

2010

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Publication Info

Postprint version. Published in *The Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work*, Volume 29, Issue 4, 2010, pages 349-371.

This is an electronic version of an article published in

DeHart, D. D. (2010). Collaboration between victim services and faith organizations: Benefits, challenges, and recommendations. *The Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work*, 29(4), 349-371.

The Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work is available online at: <http://www.tandfonline.com/openurl?genre=article&issn=1542-6440&volume=29&issue=4&spage=349>

POST-PRINT VERSION: DeHart, D. D. (2010). Collaboration between victim services and faith organizations: Benefits, challenges, and recommendations. *The Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work*, 29(2), 349-371.

Collaboration between Victim Services and Faith Organizations:
Benefits, Challenges, & Recommendations

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Author's note: This Project was supported by Grant No. #2002.VF.GX.K017 awarded by the Office for Victims of Crime, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Points of view in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice. Thanks to staff at each of the five project sites for providing information and assisting with logistics of site visits, and thanks to several anonymous reviewers for comments on earlier drafts of this manuscript. Please address all correspondence to Dr. Dana DeHart, Center for Child & Family Studies, College of Social Work, University of South Carolina, Columbia, 29208; 803-777-7867; dana.dehart@sc.edu.

Abstract

Although many crime victims seek support from members of the faith community, faith leaders may feel unsure of their abilities to assist. This paper describes findings from a descriptive needs assessment that preceded a national project to link faith-based organizations and victim service programs in five high-crime neighborhoods.

Approximately 90 participants were interviewed, including faith leaders, victim service providers, and other professionals. A majority saw positive implications of faith-secular collaboration but also identified concerns. Findings focus on perceived obstacles and facilitators of collaboration, addressing climate for faith-secular collaboration, disciplinary differences, community engagement, and church-state separation.

Implications for collaboration are explored and recommendations are provided for future efforts to link faith communities and secular services.

Introduction

Although a significant number of crime victims seek post-crime support from members of the faith community, faith leaders and congregants may feel unsure of their abilities or uneducated regarding resources to assist. This paper describes findings from a descriptive needs assessment that preceded a national project designed to link faith-based organizations and victim service programs in five high-crime, urban neighborhoods. Prior to the assessment, a single lead agency selected five existing agencies from a field of applicants to serve as site hosts across the nation. The independent needs assessment across the five sites was then performed to identify perceived obstacles and facilitators of collaboration, providing a foundation of research to guide participating agencies in implementation. This report focuses on selected findings from qualitative needs-assessment interviews, providing insights from the field and recommendations for future initiatives.

Literature on Faith-Secular Collaborations

Houses of worship are often viewed as havens or sources of information and comfort in times of distress, thereby playing a potentially important role in assisting victims of crime. Yet research has indicated a lack of training among clergy regarding crime victim needs and services (Burleigh et al., 2001; Ericson, 2001). Increased policy and funding support for faith-based initiatives have emphasized collaborations between religious organizations and other community providers (Atkinson et al., 2004). This accompanies a growing trend toward government funding of social services, either directly or through subcontracts with nonprofit providers (Austin, 2003; Cnaan, Sinha, & McGrew, 2004). Accordingly, service systems are adjusting to accommodate government initiatives, and

a range of religious congregations are demonstrating increased participation in provision of social services (Tangenberg, 2004). In a survey of nearly 140 community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, and government agencies, McGee found strong support that collaboration is “engulfing the nonprofit sector at an alarming rate” (2005, p.4349). In a study of over 1300 congregations, Cnaan and associates (Cnaan, Sinha, & McGrew, 2004) found that a majority of faith-based organizations collaborated not only with other faith-based organizations, but also with secular organizations to deliver community services. Collaborating organizations included government agencies, universities, neighborhood associations, and community-based organizations.

Needs and challenges of such collaborations have received limited documentation. Salamon (1995) notes that as nonprofit services grow in complexity, providers are often faced by some of the same limitations as bureaucracies, as well as struggling with tensions between grassroots control and administrative accountability. A series of intensive evaluations of faith-secular collaborations were conducted and reported by the organization *Public/Private Ventures* (Branch, 2002; Ericson, 2001; Hartmann, 2002; Trulear, 2000). Focusing on collaborations that addressed needs of high-risk youth, these researchers concluded that faith-based collaborations were most effective when they focused on creating safe, supportive environments and informal, relational approaches to programming. Faith partners were said to be less prepared to deliver structured programs such as education, provision of information, or mentoring. There were indications that faith partners had trouble putting together the types of recruitment, screening, training, and supervision needed in the infrastructure of such programs

(Branch, 2002). Faith-based collaboratives also performed more effectively when they focused on specific needs or populations rather than trying to be "all things to all people" (Trulear, 2000, p.10). The broader, more general approaches to service were characterized by fragmentation, overextension of resources, weakened program infrastructure, and higher tendency toward burn-out (Trulear, 2000). Ericson (2001) found that faith partners in such collaborations were sometimes uncertain in how to communicate with the secular world. Also, the personnel policies, hiring practices, fiscal management, and fund-raising capacities of faith-based organizations were often inadequate to support collaboration. Austin (2003) notes that the challenge for governments will be to find new ways to support nonprofit social service infrastructure and sustainability to prevent these providers from becoming the "weakest links" in service delivery.

