

August 2016

In the past, crime victim organizations and people who identify as crime victims lobbied and supported the passage of laws that helped fuel the increase of incarceration. Today, a different perspective is emerging: some crime victim organizations are supporting an approach to violence prevention, sentencing and violent crime that offer new opportunities to build support for policy change, and there are new opportunities to expand funding for these approaches.

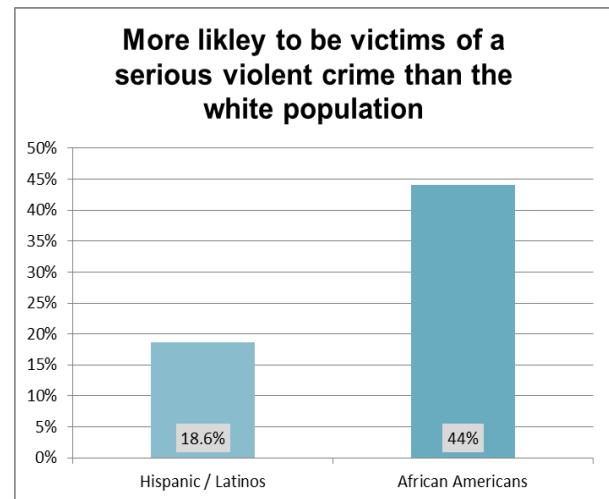
Crime victims support sentencing reform and violence prevention: According to a survey of crime victims commissioned by the Alliance for Safety and Justice, published in August (2016)¹, crime victim's support:

- **Shorter prison sentences:** Six in ten victims (61 percent) prefer shorter prison sentences and more spending on prevention and rehabilitation that keep people in prison for as long as possible;
- **Invest in schools over incarceration:** Nearly nine in 10 (89 percent) of victims surveyed prefer more investment in schools and education to more investments in prisons and jails;
- **Invest in treatment over incarceration:** Eight out of 10 (83 percent) victims surveyed preferred more investment in mental health treatment to more investment in prisons and jails. Seven out of 10 victims (73 percent) prefer more investment in drug treatment to more investment over investment in prisons and jails;

- **Violent crime victims support rehabilitation and neighborhood problem solving:** Nearly eight out of 10 (77 percent) of surveyed violent crime victims preferred that prosecutors focus on solving neighborhood problems and stopping repeat crimes through rehabilitation, even if it means fewer convictions and prison sentences.²

Crime victims are more likely to be young, low income and people of color: The crime victims' organizations that supported passage of laws that led to high rates of incarceration have been critiqued for misrepresenting who is most likely to be a victim of a violent crime.³ The data show:

- **Crime victims are more likely to be people of color:** People of color are 15 percent more likely to be victims of crime. African Americans were nearly one-third more likely to have been victims of violent crime.⁴ Young African American men were the mostly likely group to be robbed.⁵



Source: National Crime Victimization Survey (2015).

- **Crime victims are more likely to be young:** Young people (18-24) experience crime at twice the rate of any other age group.⁶
- **Crime victims are more likely to be low income:** The rate of victimization among people with family incomes less than \$15,000 was over three times that of those with family incomes of \$75,000 or more.⁷

New dollars to serve crime victims' should focus on the communities most impacted by crime.

The Alliance for Safety and Justice survey of crime victims showed that, two out of three victims surveyed received no help following the incident.

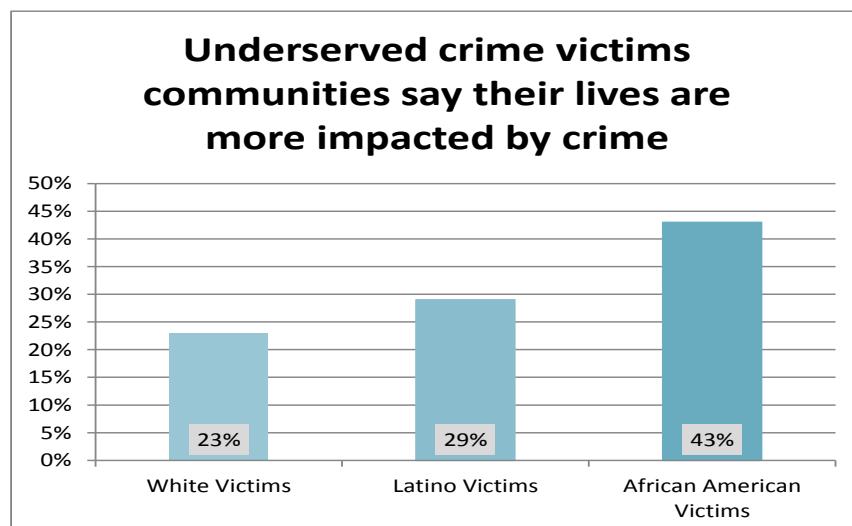
In 2015, the leading federal source that pays for victims' services – the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) – more than doubled in size (from \$745 billion to \$2.3 billion).

