



Center for Restorative Justice & Peacemaking

An International Resource Center in Support of Restorative Justice Dialogue, Research and Training

Assessing Victim Satisfaction with Victim Offender Mediation & Dialogue Services: *The Development and Use of the Victim Satisfaction with Offender Dialogue Scale (VSODS)*

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October 26, 2000

(Reformatted July 16, 2001)

Prepared for: Office for Victims of Crime, U.S. Department of Justice

This monograph is dedicated to the late Susan Laurence, the OVC grant manager for this project, in recognition of her enormous contribution to the field of restorative justice and victim offender mediation.

This monograph reports on the development and use of the Victim Satisfaction with Offender Dialogue Scale (VSODS). We will: (1) present a rationale for the use of a standardized scale and discuss problems in the use of satisfaction data; (2) describe the psychometric development of the VSODS scale; (3) provide guidelines for the use of the VSODS scale; and, (4) present victim satisfaction results from four victim-offender mediated dialogue program sites in the United States.

Why Should Restorative Justice Programs Assess Victim Satisfaction?

There is increasing interest in justice system programs evaluating their outcomes in order to meet growing demands for accountability, funding and improved services. As the field of restorative justice continues to develop in numerous communities throughout the United States and abroad, assessing victim satisfaction is one of the most essential components of evaluation in restorative justice policies and practices. When victim perspectives are not considered, the evaluation of services is incomplete and may be biased toward the provider's and program's perspective. In many areas there are now legislative mandates to include victim input. Incorporation of victim views can be used to modify services and make systems more responsive to client needs. In developing areas like restorative justice, victim satisfaction is an important indicator of the acceptability of innovative programs.

Problems in Assessment of Consumer Satisfaction with Services

Lack of a Standardized Scale

Although consumer satisfaction has been frequently assessed in health and mental health settings, it is only recently that criminal justice systems have begun to systematically assess the satisfaction of victims receiving justice system services (Umbreit & Coates, 2000). Typically, most programs that assess victim satisfaction develop their own satisfaction scales. This is problematic for three reasons. First, none of these scales have been psychometrically tested so it is unknown how reliable the scale actually is. Second, because agencies have developed their own unique measures it is impossible to compare differences in satisfaction between programs and type of services.

Program data isolated from data from similar services is difficult to interpret meaningfully and it limits the development of knowledge from the consumer perspective that can improve of services. Third, most satisfaction measures are not comprehensive and do not assess the multidimensional aspects of satisfaction and the services provided.

Problems with Validity of Results

Agencies typically report only the average satisfaction score and fail to identify the characteristics of the sample, the response rate and any indication if those who responded are representative of the population served. Without providing this information the validity of satisfaction data unclear.

There are numerous ways of administering satisfaction scales that may also impact the results: format (interview or questionnaire), timing of assessment (early in service, termination, follow-up) method (in-person, mail, phone), who contacts the client and what is said and to what extent non-responders are followed up (none, some, considerable). For example, administration of a satisfaction scale immediately after a mediated dialogue with the offender and administered in person by the mediator would likely positively distort reports of satisfaction due to the halo effect and social desirability. Without a consistent fixed method of administration in service settings the validity of results will be further undermined by the variance in method.

Limited Data Analysis

Satisfaction data is frequently reported as an average satisfaction score. Standard deviations are often not reported so we don't know how much variability there is in the average score. Similarly sub-scale scores that evaluate significant aspects of service may not be reported or even exist in the scale. Comparisons of satisfaction among different victim groups e.g. race, gender, type of offense are frequently not done. Percentages of responses in different levels of satisfaction could enhance analysis of results.

Lack of Integration of Satisfaction Data into a Continuous Improvement Process

The use of satisfaction data is often limited to ritualized use. It is common that a satisfaction survey is done only once and not incorporated into the ongoing evaluation of services. Data may be part of a yearly report or shared with staff, but use of satisfaction data is rarely used in modification of services or comparison of services within an agency.