The current study expands the extant literature by providing insight into faith-secular collaborations focused on crime victim services, including services for survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault, survivors of drunk driving accidents, family members of homicide victims, and other types of victims of crime. We utilized qualitative interviews to examine issues such including perceptions of faith-secular partnerships, current and envisioned models of faith-secular collaboration, and perceived role that such collaboration could play in the lives of crime victims. Our findings elucidate some of the benefits and challenges of faith-secular collaborations, with specific implications for efforts to bridge faith-secular gaps and build infrastructure for collaborative service networks.

Method

All research methods were reviewed and granted exemption by a university human-subjects review board. Prior to onset of the assessment, the lead agency for the project, a grassroots victim advocacy organization, established a contract with an independent evaluator (the author) to conduct project assessments. The five selected project sites included those hosted by: a victim service agency in Richmond, CA; a nonprofit consulting firm in Baltimore, MD; a faith-based collective in St. Paul, MN; a victim service agency in Philadelphia, PA; and an interdenominational church in Nashville, TN. The five sites varied not only in organizational affiliation of project leadership but also in community demographics, politics, resources, and service needs. The assessment was conducted within months of receipt of funding, so project site staff had not yet engaged in substantial attempts to link faith-based and secular victim service communities.

The independent evaluator provided project staff at each site with structured forms to assist in selecting key stakeholders for interviews (e.g., faith leaders, executive directors of local nonprofits, government and community based service staff, crime victims, and others). Nominees were reviewed by the evaluator and finalized to achieve a diverse sample of 10 to 15 stakeholders at each site. All interviews were preceded by general information about the project's purpose and confidentiality of responses. Interview prompts were developed regarding perceived models and motives for collaboration, with specific follow-ups directed at identifying potential strategies for overcoming obstacles to collaboration. Sample prompts include:

1. Are there models of communication or collaboration that you currently use to work with other agencies or groups? What are the strengths and

- weaknesses of these models?
2. What are your feelings about participating in partnerships between faith and victim service communities? Tell me what types of partnerships you might imagine.
 3. What role do you think partnerships between faith communities and victim service communities could play in helping or harming crime victims?
 4. How might existing networks be broadened to include victims, the underserved, faith partners, or service partners?

With participant permission, interviews were taped. Transcripts were analyzed via ATLAS/ti qualitative software and a grounded-theory approach (Strauss, 1987).

ATLAS/ti allows the researcher to mark computerized text passages or graphics in a manner akin to highlighting in a book. Passages or frames can be tagged with commentary or labeled with codes (e.g., "sexual assault services", "spirituality"). Codes and commentaries can be sorted into hierarchies, and participant files can be grouped into "families" or categories (e.g., "Community-based nonprofit"). Our grounded theory approach began with open coding--a microanalysis of the data in which our goal is to generate initial code categories based on themes in the data. The next steps involved filling out those categories and relationships via axial coding, through which the researcher codes "around the axis of a category to add depth and structure" (Strauss & Corbin, 1991), and selective coding, in which categories are integrated and refined into a theoretical scheme. For purposes of this paper, we focused on broad themes that emerged from the data, following discussion of these with specific recommendations for collaborative efforts.

Participants

Sixty interview sessions were held across the five sites. The vast majority of these (85%) were one-on-one interviews, and the remainder were small group interviews.

Approximately 90 participants were interviewed, representing 70 different organizations or institutions in the community. Table 1 presents sample characteristics in terms of disciplinary affiliation, service type, sex, and race/ethnicity. Although detailed demographics were not recorded in order to preserve confidentiality across sites, the sample also included persons self-identifying as Christian, Muslim, Jewish, and Hindu, and as victims of crime, and the sample was diverse in representation in age, ability, and sexual orientation.

Insert Table 1 about here.

Findings

Findings include those regarding several broad themes addressed by interviewees: climate for faith-secular collaboration, disciplinary differences, community engagement, and church-state separation. To promote confidentiality, excerpted quotations do not contain identifiers and have been edited for clarity of expression.

Climate for Collaboration

A majority of interviewees felt that timing was right for collaboration between faith-based and victim service communities, identifying potential benefits of the project, as well as noting specific concerns or caveats.

