

VOCA Community Assessment Summary

Michelle R. F. Masters, PhD
Research Analyst
Crime Prevention and Justice Assistance Division
For the Grants and Planning Branch
Hawaii Department of the Attorney General

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In December of 2023, the Grants and Planning Branch of the Department of the Attorney General's Crime Prevention and Justice Assistance Division (CPJAD) conducted a survey to gather feedback on the gaps and needs in services to victims of crime in Hawaii, and collect suggestions to improve and expand these services. The survey, which was updated by CPJAD's Research and Statistics Branch, was based upon previous questions that have been used in close to their current form by the department annually (DAG, n.d.). Surveys with community service providers are considered one of the most useful ways to assess victim needs within their communities (CVR, 2016). Victims may be unable or reluctant to participate in even brief surveys, but service providers often have a broad understanding of the needs of victims, allowing for more generalizable data with a small sample size (CVR, 2020). Community needs assessments are often brief, with a pre-set list of questions and a small pre-determined sample of participants to help minimize potential deterrents to participation, such as the time commitment needed to complete a longer interview (CTB, 2023).

Methods

A survey was dispersed to active Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) grant recipients via Google Docs, with instructions for the survey to be completed by only one individual from each organization. Responses were collected from December 4 through December

22, 2023. Overall, 12 people participated in the community needs assessment survey with at least one participant representing victim services providers for each county (Hawaii County – 1, City and County of Honolulu – 5, Kauai County– 1, Maui County – 4, Statewide Provider -1).

Participants in the survey completed a brief identification section to ensure there were no duplicate participating agencies. The survey was a concurrent mixed-methods design with a total of twelve questions regarding community needs, victims, and the responding agencies. Of those twelve questions, three required participants to select options from the provided responses. Three questions allowed participants to respond with a prompt to specify any other options that were not included as options. The remaining questions were limited character-free responses to open-ended questions. Due to the small sample size, trends were not compared between counties.

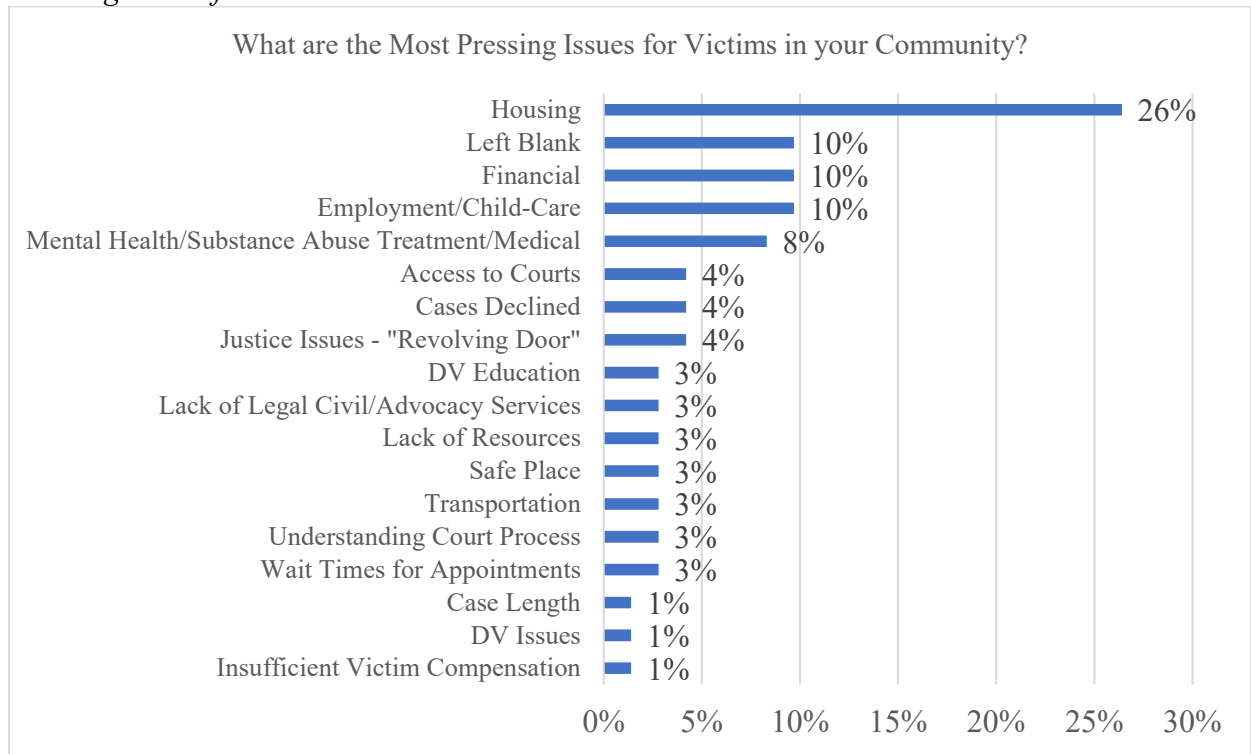
Participants were allowed to provide a limited character response to the question “What are the most pressing issues for victims in your community?”. Responses were visually checked and combined when functionally identical. Responses that were similar but not functionally identical were combined when one or more of the participants combined those two items in a single response. For ease of presentation, the abbreviated answers can be seen below (Figure 1). The responses were cleaned in Microsoft Excel and then analyzed in SPSS using descriptive frequencies.