While this creates the opportunity to expand services to crime victims, there are challenges in making sure that these dollars are reaching the underserved victims communities.

"[D]espite the formidable work of many, the victim services field has not achieved equity in service delivery. Victims of certain crimes and from certain backgrounds are too often left out. Whether because of limited resources, lack of information, implicit bias, or an emphasis on partnership with law enforcement, the field has struggled to reach many survivors...."⁸ (The Vera Institute of Justice (2016))

In a recent publication, the Vera Institute of Justice made a series of recommendations to the state-based administrators of these funds and their partners to expand services to underserved communities. Some of the recommendations made to help target these funds to underserved communities, include:

- Interpret statutes in a way that does not exclude certain victims from services and ensure that all victims are provided reasonable care;
- Dedicate time and resources to make an affirmative effort to reach new providers and populations;
- Engage "cultural translators" – people who understand the work, culture, values, and practices of both non-traditional providers, and mainstream victims' services;
- Take steps to address the challenge that some community-based providers lack the infrastructure necessary to apply under VOCA grant requirements, and support capacity building of applicants.



Source: Crime Survivors Speak: The First Ever National Survey of Victims on Safety and Justice. Alliance for Safety and Justice (2016).

White victims surveyed are less likely to report that their lives are impacted by crime (23%) than Latino victims (38%) or African American victims (43%).

1 Crime Survivors Speak: The First-Ever National Survey of Victims' (Oakland, California: Alliance for Safety and Justice, 2016).

2 Crime Survivors Speak: The First-Ever National Survey of Victims' (Oakland, California: Alliance for Safety and Justice, 2016).

3 According to a consensus document generated by criminal justice policy and crime victim advocates committed to developing a holistic paradigm to address safety, crime and victimization. "Instead of recognizing that victims and offenders usually come from the same communities, the current paradigm portrays victims as white and middle class, and offenders (generally) as people of color and poor. This serves to further entrench the sides into not only legal silos, but racialized ones. See, Bridging the Divide: A New Paradigm for Safety, Crime and Justice (2016). <http://ejusa.org/bridging-the-divide-a-new-paradigm-for-addressing-safety-crime-and-victimization/> Also see, discussion of Crime Victims United and Californian's Proposition 184 in, Moving Beyond Sides: The Power and Potential of a New Public Safety Policy Paradigm. (Portland, Oregon: Partnership for Safety and Justice, 2011).

4 Truman, Jennifer L. and Langton, Linn. "Criminal victimization, 2014." (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Justice Department, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2015).

5 Sered, Danielle and Butler, Bridgette. Expanding the Reach of Victims Services: Maximizing the Potential of VOCA Funding for Underserved Survivors. (New York City: Vera Institute of Justice, 2016).

6 Truman, Jennifer L. and Langton, Linn. "Criminal victimization, 2014." (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Justice Department, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2015).

7 Kearney, Melissa S. Harris, Benjamin H. Jacome, Elissa, Parker, Lucie. "Ten Economic Facts about Crime and Incarceration in the United States." (Washington, D.C.: The Hamilton Project, 2014)

8 "We know expanded victim services can have far-reaching impact. Thirty years of advocacy for victims has brought about lasting paradigmatic change in our culture's response to domestic and sexual assault, and reached millions of victims of these and other crimes. But despite the formidable work of many, the victim services field has not achieved equity in service delivery. Victims of certain crimes and from certain backgrounds are too often left out.⁴ Whether because of limited resources, lack of information, implicit bias, or an emphasis on partnership with law enforcement, the field has struggled to reach many survivors including immigrants; young people of color; people with disabilities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) people; and other historically marginalized communities.⁵ When people belong to more than one of these groups, they are even more likely to be excluded from services." Sered, Danielle and Butler, Bridgette. Expanding the Reach of Victims Services: Maximizing the Potential of VOCA Funding for Underserved Survivors. (New York City: Vera Institute of Justice, 2016).