Benefits of Collaboration

In characterizing the social and political "climate" for collaboration between faith communities and victim service communities, many interviewees said that they felt the climate was positive. A number of these responses emphasized a desire to address victim needs in a more comprehensive manner.

"I think if we truly say that we want to eliminate violence, I think that you have to look at every possible avenue to do that." (participant #26, sexual/domestic violence services)

Some conceptualized this approach as more aligned with restorative justice principles for enhanced well-being not only for victims, but also for offenders and broader communities.

"The offenders live next door to the victims sometimes....To just look at the victim--for me it's only a piece of what we need to be doing if we are really going to heal the community. I see faith contacts as really being a key part of that healing aspect." (participant #21, general community services)

"If...the church can be a place where victims of domestic violence can come out and the church has a way in which they can keep batterers accountable...it would be phenomenal. The effects would be incredible." (participant #51, sexual/domestic violence services)

Some interviewees perceived a positive climate for the project as growing from the broader political atmosphere, including the need to pool resources in the wake of budget woes.

"We're trying to gain momentum back and regroup after we lost a lot of our programs over the last year...and we've been talking a lot about just getting back to where we need to be...so there's an awareness, and there are services out there to help." (participant #20, sexual/domestic violence services)

Other sociopolitical factors that contributed to perception of a positive climate included recent legislation to mandate clergy as reporters of abuse, enhanced awareness among clergy of abuse issues, and the evolving role of the church in ministering to new types of populations and broader concerns.

"Churches and the faith community are beginning more and more to have health fairs and community outreach kind of formats and stuff where they have all of these resources coming to them to offer outreach on a broad scale." (participant #32, general community services)

Interviewees also cited some of the unique benefits that collaboration with faith communities would bring. Foremost, interviewees felt that spirituality was integral to addressing the holistic needs of victims.

"The reality is people are mind, body, and spirit." (participant #45C, faith-based services)

Interviewees further characterized the faith community as an untapped human resource.

"There's so many individuals within a different congregation that have so many skills and are willing to share their talents and expertise--that would be a wonderful thing." (participant #7, sexual/domestic violence services)

Interviewees noted that support from the faith community may help victims maintain faith during crisis, and may help to restore trust through positive social relationships. These relationships--when established with educated congregants--may also be important for giving feedback to eliminate self-blame and contribute to longer-term social support when other supports have begun to fade. The faith community's contributions extended beyond social support. Faith communities have a unique ability to mobilize communities--lending material support, advocacy, and influence to social causes.

"Victims of violent sexual assault lose their clothes as evidence, and so we've reached out to those [faith-based] agencies to provide clothing. And they go to their parishioners--or whoever, their congregation--and are supplying teddy bears for the interview centers. They're providing sweats for our victims." (participant #1, sexual/domestic violence services)

"I like to call us Mighty Mouse...we're the small church that gets involved and pushes and actually does a lot of what I consider important things." (participant #12, faith-based services)

For victim service providers, having a faith connection sometimes enhanced receptivity of hard-to-reach audiences.

"I recognize the strong connection that a lot of our clients have with their churches that just gives them an 'in' that I would never have. Whether it is socioeconomic, whether it is race, whether it is something else. You know, I am just never going to be able to connect with those families." (participant #33, youth services)

Collaboration between faith communities and victim service communities was also viewed as a means of "meeting people where they are," in that houses of worship are often a first resource for people experiencing crisis.

"When folks get to the point where they don't know anything else to do, they don't know what else there is, they don't have an outlet, they just become so hopeless and helpless--they go to church, or they pray, or they seek some solace within that spiritual realm of who they are." (participant #35, faith-based services)

This was especially important in connecting with groups or cultures that may not use mainstream or secular services due to distrust or because they preferred to use their own internal community resources.

"The Hmong community--they want their leaders to handle the problems of the community. They don't want the outside people....It's almost a thing of, 'Don't air your dirty laundry out in public.'" (participant #23, general crime victim services)

"We are in the Bible Belt and I know that there are some people that won't look at any services unless they are faith-based." (participant #50, general crime victim services)

Providers noted that collaboration between faith and secular communities expanded the range of options for victims--allowing them to seek supports with similar ethnicity, with a faith connection, or even someone who has a different relationship to their community.

"We have heard from clients [that] why clients come to us rather than the [faith] community is because oftentimes the community is so small--like the Orthodox community. They don't want to go to Jewish Family Services for counseling because everybody knows everybody, so they come to us and they also know that they are not going to get preached at or whatever." (participant #41, sexual/domestic violence services)

Obstacles to Collaboration

Although some interviewees believed collaboration between faith and victim service communities was "like a natural progression...a long time coming," others described the relationship as more forced. They were uncomfortable with the project because of its association with what they saw as a trend toward losing church-state separation.