Results

Housing; financial needs; various legal/criminal justice issues; employment/childcare; and mental health, substance abuse treatment, and medical treatment needs remain the most pressing issues for victims of crime in Hawaii, as

reported by the respondents. Two participants specified that there were extra needs for victims following the 2023 wildfires on Maui, with one participant pointing out increased issues with housing and the other writing about the emotional impact on victims.

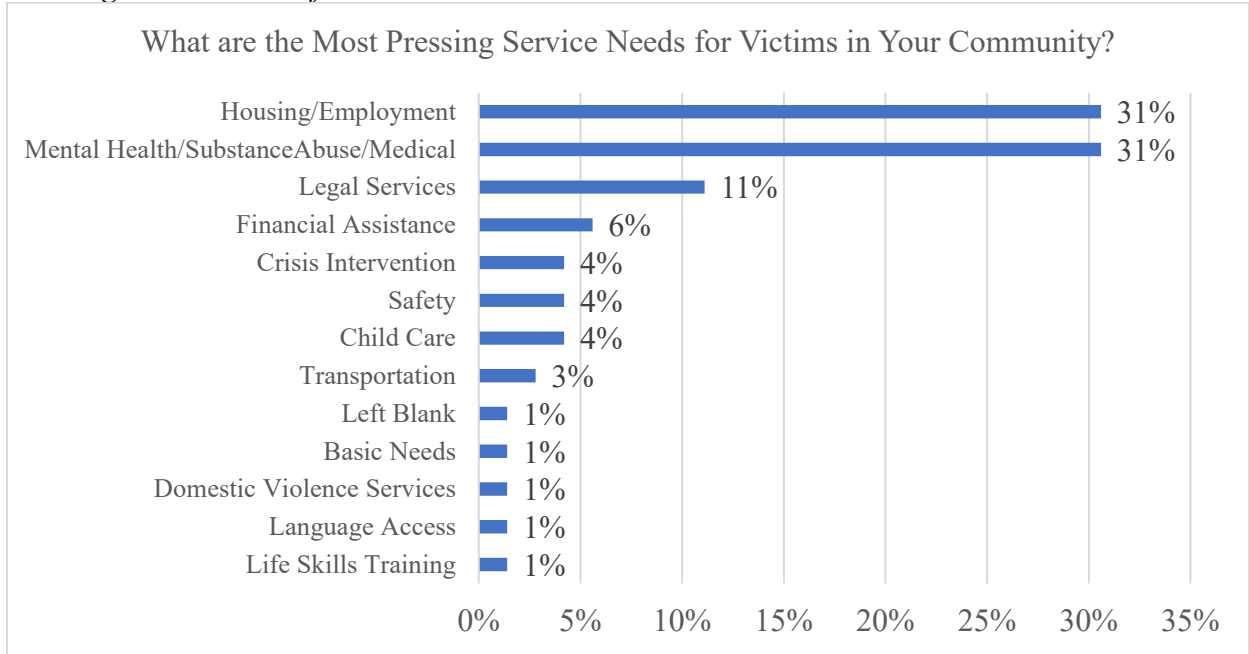
Figure 1
Pressing Issues for Victims



Note: The N was calculated by weighting responses (e.g. first most pressing weighted x3, second most pressing weighted x2, third most pressing weighted x1). Due to rounding, the total may not equal 100%.

