

ANNOTATION:

DESIGN: Increasingly over the last two decades, victims of serious and violent crimes such as assault and homicide have been seeking to meet with the offenders who harmed them or their loved ones. Texas and Ohio were the first two states to develop and offer statewide programs for victim-offender dialogue in serious and violent crimes for victims who desire such a meeting. This five-year study interviewed 40 victims and 39 offenders who participated in 47 mediation/dialogue sessions regarding 46 serious and violent crimes. Exactly half of the crimes were murder or manslaughter; the victim died as a result of 65% of the crimes, including both murder/manslaughter (50%) and vehicular homicide (15%). The remaining crimes included sexual assault (17%), felony assault/attempted murder (13%), and theft/burglary (4%).

The interviews covered the participants’ experience of the crime, their reasons for seeking and/or agreeing to meet, their preparation for the meeting, their evaluation of their preparation, their dialogue meeting and their mediator/facilitator, their experience of the dialogue meeting, and their assessment of its impact on their life.

REASONS: The three most frequent reasons victims sought to meet were to seek information (58%), to show offender the impact of their actions (43%), and to have some form of human contact with the person responsible for the crime (40%). Offenders focused primarily on benefits to victims (95%). Their three most frequent victim-related reasons were to apologize (38%), to help victims heal (38%), and to do whatever would benefit victims (26%). Offenders also hoped the experience would benefit themselves (74%), including that it would contribute to their own rehabilitation (33%), that it could change how their victims viewed them (21%), and that they had spiritual reasons for wanting to meet with their victim (18%).

SATISFACTION: Both victims and offenders gave overwhelmingly positive evaluations of their preparation, their dialogue meetings and their mediators/facilitators. Overall life changes were assessed using both a closed-ended Likert scale question, asked of 73 participants, and open-ended questions probing changes in internal feelings, healing and well being, and spiritual outlook, asked of all 79 participants.

IMPACT: A total of 63 interviewees, or 80% of the research participants, reported that their participation in the mediation/dialogue program had a profound effect on their lives. Victims/family members and offenders alike reported feeling more at peace and better able to cope with their lives.

PROCESS AND PROGRAM DESCRIPTION: In addition to the participant data, the project interviewed staff and volunteers to develop and describe in depth how each program operates; this material, and a chapter exploring the beginnings of a typology of such programs, should be of use to program developers and policy makers in other sites.