"Our politics and our spirituality are becoming more and more and more connected. It's dangerous." (participant #48, sexual/domestic violence services)

"A lot of resistance comes from Bush and his faith-based [initiatives]....There was a really big pull back from the victim services agencies....The fear was that they were going to take up our program, and we would lose our mission and our philosophy." (participant #1, sexual/domestic violence services)

Aside from concerns about broader political factors, many interviewees described relationships between faith-based and victim service programs as weak or nonexistent.

"We only use it in that most extreme situation." (participant #9, general community services)

"I wouldn't say that the relationship is bad, but I just don't think that there is a relationship." (participant #16A, sexual/domestic violence services)

Quite a few victim service providers had given up on faith-based collaborations, characterizing the faith community as resistant, unresponsive, or difficult to contact.

"I know efforts have been made over the years, and the turnout has been very small...so I think from the victim services side--they are very open and receptive. I think it is the clergy that has been more resistant." (participant #54, general crime victim services)

"One priest I know is more open to being involved...but at the same time, I have called him a couple of times--he doesn't respond to my calls." (participant #11, services for the underserved)

"The African American churches in [city] are a group that we've targeted, and I don't think we've had a single referral from them....It hasn't seemed like a really good use of time to keep hitting them." (participant #30, general crime victim services)

"We sent out letters to offer ministers any kind of tailor-made presentation about health relationships and dating issues. Then we got all of the names of the youth group leaders that we could in those churches. So we sent out another batch of letters....But I mean literally, out of probably 350 to 400 letters that we sent twice essentially, the Cathedral called us--they were the only one." (participant #51, sexual/domestic violence services)

The latter two interviewees mentioned mass mailings as a means of contact and shortage of staff for follow-up. Other interviews indicated that this may be more a matter of methodological differences between disciplines than an indicator of resistance or apathy. That is, faith leaders indicated that face-to-face contacts are more likely to win attention with them than are less personal appeals. Still, even clergy themselves acknowledged that victimization issues sometimes took low priority among their prospective commitments.

"I don't think it's a realistic goal--I think it's more of a realistic goal to put it out there for the pastor or their designated person. But if you're going to hold to it being for the pastor, you just shot yourself in the foot. And there will be some who won't want to come because they don't see it as an issue--they see it as spiritual and 'We can pray our way through it.'" (participant #12, faith-based services)

Encouragingly, most of these persons who mentioned obstacles to be encountered also mentioned benefits of faith-secular collaboration, demonstrating an openness to view collaboration from a balanced perspective.

Disciplinary Differences

Over past decades as members of the victim service community worked toward coordinated community responses, many experienced struggles trying to coordinate teams despite team members' varying stereotypes about law enforcement, social workers, women's advocates, and so on. Respondents described these familiar struggles and accompanying concerns. Findings regarding disciplinary differences were often framed by themes about different ideologies, skills or standards, or interpersonal and organizational differences.

Ideologies

At the most fundamental level, there was some concern that ideological differences *within* the faith community or *within* the victim service community would impede broader collaboration.

"The Lutherans will not talk to the Baptists...if you're Catholic you don't talk to the Protestants, and if you're Protestant you don't talk to the Muslims. The Muslims don't talk to the Buddhists, and the Buddhist monks don't talk to the Hindus."

(participant #15, services for the underserved)

Many interviewees mentioned conflict between different faiths. Conflicts within the faith community sometimes occurred along racial lines or over political belief systems on issues such as homosexuality or female pastors. Interviewees were also concerned about conflicts among victim service providers. For instance, domestic violence

agencies sometimes conflict with child welfare agencies over issues such as a battered woman's failure to protect a child.

"Once you start talking about domestic violence, child protective services people think, 'We have two different clients. We are protecting the children, you protect the woman.'" (participant #51, sexual/domestic violence services)

Sexual assault and child abuse agencies are sometimes viewed as more systemically aligned than domestic violence agencies, in that the former two types of providers frequently work with health care providers around forensic exams. Both domestic violence agencies and faith groups are often perceived to be at odds with government systems (e.g., over issues such as systems-change advocacy or biased policing).

"What often happens with...grassroots organizations, particularly women's groups, is they may be anti-'the police.'" (participant #26, sexual/domestic violence services)

"I think faith organizations may at times discourage law enforcement involvement--for pretty good historical reasons of victimization and such." (participant #8, general community services)

Interviewees from both faith-based and victim service communities mentioned stereotypes of victim service providers. There were beliefs that victim service providers (largely conceptualized as White feminists) did not understand how victimization tangled with other realities of urban life (e.g., poverty, racism, environmental stressors), and that they distorted facts or used misrepresentation to serve their own agendas.

