A Conceptual Model for Victim Legal Services

What is a Conceptual Model?

A conceptual model outlines the pathways to achieving program outcomes, while a theory of change explains how program activities are believed to produce those outcomes.

What can you use this Conceptual Model for?

- To better craft effective legal services programs for crime victims
- To better measure the impact of interventions through meaningful evaluation
- To better tell the story of the impacts of legal services to community, criminal justice, victim services, and funding stakeholders

The Need for a Conceptual Model

While interest in victims’ rights gained attention in the 1960s, the victim legal services field still lacks a widely accepted conceptual framework that describes the ultimate goals of these services.

The goal of this work is to develop a conceptual model and theory of change for what constitutes “success” in the delivery of legal services to crime victims.

The Conceptual Model

By defining effectiveness, operationalizing outcomes, and identifying possible sources of data, this model aims to link program activities to program outcomes and long-term objectives. It is believed that the use of this model will increase legal service providers’ understanding of and ability to measure success in their field. This model is intended to be flexible, allowing agencies to focus on the parts relevant to their specific missions.

Developing the Conceptual Model

The model presented in this fact sheet was grounded in existing theory and developed via a collaborative process that relied heavily on the input of victim legal service providers and crime survivors. This researcher-practitioner collaboration included:

- intensive interviews with victim legal service providers and victims who served as the advisory committee;
- a survey of a broad group of victim legal service providers from a variety of agency types;
- a roundtable meeting of subject matter experts; and
- iterative refinement of the model based on multiple rounds of advisory committee feedback.

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Program Activities
Program activities are divided into four categories of services available to victims in different legal systems: criminal and juvenile delinquency, civil, administrative, and a section covering services that cut across multiple legal systems. Program activities are victim-led, where victims are empowered to make informed choices as their cases proceed about options they wish to pursue.

Potential Measurement Methods:
- Whether the service occurred
- Frequency (how often and how many times a service was delivered)
- Dosage (amount or level of service delivered)
- Qualitative dimensions (e.g. info about how the services were delivered and received)

Potential Data Sources:
- Case management systems
- Paper files
- Data collected for grant reporting purposes
- Narrative descriptions within case files
- Direct observation of service delivery

Program Outcomes (Short-Term)
Program outcomes are the short-term changes theorized to result from effectively implemented programs on three levels: victim/survivor, community, and system outcomes. These outcomes focus on victims' perceptions of the legal system, their feelings of wellbeing shortly after receiving services, and increases in legal actors' and communities' knowledge about victims' needs and rights.

Long-Term Objectives
The conceptual model theorizes that consistent achievement of the short-term outcomes should eventually lead to achievement of long-term objectives. Furthermore, consistent achievement of outcomes for survivors should not only lead to the achievement of survivor objectives but have ripple effects on the community.

Conceptual Model (Simplified)

For More Information
This conceptual model is in the theoretical stage and, as of this writing, is in the process of being pilot tested with three victims' rights enforcement clinics working in the criminal/juvenile legal systems. It should also be tested by others, including those providing other types of legal services to victims, and then further refined based on these tests. For more information, and the fully-detailed version of this model, please visit the project page at: www.jrsa.org/projects/legal-services.html.