Lack of Variability in Satisfaction

Reviews of consumer satisfaction in different areas of human services, health, mental health, criminal justice, are generally uniformly positive. Some people reject these results by saying the results are just due to social desirability. Others proudly point to high ratings as justification for their work. Meaningful interpretation of these positive results is difficult if the results are constrained by the problems previously discussed.

Development of the Victim Satisfaction with Offender Dialogue Scale (VSODS)

Currently there is no standardized measure of victim satisfaction with victim offender mediation and dialogue and there is little knowledge of the different aspects of mediation and dialogue processes and their differential effect on satisfaction with services. For example, a client might be satisfied with the mediator, but dissatisfied with the restitution plan. Because a standard measure of victim satisfaction is needed we sought to develop a simple scale that could be used in a variety of victim services such as victim offender mediation and family group conferencing. In addition we attempted to develop a scale that can differentiate between victim satisfaction along multiple dimensions.

Initial Scale Development

The first step in developing the Victim Satisfaction with Offender Dialogue Scale (VSODS) was to consult published sources in order to identify the potential determinants of satisfaction with services. We identified seven areas of possible determinants in the literature. For each category we created four scale questions. Each question had a four point anchored answer without a neutral position. Table 1 lists the seven areas with an example of a question in each.

Table 1
Scale Content Categories and Sample Items

Category

Sample Items

Mediator Skills	Were you treated respectfully by the mediator?
Preparation for Mediation	Was it made clear to you that participation voluntary on your part?
Restitution	Was the restitution agreement fair to you?
Meeting the Offender	Did you have sufficient time to talk offender?
Experience of the Criminal Justice System	Have you ever felt our program was more concerned with procedures than with helping you?
Experience of the Mediation	While participating in the session did you feel safe?
Family Conferencing Session	
Subjective Experience of the Victim	Did the meeting with the offender reduce upset you were about the crime?

A panel of six national experts in the field of restorative justice reviewed the twenty-eight items to evaluate how well they tapped each category. After reviewing the scale nine additional items were added by the panel. The preliminary version of the scale consisted of thirty-seven items with a minimum of five items in each category.

The preliminary scale was administered to 197 victims of criminal offenses who participated in victim offender mediation in four service settings in Orange County, California; Los Angeles, California; Washington County and Dakota County in Minnesota. The satisfaction scale was to be mailed to subjects 2 weeks following the mediation. The response rate was 56%. The sample is described in Table 2.

Table 2
Sample Description

<u>Variable</u>	<u>%</u>
<u>Gender</u>	
Male	63%
Female	77%
<u>Type of Offense</u>	
Person	11%
Property	89%
Age	x=39 sd=13
Education	x=15 sd=4

As in previous research the distribution of scores was positively skewed with a large number of satisfied clients and smaller numbers of dissatisfied clients. The data from the preliminary study were analyzed with principal-components factor analysis. The first factor derived from this solution accounted for 38% of the total variance and roughly 70% of the common variance. In the main analysis the second factor accounted for less than 8% of the common variance. When items with high first factor loading were removed and the analysis repeated no other factor accounted for as much as 6% of the total variance. These findings suggest only one significant dimension from the responses to the preliminary scale.

Final Scale Development

To construct a briefer scale for assessing victim satisfaction with mediation and dialogue services the factor loadings and item-total correlations were examined. Eleven items were selected which loaded highly on the unrotated first factor and which exhibited good inter-item and item-total correlations of. Table 3. Coefficient alpha for the final VSODS was .87. This indicates a high degree of internal consistency of the scale indicating that the scale can provide a reliable overall estimate of victim satisfaction with mediation and family conferencing services.