"The faith-based community, they have an impression of...the domestic violence community which says, 'First time somebody puts their hands on you, you've got to leave your marriage.' And that, of course, is not the message that we give, but that's the message that they hear." (participant #43, sexual/domestic violence services)

"Not necessarily [the domestic violence agency], but the other agencies—they come in, they use the demographics. They get in touch with us and find out everything they want to put on paper--and [then they] get the money, and the services don't accomplish anything." (participant #12, faith-based services)

There were also concerns about ideologies within the faith community. The church was viewed as an institution that victimizes (e.g., through sexual abuse) and re-victimizes with religious doctrine. Specifically, there were quite a few concerns about involvement of faith leaders in sexual abuse scandals--as perpetrators who exploited power, and as conspirators in cover-ups.

"I've worked with a woman who was actually sexually abused by her pastor....He knew she was vulnerable and used his power to get what he wanted. And in the end when she did disclose a sexual assault, the whole church turned against her....I kind of can see where the value is in educating faith-based communities. At the same time, I can see where...it makes them more powerful to prey on victims that actually go to them for help." (participant #16C, sexual/domestic violence services)

The faith community's allegiances were perceived as extending to non-clergy perpetrators of abuse, and their interests as aligned with male interests.

"The faith-based providers in this community seem more accustomed to working with perpetrators and using a forgiveness model, thus they show some resistance to approaching this from a victimization angle." (participant #55, sexual/domestic violence services)

"[You hear] 'Oh this person never could have done that. You know this is too good of a person--they come to church, they do this, they are active'....So the denial aspect comes into play big time in those kind of cases. And a church will rally around those people--the people charged--and that can sometimes be a major force within the court system in support of the defendant." (participant #54, general crime victim services)

Religious doctrines were conceptualized as perpetuating inequalities based on gender or sexual orientation.

"[At certain churches] men are there, but the people who do the work are the women. So it's just a natural inclination that women are going to take the back seat. And they say to women, 'You take the back seat and be the doers, and we'll be the talkers and thinkers.'" (participant #26, sexual/domestic violence services)

"[We have] ministers who will not serve on the board or serve in any official capacity because there are women clergy involved." (participant #12, faith-based services)

"People who are gay- or lesbian-identified, who have tried to go to [two different faith-based organizations] have definitely expressed great trouble." (participant #8, general community services)

There were concerns about judgments or rigidity believed to be inherent in faith ideologies. Particularly, victim service providers believed these might undermine empowerment or contribute to victim blaming. At the same time, victim service providers were aware that empowerment meant allowing victims access to whomever victims might choose as a support.

"[With a] social service background...we have a whole position that's about empowering the victim, and certainly I would support them working with whoever their person that they see as helping them is. But I get worried...they don't need more guilt trips or more feelings that they're failing their religion or that they aren't really believing in God if they're upset that their son is murdered." (participant #30, general crime victim services)

"One of the things that's happened in victim services is that we've been very rigid in our training, and that is that you listen to the victim and the victim makes her own decisions....[but] I see that we aren't really empowering the victim, because we're missing one of her choices, which would be to have clergy there for her...We've never wanted clergy there--our own bias." (participant #1, sexual/domestic violence services)

Nonprofit and systems-based victim service providers expressed a strong concern that faith-based ideologies would promote religious ideals at the expense of victim safety

and autonomy. A number of victim service providers drew their concern from past experiences in which religious teachings had limited options for victims (e.g., about divorce or abortion) or compromised victim safety.

"I knew somebody...[who was in a domestic violence] torture situation. [Her priest] told her that she wasn't doing the right things, and she has to be patient, and to remember how much Jesus suffered, and that she was going to be fine."
(participant #11, services for the underserved)

Several interviewees (including those with faith backgrounds and victim service backgrounds) felt that training may not be sufficient to balance religious ideologies that could pose a danger to victims.

"Forty hours of training isn't going to undo some of the things that people hold strong and true to themselves." (participant #16D, sexual/domestic violence services)

Another interviewee--differentiating between good and bad theology--noted the need to frame education in a manner that is relevant to theologians.

"I think women's advocates can do a good job in explaining all that other stuff, but the other thing is to say, 'How do you put that in a theological framework?' People forget that even when Paul writes in the New Testament 'Submit--wives submit to their husbands,' the sentence before it is 'You submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.' Somehow that gets forgotten....Again, doing good

theology [is the way to get this across], because there's been bad theology."

(participant #19, general community services)

Skills & Standards

Some interviewee concerns about disciplinary differences had less to do with ideological difference and more to do with differences in training, expertise, or program standards. Many of these concerns pertain to direct services or referral procedures. Past experience with cross-referral, for instance, had sometimes fared poorly when programs ended up being ill-equipped to handle referrals, resulting in referral clients returning repeatedly to the original agency, coming back worse off, or being alienated from services all together. Conversely, agencies providing referrals often did so inappropriately--when clients did not meet eligibility criteria, needed entirely different services, and so on.

