

**Community Action Network**  
 Frequently Asked Questions About  
**Victims of Violent Crime**  
 July 2009



Approximately 5 out of 6 people will become victims of attempted or completed violent crime at least once in their lives.

I never thought this could happen to me. I came home from work one day and saw something I would never forget. My brother-in-law had my teenage son pinned to the floor and was strangling him. When I tried to stop him, he pulled a knife on me and began yelling threats. He held my son and me hostage for several hours in our own home. He left without a word of explanation. I just kept thinking to myself, “Why me? Why us? What do I do next?”

**PRIORITY ISSUES**

- **Violent crimes are underreported.** Victims may not report crimes because they are afraid of retaliation from their abuser, they fear deportation, they are afraid of losing their children, they feel that the incident was too private or personal, or they are afraid of getting their abuser into trouble.<sup>1,2</sup>
- **Victims are often victimized by someone that they know.** Most perpetrators of crime against women and half of the perpetrators of crime against men are not strangers.<sup>3</sup>

**VIOLENT CRIME VICTIMIZATION IN OUR COMMUNITY**

Victims of crime include the immediate targets of violent or threatening behavior, their families, and members of the group or community to which they belong.<sup>4</sup>

<b>RECENTLY REPORTED CASES OF VICTIMIZATION IN TRAVIS COUNTY</b>		
<b>Case Type</b>	<b># of Reported Cases</b>	<b>Trend</b>
Family Violence*	9,176	Increasing
Aggravated Assault*	2,277	Increasing
Child Abuse & Neglect**	1,960	Holding
Abuse & Neglect of the Elderly and People with Disabilities**	1,403	Increasing
Rape*	372	Increasing
Human Trafficking**	44	Increasing
Murder*	35	Decreasing
Hate Crimes*	9	Increasing

Many of these cases are underreported. See reference #s 5-7 on page four.  
 \*Data from 2007 \*\*Data from 2008

Nationally it is estimated that violent crime victimization results in tangible costs to victims of over \$17 billion annually because of medical and mental health care expenses, lost productivity, and property damage. If one also includes the intangible costs related to reduced quality of life, pain, and suffering, then the total rises to \$330 billion.<sup>8</sup>

## Frequently Asked Questions about Victims of Violent Crime

### WHAT IS THE VICTIM'S EXPERIENCE?

Victims of crime may experience mental and physical illnesses as a result of their victimization. Victims may experience symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder as well as illnesses such as heart conditions, digestive problems, and diarrhea. If victims do report their crime, they often need assistance as they navigate the legal system.<sup>9</sup> Victims tend to have positive experiences with the criminal justice system when they feel control in moving forward with their case and when they utilize victim services.<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, only one fifth of victims feel that they received the information they needed. Half of all victims felt that prosecuting a case through the criminal justice system was a worthwhile use of their time.<sup>11</sup>

### WHAT RIGHTS DO VICTIMS HAVE?

The Crime Victims' Bill of Rights, adopted by the Texas Legislature, states that victims of violent crimes are afforded rights such as receiving adequate protection as provided by law enforcement agencies, being informed about the investigation and prosecution of their case, and knowing whether they are eligible for Crime Victims Compensation, financial assistance for loss of income or expenses that were a direct result of the crime.<sup>12</sup>

### WHAT KEEPS VICTIMS FROM GETTING HELP?

- **Lack of Information**—Many victims are not aware of victim service resources in their community and, as a result, they often do not access these services.<sup>13</sup> This hinders victims' ability to stay safe, to actively participate in the criminal justice process, and to receive support in trauma recovery.<sup>14</sup>



**Many victims are not aware of victim service resources in their community and, as a result, they often do not receive the help they need.**