Table 3
Inter-item Correlations of the Victim Satisfaction with Offender Dialogue Scale (VSODS)

Item Numbers	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1	1.00	.53	.49	.34	.34	.41	.22	.27	.42	.43	.25
2	.53	1.00	.33	.33	.45	.33	.21	.24	.44	.34	.25
3	.49	.33	1.00	.44	.47	.53	.29	.30	.47	.34	.38
4	.34	.33	.44	1.00	.39	.43	.33	.38	.40	.42	.32
5	.34	.45	.47	.39	1.00	.41	.26	.34	.56	.34	.39
6	.41	.33	.53	.43	.41	1.00	.42	.40	.43	.40	.36
7	.22	.21	.29	.33	.26	.42	1.00	.42	.25	.33	.33
8	.27	.24	.30	.38	.34	.40	.42	1.00	.34	.52	.34
9											
10	.43	.34	.34	.42	.34	.40	.33	.52	.36	1.00	.44
11	.25	.25	.38	.32	.39	.36	.33	.34	.38	.44	1.00

The VSODS score is simply computed by adding the scores of each item on the scale. Scale scores range from 11-44 with higher numbers indicating higher levels of victim satisfaction. In general scores between 11-19 indicate dissatisfaction with services. Scores from 20-27 indicate somewhat dissatisfied. Scores from 28-36 indicate satisfaction with services. Scores of 37-44 indicate high levels of satisfaction. A copy of the VSODS is presented in Table 4.

Table 4
The Victim Satisfaction with Offender Dialogue Scale (VSODS)

Please help us improve the services we provide to people who have been victimized by crime in our community by answering the following questions about the services you have received. We are interested in your honest opinion, whether they are positive or negative. Please answer all of the questions. We also welcome your comments and suggestions. If a restitution agreement was not developed in your meeting with the offender, please ignore question 4. Thank you very much; we really appreciate your help.

1. How satisfied were you with the manner in which the mediator prepared you for the eventual meeting with the offender?

1 2 3 4
 Quite Dissatisfied Indifferent or mildly dissatisfied Mostly satisfied Very satisfied

2. Was the mediator a good listener?

1 2 3 4
 No, definitely not No, not really Yes, generally satisfied Yes, definitely

3. Would you recommend to other victims of similar crimes that they should consider the option of meeting the offender in this type of program?

1 2 3 4
 No, definitely not No, not really Yes, generally Yes, definitely

4. How satisfied were you with the restitution agreement that was made during the meeting?

1 2 3 4

Quite Dissatisfied Indifferent or mildly dissatisfied Mostly satisfied Very satisfied

5. Did the mediator seem genuinely interested in your expressed needs?

1 2 3 4
 No, definitely not No, not really Yes, generally Yes, definitely

6. Was it helpful to be able to talk directly with the offender about the impact of the crime?

4 3 2 1
 Yes, it helped a great deal Yes, it helped somewhat No, it really didn't help No, it seemed to make things worse

7. Did meeting the offender help reduce any fear that he/she would commit another crime against you?

4 3 2 1
 Yes, definitely Yes, generally No, not really not No, definitely

8. During the meeting with the offender, did he/she show any understanding, even the beginnings of understanding, about the real personal impact of the crime upon your life?

4 3 2 1
 Yes, definitely Yes, generally No, not really not No, definitely

9. Did the victim offender mediation (conferecing) program allow you to express your feelings about being victimized?

1 2 3 4
 No, definitely not No, not really Yes, generally Yes, definitely

10. After participating in a meeting with the offender, do you have a better understanding of why the crime was committed against you?

4 3 2 1
 Yes, definitely Yes, generally No, not really not No, definitely

11. Did participation in the victim offender conferencing program make the criminal justice process more responsive to your needs as a victim?

4 3 2 1
 Yes, definitely Yes, generally No, not really not No, definitely

COMMENTS:

It would be very helpful to our agency if you provided the following information. All information in this survey, including the following, will in no way ever be reported out in such a manner that it is connected to your name. Please do not feel obligated to provide the following information if you feel uncomfortable doing so.

Type of crime _____ Age _____ Sex _____ Race _____

Highest grade of education _____

Was an agreement reached in the meeting with offender?