"Some folks put it out there 'Oh, just call [program director].' It doesn't work that easy, because you call me, [and] I may not be able to get you in this program....I have to go through certain procedures to make a determination clinically and medically, economically, if you qualify." (participant #36, faith-based services)

Victim service providers were particularly concerned about faith communities providing direct services to victims, fearing that faith-based providers lacked the requisite knowledge of safety issues involved in violent victimization.

"They will be off like, 'Anybody can start a shelter.' It is not that easy. It is about safety. Why did you have a shelter for battered women where everybody knows

where it is? The danger is in the details." (participant #32, general community services)

However, it was noted that concerns about quality assurance are not unique to faith-based services.

"You are asking folks without the appropriate background and training to do work. On the other hand, our VOCA money requires us to use volunteers and requires us to train them extensively." (participant #33, youth services)

Interviewees often mentioned the need to train clergy on basic victimization issues and, as applicable, on reporting mandates. Yet, they worried about entrusting basic training to new hands.

"A little bit of information can be a very dangerous thing, and then if people don't have a good background and a good understanding of the dynamics of sexual assault...they can do an awful lot more harm than they can good." (participant #16D, sexual/domestic violence services)

"What I really believe is that the individuals that are leaders in the religious community or the spiritual community may take things in their own hands.... They feel that because they've gone through this training, they're capable of doing this." (participant #16C, sexual/domestic violence services)

There were numerous concerns about issues typically covered by victim service program standards. Victim service providers, for instance, often have set protocols for preserving confidentiality and avoiding conflicts of interest. Respondents expressed

concern about the lack of such protocols and other safety assurances for faith-based services.

"I am actually working with a church--a Mennonite church--and what they do is they take [the victim] to their house. These people stayed with the pastor or they stayed with one of the missionaries, and I am like, "Wait a minute, hold up!"

(participant #35, faith-based services)

"[In a past project] we worked it out with the priest that when the priest heard that there was [domestic violence], they would refer the woman to us. Well, instead what happened is the priests are referring the women to this [clergy]'s wife, who's not even a member of the committee....The referrals are not getting to us. And so what's happening is that women don't trust the confidentiality that's within that religious community that we said we would offer....That faith community understanding of confidentiality is very different from ours."

(participant #48, sexual/domestic violence services)

"We have this plethora of storefront churches. Some of the ministers purport to use clinical or quasi-clinical skills, some of which are probably well-founded skills based in good learning and good skill. Others of which are, perhaps, just sort of flawed. It's a highly unregulated world, the church world."

(participant #27, youth services)

Accordingly, victim service providers often said they avoided referrals to agencies that did not operate under victim service standards. Although implementing a rudimentary set of service standards for participating faith-based services might address quality-

assurance concerns, it remains to be found whether such an option will be amenable to the faith community; that is, faith-community respondents indicated concerns that linking to government funds for faith collaboratives would lead to increased regulation or control of faith institutions.

Interpersonal & Organizational Differences

Some of the disciplinary differences mentioned by interviewees involved things like routines, language, personal style, or use of technology for communication. For instance, it was noted that victim service providers and faith community leaders usually work from different types of weekly schedules, which becomes a factor to consider in planning meetings and special events.

"We [medical providers] work 9-5 and the faith community works nine to five to ten to twelve to one. We do Monday through Friday and they do kind of like, off on Mondays, but Tuesday through Sunday something is going on. Normally, the stuff that they have going on is going to be after seven in the evening. Probably a lot of stuff on Saturday and all day Sunday." (participant #35, faith-based services)

Several interviewees also mentioned the types of meetings most likely to gain attendance. While members of the faith community enjoy discussions over potlucks (i.e., "ministers' dinners"), the victim service community may be less likely to participate in such events. There were also noticeable differences in language and expression of the two communities. During interviews, victim service providers relied on concrete examples, while faith leaders often used abstract imagery, broad general concepts, or

analogies. There may be gaps in the ways that victim service providers and faith community members visualize and communicate the goals that they would like to achieve. This may become a source of some frustration and may take time to work through.

"I can tell you from hearsay--from my [victim service] co-worker who attends those meetings--that it is a true lesson in diversity. Sometimes she feels she's at the table to kind of like reel people in and keep them focused again, because they will go off on their faith-based tangents." (participant #32, general community services)

Another difference pertaining to language and expression has to do with preferred methods for training.

