Victim Services*. Presented at the NCVC National Training Institute for victim service practitioners in September 2025
- *What the VictimConnect Evaluation Tells Us About Hotline Operations and Impact*. Presented at the National Hotline Consortium webinar for victim hotline practitioners in October 2025
- *Learning from Implementation and Outcome Evaluation of a National Victim Helpline*. Presented at the American Society of Criminology conference for victim researchers in November 2025
- *Evaluating a National Victim Hotline: How We Did It and What We Learned*. Presented at the Center for Victim Research webinar for victim researchers and practitioners in December 2025

Urban Institute

*Findings from a Rigorous Evaluation of a Technology-Based Victim Helpline: Summary of the Implementation and Outcome Evaluation of the VictimConnect Resource Center*

**PI: Ms. Jennifer Yahner**, Senior Research Fellow, Justice and Safety Division

---

- [\*Reaching Victims through Hotline Technology: Lessons from an Evaluation of the VictimConnect Resource Center\*](#). Factsheet published on Urban's website.
- [\*How Do Victims Benefit from Connecting with Trained Hotline Staff? Lessons from an Evaluation of the VictimConnect Resource Center\*](#). Factsheet published on Urban's website.
- [\*Victim Service Provider Collaboration: Lessons from an Evaluation of the VictimConnect Resource Center\*](#). Factsheet published on Urban's website.
- [\*Who Uses a National Victim Hotline? Lessons from an Evaluation of the VictimConnect Resource Center\*](#). Factsheet published on Urban's website.

In addition, the study data and supporting materials have been uploaded to the NACJD site and are currently being curated for public access.

Finally, the assigned scientist has confirmed with the PI that a scholarly product is in the planning phase, with content drafted for a peer-reviewed journal article in which specific findings will be offered.

#### **POST-AWARD DISSEMINATION RECOMMENDATIONS**

Once the NIJ director has approved the NIJ Product Workflow plan, a courtesy copy of the final report will be shared with DOJ colleagues in sister components (e.g., Bureaus of Justice Statistics, Office for Victims of Crime, and the Office of Violence Against Women). Given the PI's wide-reaching dissemination plan and execution, as noted above, aside from archiving the final report and linking it to the grantee's NIJ project web landing page, no additional dissemination activities are recommended at this time.