The average VSODS score for the total sample was 32.74 sd=4.6 which indicates that on the whole victims were generally satisfied with the mediated dialogue services they received. Table 5 shows the average VSODS score for each site

Table 5
Victim Satisfaction Scores (VSODS) from Five Sites

Site	Mean	Number	Std Deviation
Orange County	31.34	23	4.44
Los Angeles	33.29	48	5.19
Washington Co	32.29	31	4.76
Dakota County	33.14	57	3.97

VSODS scores range from 11-44. Higher scores indicate higher satisfaction
 11-19= very dissatisfied with services
 20-27= somewhat dissatisfied with services
 28-36= satisfied with services
 37-44= very satisfied with services

Correlates of Victim Satisfaction

The relationships between the VSODS and the sample variables listed in Table 2 were tested using t-tests and correlations. T-tests were used to compare differences in VSODS scores between gender and between type of offence. The results indicated that satisfaction was not significantly related to gender or type of offense. Although there were no statistical differences in satisfaction between person and property offenses, this may be a result of the small number of person offenses in this sample and the unequal variances in the two groups. This is an important area of future research. There was no demonstrated relationship between income, education and age on VSODS scores.

Guidelines for Use of the Victim Satisfaction with Offender Dialogue Scale

- Use of the VSODS scale should be based on the unique needs, goals and resources of each program. This might include doing a survey of satisfaction once a year or quarterly and using a random sample or sampling all participants in a specific limited time frame. The VSODS can be used to assess the satisfaction of special subgroups of clients or compare different types of victim services.
- Victim satisfaction surveys should be done on a regular basis and use a fixed method (use the same format, timing, method, follow-up procedures) in order to enhance the interpretation of results. If different methods are used we cannot distinguish changes in satisfaction from changes due to method
- Integrate victim satisfaction into all program evaluation activities.
- Communicate victim satisfaction results to funding sources, staff, community and in victim information brochures.
- Describe the sample (e.g. age, gender, race, and type of offence) from which the victim satisfaction data is drawn and note the rate of response. This will allow you to have a better sense of how strongly the results can be generalized to your program population.
- Report satisfaction data by total mean scale score with standard deviation as a general measure of level of victim satisfaction. You also should report means for each scale question and the percentages of levels of satisfaction for each question.
- Use the satisfaction data to examine sub-components of satisfaction e.g. mediator skills, experience of meeting the offender, satisfaction with the restitution plan.
- Explore differences in victim satisfaction for different groups of clients (e.g. African-American, Hispanic, Caucasian; male/female; mandatory offender participation/ voluntary offender participation).
- Focus on dissatisfied victims and explore the problems.
- Set quality control limits for acceptable victim satisfaction scores for your program and monitor routinely for meeting satisfaction goals.
- Collate comments offered on VSODS form and/or routinely have a small number of brief follow-up telephone discussions with victims to hear in their own words their experience of restorative justice services. This use data in conjunction with VSODS scores can enrich understanding of critical issues in victim satisfaction.
- Use VSODS as a part of training and monitoring new staff.
- Integrate victim satisfaction information into continuous improvement activities.

Conclusion

The VSODS appears to be a useful measure of general satisfaction with victim-offender mediated dialogue services. It has a high degree of internal consistency and has been used in a four site United States victim satisfaction study.

The addition of open-ended questions and/or items of special interest to particular programs can easily supplement the VSODS. The scale is easy to administer and score and takes no more than 3-5 minutes for clients to complete. The VSODS can be used to compare satisfaction between programs and between specific samples. The scale data with comments and any added open-ended questions can increase the richness of the information obtained. Finally, the use of VSODS can encourage more specific feedback from participants in mediated dialogue that can be used to maintain and improve the quality of program services. The Victim Satisfaction with Offender Dialogue Scale can provide a brief and useful measure of victim satisfaction for use in victim offender mediation and dialogue programs.