"Clergy--when they bring you in to work with, to do anything with the church, they want you to put it in the context of the Bible in most cases, and it's just not possible to do that. And that's hard to do. [There are also] certain words they have to get used to, like 'rape' and 'sexual violence.'" (participant #26, sexual/domestic violence services)

"You can package what you are doing in a way that most clergy will say, 'No, I don't want to be involved in it, it is totally, totally secular.' So if you are talking about receptivity, then it has got to be in a format that the average clergy is able to receive....And since the Holy Scriptures or some book teaching is that tool that holds us all together, I would say making sure that the approach is rooted in principles that can be doctrinally based." (participant #36, faith-based services)

A final issue concerning style of the two communities has to do with level of bureaucracy and technology integrated into routine functioning. A few interviewees felt that faith-based agencies--while formal in many respects--were less formal with regard to routine office procedures.

"Churches don't always follow up. They're not always efficient. They'll schedule you, you go in there, and there's no one there that night because they thought it was the next week." (participant #26, sexual/domestic violence services)

"A lot of technology is what we use in the professional world, and the faith community are just up-and-coming in regards to technology. They might have excellent sound systems, but they may not have a fax. Everybody has a cell phone, but they do not necessarily have their administrative offices set up to do the email thing." (participant #35, faith-based services)

Community Engagement

Ability of the project to engage members of the lay community to really make a difference was a major concern at most of the five sites. While faith partners may have high credibility in communities, researchers and program developers may have to overcome the legacies of their predecessors. Impoverished communities and underserved populations have been subject to the transient fascination of grant-funded project teams.

"We always get these programs and projects to come in--all these big dreams--build the community's hopes up, get us to sit in on all these committees and

board meetings, only for them to be awarded the funding. They hire people that don't look like us--are not from our community. All we know, we're going through all these meetings and doing all these things for the funding to be gone because they haven't done nothing, and they can't get refunded. And what it does is it depresses the people of the community." (participant #45B, general community services)

"My greatest concern is that it is another research project that will have its cycle, and once it ceases to be funded, those who administrate this project will have made their dollars for their salaries and it's over....When the money runs out, then it is over." (participant #36, faith-based services)

Getting community buy-in is difficult, given the history of programs coming in, making promises, taking surveys and requesting community time, then leaving the community no better off in the long run. There was also concern that the project may be viewed with skepticism by community members who felt outsiders were coming in, finger-pointing about problems in the community, and imposing solutions that were not culturally suited to the community. Such an approach may be difficult to suppress, especially when the community's cultural values or customs come in conflict with some of the providers' mainstream paradigms.

"I don't know how we'll take on that community—to go in and tell them that domestic violence and polygamy and marrying children to older men is unacceptable." (participant #56, services for the underserved)

Developing community-derived methods and solutions is not an easy task and would require innovative thinking, as one interviewee noted:

"What I don't have a clear vision of...is how to better help the people in the community who are already expending energy and doing things, how to support them in what they're doing." (participant #8, general community services)

Separation of Church & State

The majority of concerns about faith-secular collaboration involved church-state separation issues. In offering their concerns about religious freedom, interviewees often provided examples of key issues, such as diversity of faith representation.

"While you have at the table a Presbyterian, a Catholic, a Baptist, and a Nazarene, that that can be seen as Christian diversity, but that that's not really diversity." (participant #48, sexual/domestic violence services)

"We're dealing with so many different religions....I just get worried that these faith-based things end up meaning sort of mainstream Christian, maybe throw in some Muslim stuff, and, you know, 'Aren't we diverse?' It just makes me a little bit nervous." (participant #30, general crime victim services)

Another concern was that--even given diverse representation--religious minorities might not be given equal voice.

"When you get people from various faith-based institutions together....you will have people pulling rank, you know, 'I bet there are more people in the city that are of my faith than yours.'" (participant #32, general community services)

This interviewee went on to caution that the project should strive to support each agency's freedom to choose whether or not to participate.

"[We want to be] careful that we are not saying that this is the way....Say, for example, some faith-based institutions do not want to buy into this, do not want to be part of this--that we not make it appear that if they didn't, that it is wrong." (participant #32, general community services)

Based on experience, several interviewees had real concerns about discrimination based on religion.

"There is a new shelter that's opening up....It's going to be run by [church name]...and from what I understand they want to primarily serve Christian women. And I don't know how I'm going to screen for that." (participant #48, sexual/domestic violence services)

"You just can't pick and choose your victims." (participant #16B, sexual/domestic violence services)

A significant area of concern involved promoting religiosity over non-religiosity.

"I think they're trying to force religion on us. I think they're trying to promote religion. I think there's a deep disaffection for the separation of church and state that this administration has." (participant #27, youth services)

Staff at one site faced this issue early in the project, when a (non-project) speaker at a media event mentioned that the project might be an opportunity to help people find God. Interviewees who were concerned about promotion of religion emphasized stakes may be high when religion is involved in counseling, especially when victims are given few perspectives or options.

