

# pccd researcher



## PA Crime Victims' Rights Survey - 2008

### Introduction

The Coalition of Pennsylvania Crime Victims' Organization (COPCVO) seeks "to advocate for the rights and interests of crime victims and to promote the delivery of a full range of quality victim services in the commonwealth." To ensure that victims of crime in Pennsylvania receive the rights set forth under state and federal law, COPCVO contracted Abt/SRBI to conduct the 2008 Pennsylvania Crime Victims' Rights Survey. The survey was structured to assess the compliance of law enforcement officials in notifying victims of their rights.

### Methodology

The 2008 Pennsylvania Crime Victims' Rights Survey was conducted via a statewide telephone survey. The survey was administered to a randomly selected sample of residents, aged 18 years and older, who had been victims of a major crime in Pennsylvania in the three years prior to the survey. If the crime victim was not available (i.e., the victim of homicide, incapacitated, etc.) or was under the age of 18 years, a responsible adult member of the household was asked to participate. The survey was conducted between September 18 and October 29, 2008. A total of 402 crime victims participated in the survey. The sample size among subgroups of the population, in some cases, was very small, thereby, limiting inter-group comparisons.

### Questions

The 2008 Pennsylvania Crime Victims' Rights Survey included 42 questions. The average time required to complete the phone survey was 6.31 minutes. Survey questions asked respondents for the following information: victims' demographics, type of crime victimization, whether the victim was informed of legal rights,

whether the victim received legal rights, and whether the victim received mandated legal services.

### Findings

**Demographics** - Participants averaged 47 years of age, reported a high school degree (47 percent), a household income of \$35k per year or less (36 percent), were female (66 percent), and were Caucasian (70 percent). (See right information bar.)

**Crime Statistics** – 85 percent of respondents were crime victims with the remaining 15 percent participating on behalf of a family member who was deceased or otherwise indisposed. Participants were victims of robbery (55 percent), assault (33 percent), sexual assault (8 percent), and/or homicide (7 percent.) 60 percent of the incidents occurred within the past year. In 36 percent of the cases, an arrest had been made. 27 percent indicated that they were the victim of a juvenile defendant.

**Victims' Rights** – The survey included questions about the respondents' interaction with law enforcement officials following their victimization including: 1) were you informed of your rights, 2) were you informed of available victim services, and 3) were you informed of your right to seek pre-crime economic restoration. While nearly 56 percent of respondents reported that they had been informed of their rights as victims, another 38 percent indicated that they did not receive notification. Less than half reported that they received victim services information. Even fewer respondents (32 percent) indicated that they received information about their right to restoration to pre-crime economic status.



#### Respondent

- Crime Victim (85%)
- Family Member (15%)

#### Profile

- Average Age (47 years)
- High School Degree (47%)
- \$35k Household Income (35%)
- Female (66%)
- Caucasian (70%)

#### Criminal Offense

- Robbery Victims (55%)
- Assault Victims (33%)
- Sexual Assault Victims (8%)
- Homicide Victims (7%)

#### Timeframe

- Within Past 12 month (60%)

#### Resolution

- Arrest made on Case (36%)
- Outcome Unknown (3%)

#### Victimization

- Victim of Juvenile (27%)

*“65 percent of respondents reported that they were informed of one or more of their rights under the Crime Victims Act.”*

*“Six in ten (56%) respondents felt that they were informed of their rights with four in ten (43%) indicating that they were aware of victims' services.”*

*“Victims of crimes with juvenile defendants and victims with cases where the defendant has been sentenced and/or released were all significantly more informed than others.”*

## Discussion

To assess compliance with the Pennsylvania Crime Victims Act, Abt/SRBI created a proxy measure – a victim's rights information score - using responses to three of the survey questions. A respondent could score from 0 out of 3, with zero indicating that they were not informed of their rights, were not informed of victim's services, nor were they informed of the right to restoration of pre-crime economic status, to 3 out of 3, indicating they were informed of all three rights.

Based on this score, the 402 respondents were evenly spread across the information scale. Approximately one third reported that they were not informed of their rights (35 percent), 20 percent indicated that they were informed of one of three rights, 23 percent receiving notification on two of three rights, and 22 percent received notification on all three rights.

Overall, the level of information provided varied statistically as a function of the type of defendant (juvenile versus adult), as victims of juvenile defendants were more likely to receive notice than the victims of adult defendants. Additionally, the proxy information score varied by type of crime, although the differences were not statistically different; sexual assault victims were most likely to report higher information scores than other offense categories. They were followed by family members of victims of homicide, victims of assault, and robbery victims.

There were some interesting demographic trends noted, but they too were not statistically significant. Victims aged 25 to 55 tended to be more informed than other age groups. Similarly, respondents who reported some college education reported higher information levels as did female respondents. Households with higher income levels (\$50k-\$75k) also reported higher information scores than households with lower incomes. This trend discontinues for households with incomes of \$75k and above.

To further consider the question of victims' rights notification, respondents were asked about specific rights, depending on whether the defendant was a juvenile or not and the current status of the case (i.e., trial, sentenced, released, etc.). Differences were noted, but the subgroups were too small to allow for intergroup comparisons.

For the most part, when asked about specific rights, between 59 and 67 percent indicated that they were informed of the specific right in question. The two exceptions were: being informed of the right to receive prior notice of date of release (36 percent) and being informed of the right to provide comment on post sentencing releasing decision (36 percent). Ironically, release decisions potentially most impact the lives of victims after the initial victimization event.

Again, the results from the survey suggest that nearly six-in-ten (56 percent) respondents felt that they were informed of their rights and a little more than four-in-ten (43 percent) felt they were informed of available victim services.

When looking at general rights and the provision of information, victims of crimes with juvenile defendants and victims with cases where the defendant has been sentenced or released were all significantly more likely to report being informed.