

Crime Victims Compensation Programs Needs Assessed

NIJ Research in Progress Seminar, "Crime Victims Compensation: Evaluation Findings and Policy and Program Administration Trends and Strategies for the Future," Lisa Newmark, grant number 98-VF-GX-0016, available on videotape from NCJRS (NCJ 189632).

Almost \$1 billion in Federal funds have gone to compensate crime victims since the Victims of Crime Act became law in 1984. Claimants say that the money is making a difference. In a study of compensation programs, victims generally reported positive perceptions of the compensation process.

In an NIJ Research in Progress seminar, Lisa Newmark, a senior research associate at the Urban Institute, presented findings from an ongoing study of crime victims' compensation programs. The study surveyed 452 compensation claimants in 6 States, plus compensation and

assistance administrators in all 50 States. Selected State administrators, members of oversight bodies, advocacy group representatives, and direct service providers were also interviewed.

Research Reveals Needs

More than two-thirds of the crime victims who were approved for compensation suffered an average financial loss of \$600. Ongoing research shows a need for expanded outreach to victims, consideration of expanded benefits, higher compensation caps, revised eligibility criteria, and increased funding if victim support programs are to truly reach their potential.

Expand benefits. Generally, only certain types of expenses are eligible for compensation. The survey findings showed that additional compensation to cover items such as moving expenses would

help a considerable number of victims who suffer crime in or near their homes. Claimants also suggested that States should consider raising the compensation limits for reimbursements of funeral and burial costs, mental health counseling, medical treatment for catastrophic injuries, and other such expenses.

Expand eligibility requirements. Because the monetary effects of crime are often complex, reaching beyond the primary victim alone, expanding compensation for secondary victims of crime—including victims' dependents and other relatives—should be considered.

Extend deadlines. Filing deadlines are being extended for certain types of victims (for example, victims of child abuse who may not report such incidents until long afterwards). The research suggests that reports to authorities other than the police might be considered in determining eligibility and that requirements of notification of insurance companies might be reconsidered in cases in which claimants could be negatively affected by the filing of an insurance claim.

Improve case processing. Some programs are streamlining the processing of claims for compensation, which currently can take up to 6 months. For claims to be processed faster, improvements must be made in the claims verification process.

Improve training. Better training of the direct service providers who assist victims with the claims process is also needed. In addition, more diverse groups—particularly those who work effectively with minorities—could be brought into the claims process to increase the number and diversity of compensation claims.

Explain the program. Claimants say they want greater knowledge of the claims process. Compensation programs need better publicity and better explanations of claims procedures for potential claimants. More than half of the crime victims surveyed whose claims were denied said that they weren't given a reason for the denial.

Funding These Innovations

Taking steps to improve program operations, with the goal of providing more benefits to more victims, means more funds will be needed, including money to support administrative activities.

For more information

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