"You're a faithful Christian and here comes from another faithful Christian telling you something you totally oppose....Now you're in this battle of faith--rather than just saying, 'It's okay. I don't really accept your advice here.' 'Well, if you don't accept my advice, you're going to hell.' There's new cards on the table." (participant #27, youth services)

While some interviewees discussed avoiding discussion of religion altogether, this one went on to discuss integration of faith into service delivery.

"Our clients are often faithful people, so it's not like we're establishing a religion in them. It's already there. And to that extent, I think it's entirely fine for me, the victim service provider, to relate to that person in the context of their faith and maybe to share my reflections on faith....I think that the danger lies in what I the provider believe...which is everything from forgiveness to revenge that's rolled into faith life....It's a very hard line to find." (participant #27, youth services)

Suggested strategies for addressing concerns included clarifying boundaries, offering options from a variety of faith and secular traditions, and performing cultural intakes.

"As part of their intake process, we ask them how they identify themselves--culturally, spiritually--and is there anything that they would need or want while they are at the shelter that addresses some of these specific cultural needs....We can't provide transportation for everywhere for everybody, but one of the priorities for transportation is legal appointments, doctor appointments, appointments for public assistance, housing, and church, as well as school."

(participant #25, services for the underserved)

Discussion & Recommendations

These findings provide a window through which to view some of the benefits, concerns, and considerations that may be relevant to faith-secular collaborations. Readers are encouraged to use these findings as a springboard--to expand upon, refine, and generate new ideas—and to supplement perspectives herein with those of stakeholders in their own communities. Ideally, thoughtful implementation of faith-secular collaborations can thoroughly address potential problems and increase the probability of success. For instance, a prominent theme to be addressed in future faith-secular collaborations involves differences in philosophy and styles across disciplines. Much of the conflict that arises from such differences relates stereotypes or overgeneralizations about members of others disciplines. Understanding sources of perceived difference may help develop strategies to address conflict. Similarly, concerns about skills and standards might be addressed through workshops or discussions regarding key ethical

issues such as confidentiality or roles and boundaries. Cultural sensitivity and inclusion of members of the lay community is also essential in developing strategies for linking faith and secular services for victims of crime. Rather than coming in to a community as outsiders and choosing the "problems" to attack, it may be advisable to conduct town hall meetings or "listening circles" with those in the community to jointly identify areas of consensus. Rather than seeking to draw persons out of their communities and into mainstream service venues, efforts might seek ways to broaden existing community activism in bringing culturally appropriate services to the communities.

Our data here is limited in drawing from a sample of stakeholders in high-crime urban areas within a project for which five sites had already been selected for implementation. The study was also conducted in the midst of the G.W. Bush presidency, at a time when faith-secular collaborations were first developing prominence among federally funded initiatives. Since that time, numerous small and large efforts have cropped up around the country, technology has changed rapidly, and perspectives on collaboration may have evolved accordingly. Future research might revisit these issues as well as examine longitudinal success of faith-secular collaborations for crime victim services.

A number of lessons might be garnered from voices of participants in our research. Based on strength of several themes in these data, we offer several recommendations to developers of future collaborations:

- First, directly address uncertainty around church-state separation, possibly including operational definitions and parameters for appropriate behavior. This might include prohibitions against proselytizing or protocols for disclosing faith-

based program content for referrals. The *Working Group on Human Needs and Faith-Based and Community Initiatives* (2003) provides helpful taxonomies of faith-based practice (e.g., non-religious, passive/implicit religious content, invitational content, relational content, integrated content) as well as consensus-based guidelines for practice.

- Second, actively engage lay community members in identifying issues to be addressed and defining plans. Community surveys, town hall meetings, focus groups, listening circles, and advisory boards might provide formats for doing so.
- Third, work from community-derived models to enhance pre-existing community strengths. Particular attention should be given to cultural appropriateness of plans.
- Finally, if collaborations will involve direct victim services, faith and secular providers should be held to victim service standards (see DeHart, 2003). This is particularly important around issues of confidentiality and safety and might include confidentiality agreements, protocols for screening volunteers, reviewing case handling and retraining persons with competence issues, and safety protocols for transport.

Faith-secular collaborations are characterized by substantial complexity. Careful consideration of the implications of action will help these emerging initiatives grow to their optimum potential in serving communities.

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Table 1: Sample Characteristics

SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS	PERCENT (n = 90)
Service type	
Faith-based worship/services	15%
General crime services (e.g., homicide, missing children, drunk driving)	35%
Sexual/domestic violence services	20%
Youth services	10%
Services for underserved groups (e.g., ethnic minorities, disabilities)	15%
General community services (e.g., substance abuse, health care)	5%
Role within agency	
Faith leaders	15%
Executive directors	25%
Victim service staff	50%
Other (e.g., police, physicians, judges)	10%
Sex	
Male	30%
Female	70%
Race/Ethnicity	
White	50%
African American	37%
Asian	6%
Latino	4%
Native American	3%