- **Fear of Retaliation**—Victims are often victimized by someone that they know. Most perpetrators of crime against females and half of the perpetrators of crime against males are not strangers.<sup>15</sup> Victims may choose not to receive services because of fear of retaliation from the offender.<sup>16</sup> This fear results in underreporting of crime which has several consequences for our community: adequate knowledge of crimes reduces effective prevention and intervention plans, the community does not learn that there are consequences for committing criminal acts so more crime occurs, and the message to the community is that there is a lack of concern for their safety.<sup>17</sup>
- **A Lack of Trust in the System**—Members of racial/ethnic minority groups are more likely to have unaddressed needs.<sup>18</sup> In Central Texas, 40% of African Americans reported having “little” or “no” confidence in local law enforcement and less than 50% reported having confidence in our criminal courts.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, just under half of Hispanics say they are confident that police officers will treat Hispanics fairly and that courts will treat Hispanics fairly.<sup>20</sup>

### WHICH COMMUNITY MEMBERS ARE AT HIGHEST RISK FOR VICTIMIZATION?

Anyone can become a victim of crime at any point in time.<sup>21</sup> Approximately five out of six people will become victims of attempted or completed violent crime at least once in their lives.<sup>22</sup> Certain types of crime are underreported, however, and the victims of these crimes are often hidden in a community.<sup>23</sup> Only about half of victims of violent victimizations report the crimes to the police.<sup>24</sup> Commonly underreported crimes include: school crime, sexual assault, hate crimes, and domestic violence.<sup>25,26,27,28</sup> Populations especially vulnerable to victimization include children, elderly & adults with disabilities, immigrants and English language learners, and low-income populations.

**Children:** More than half of child victims are six years or younger. The most vulnerable are three years old and younger. Some children cannot or will not ask for help when they need it—even if their lives may be in danger. Thousands of children who suffer abuse and neglect are too young, terrified or confused to tell anyone about their abuse. Child abuse may go unnoticed for years, permanently impairing health and development—or worse, taking lives.<sup>29</sup> An estimated 2 out of every 100,000 children die from injuries that were a result of abuse or neglect.<sup>30</sup>



**Elderly & Adults with Disabilities:** Adults older than the age of 65 and adults over the age of 18 with a disability are particularly vulnerable to abuse and neglect.<sup>31</sup> Many people who are elderly or have disabilities live alone or are dependent on others for their care. Isolation is a factor that places vulnerable adults at risk for abuse, neglect, or exploitation. Abusers may also believe that the elderly and adults with disabilities are less likely to fight back or be believed when they report a crime.<sup>32</sup>

**Certain populations, such as children, are more vulnerable to victimization and less likely to report violent crimes.**

**Immigrants & English Language Learners:** Immigrants and English language learners are especially vulnerable to exploitation and victimization. Examples include difficulty accessing services and systems, experiencing fear of being caught by immigration officials, and they have limited rights and protections and/or a lack of knowledge about rights and protections.<sup>33</sup> Documented immigrant victims report in one out of four instances and undocumented immigrant victims report in just one out of seven instances.<sup>34</sup> Locally, in 2004, Hispanics represented only 28% of the Austin population, but comprised 38% of all homicide victims. It is estimated that at least half of these victims were recently immigrated Spanish-speaking individuals.<sup>35</sup>

**Low-Income Populations:** People who are poor and who live in poor neighborhoods are more likely to be victimized. Higher rates of violent crime tend to be linked to poverty among both victims and criminals.<sup>36</sup> For example, in 2006 the National Crime Victimization Survey found that victims with very low-incomes (below \$7,500 annually) were much more likely to become victims of aggravated assault than those with higher incomes.<sup>37</sup>

## HOW CAN WE IMPROVE THE VICTIM'S EXPERIENCE IN GETTING HELP IN OUR COMMUNITY?

- Increase and improve victim advocacy in the system and in our community.
- Raise community awareness about the importance of reporting crime and of the services that are available for victims.
- Establish victim assistance as a top priority in all criminal and juvenile justice agencies.
- Refer victims to crisis and support services as soon as possible after victimization.
- Provide a “seamless continuum” of services and support for victims of crime.
- Increase services for vulnerable populations.
- Engage victims in developing policy, protocol development, and statute of law.

