

Colorado Probation Research in Brief

Impact of Crime on Victims Curriculum: Final Evaluation Report

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Impact of Crime Classes

Summary/Conclusions

Impact of Crime on Victims (IOC) classes have been delivered since originating in the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation in 1984. A variety of curriculum and approaches have evolved and, according to a 2004 national survey, "IOC programs have been adopted by some facilities in as many as 73% of state correctional departments." This proliferation has not been followed up with research on the outcomes of the classes. Little research exists as to the effectiveness of these IOC programs. This study used a control and comparison group to study the short-term effects of a standardized IOC curriculum delivered in ten sites within four states.

Limitations of Information

Random assignment was not possible, given issues with institutional populations, so participants in the control and comparison groups were volunteers. Although no demographic differences were found, risk level and crime type were not controlled for. The measurement for victim blaming was reduced from five items to two, so results on this factor should be interpreted cautiously.

Caveat: The information presented here is intended to summarize and inform readers of research and information relevant to probation work. It can provide a framework for carrying out the business of probation as well as suggestions for practical application of the material. While it may, in some instances, lead to further exploration and result in *future* decisions, it is not intended to prescribe policy and is not necessarily conclusive in its findings. Some of its limitations are described above.

At the time of this study, little research had been conducted on the effect of Victim Impact classes, although their use has become commonplace in correctional settings. With a grant from the Office for Victims of Crime, researchers in this study evaluated an updated Impact of Crime on Victims (IOC) curriculum. Ten sites in four states (California, Tennessee, Ohio, and Vermont) were chosen to participate in the study. Group facilitators received the same training in each site to ensure fidelity to the curriculum. Two samples were drawn from the study sites: a control group of 203 inmate volunteers and a comparison group of 163 inmate volunteers. Analysis was conducted on the sample groups' demographics and determined no significant differences between the samples.

The study design included a 50 question inmate survey which was administered pre- and post-treatment (or equivalent time for comparison group members). The surveys focused on five factors: 1) knowledge of victim rights, 2) knowledge about criminal victimization, 3) sensitivity to victim's plight, 4) personal accountability, and 5) victim blaming. The results were mixed:

1. Knowledge of victim rights-The class participants showed statistically significant improvement compared to the control group. 2. Knowledge about criminal victimization-Again, the class participants showed statistically significant improvement compared to the control group. 3. Sensitivity to victim's plight-The class participants showed gains over the control group, but the increase was not statistically significant. 4. Per-

sonal accountability-The class participants had no change in this area, while the control group got worse. 5. Victim Blaming -No changes in either group, although there were problems with the measurement that may have contributed to the outcome.

Overall, there were short-term benefits to be gained from IOC classes. The least impacted areas included the inmates' beliefs and attitudes, which may require longer and more intensive interventions to change.

Practical Applications

- ✓ Address victim blaming as an anti-social attitude. Consider using the Carey Guides: *Antisocial Thinking and Empathy*.
- ✓ If Victim Impact classes aren't available in your district, discuss homework assignments and activities that might be available through your Victim Services Officer.
- ✓ Before referring to an IOC, use the Carey Guides, *Moral Reasoning* workbook to assess the client's ability to distinguish right from wrong. It may be prudent to delay a referral for clients who are not yet willing to see anything wrong with their behavior.
- ✓ When referring clients to community treatment agencies for IOC classes, ensure the provider is using a standardized or manualized curriculum.
- ✓ Support the client to internalize the information by discussing what is covered in the class, being mindful of the client's attitude toward victim blaming.

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