After filing a protective order against my abuser, I was referred to a victim services agency. The counselors there understood what I was going through and never once tried to tell me what changes I needed to make in my life. When I began meeting with them I was lost, I was scared, and I didn't want my child to be exposed to any future violence. Just having the counselors' support and being able to talk about my experiences let me know that what I was feeling was ok. After that I realized, I'm not just a victim...I'm a survivor.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP?

- Report crime. Call 9-1-1.
- Learn the signs of victimization. Visit the [Network of Victim Assistance](#) website to learn more.
- If you suspect someone has been victimized, discuss any changes in behavior with the victim and a trusted victim assistance professional. Call 2-1-1 for a referral to a professional.
- Know your legal responsibility: in Texas all adults MUST report any suspicion of abuse or victimization of children, the elderly and persons with disabilities. Contact local law enforcement or call the state hotline: 1-800-252-5400.
- Donate to a victim services organization or volunteer with a victim services organization.

## WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?

- Call 2-1-1, a comprehensive database of health and human care services, for referrals to community resources.
- Visit the Austin/Travis County Victim Services Task Force's website:  
<http://caction.org/victims/index.htm>

The Austin/Travis County Victim Services Task Force (VSTF) is a collaboration of victim service providers serving the Austin/Travis County (Texas) community. The purpose of the VSTF is to educate the community and policy makers about the needs of victims, advocate for victim rights and improve the delivery of victim services to individuals needing such services. State and local organizations were involved in the development of this FAQ.

### REFERENCES

- 1 [U.S. Census Bureau](#), 2003
- 2 [DC Coalition Against Domestic Violence](#), 2009
- 3 [Bureau of Justice Statistics](#), 2008
- 4 [International Association of Chiefs of Police](#), 2000
- 5 [Federal Bureau of Investigation](#), 2009
- 6 [Texas Department of Family and Protective Services](#), 2009
- 7 [American Gateways](#), 2009
- 8 [American Journal of Public Health](#), 2008
- 9 [Restore Justice](#), 1999
- 10 [National Institute of Justice](#), 2006
- 11 [Office for Criminal Justice Reform](#), 2005
- 12 [Texas Department of Criminal Justice](#), 2009
- 13 [The Institute for Law and Justice](#), 2004
- 14 [Office for Victims of Crime](#), 2009
- 15 [Bureau of Justice Statistics](#), 2008
- 16 [The Institute for Law and Justice](#), 2004
- 17 [Florida Department of Law Enforcement](#), 2008
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- 19 [Central Texas Sustainability Indicators Project](#), 2006
- 20 [Pew Hispanic Center](#), 2009
- 21 [The National Center for Victims of Crime](#), 1999
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- 23 [Austin/Travis County Victim Services Task Force](#), 2009
- 24 [Journal of American College Health](#), 2008
- 25 [National School Safety and Security Services](#), 2007
- 26 [National Institute of Justice](#), 2005
- 27 [National Crime Prevention Council](#), 2009
- 28 [American Civil Liberties Union](#), 2007
- 29 [Texas Department of Family & Protective Services](#), 2009
- 30 [Child Welfare Information Gateway](#), 2008
- 31 [Texas Department of Family & Protective Services](#), 2009
- 32 [American Society of Adult Abuse Professionals & Survivors](#), 2004
- 33 [Travis County Health and Human Services & Veterans Division](#), 2007
- 34 [American Civil Liberties Union](#), 2007
- 35 [Austin Police Department](#), 2005
- 36 [Federal Reserve Bank of New York Policy Review](#), 1999
- 37 [Bureau of Justice Statistics](#), 2009

\*Hyperlinks to all reports are available when you access this document electronically on [www.caction.org](http://www.caction.org).



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