While participants provided very specific responses regarding issues for victims, their responses to pressing service needs were a bit broader (Figure 2) with substantial areas of overlap. The question “What are the most pressing service needs for victims in your community?” was a limited character response option. Responses were combined and truncated when appropriate.

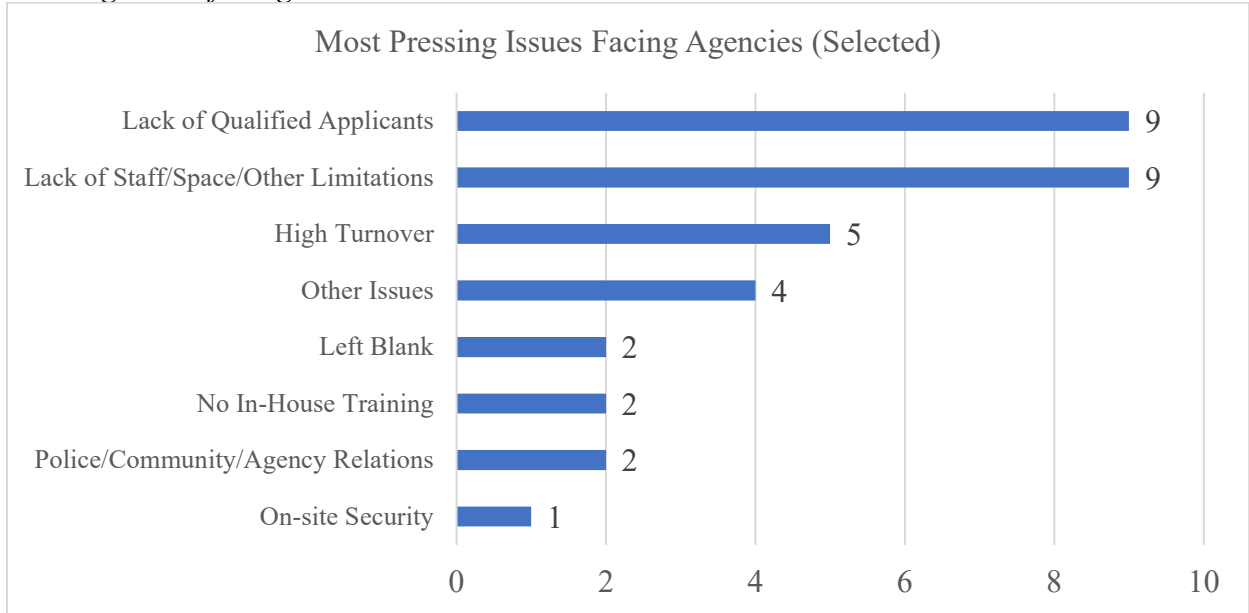
Figure 2
Pressing Service Needs for Victims



Note: The N was calculated by weighting responses (e.g. first most pressing weighted x3, second most pressing weighted x2, third most pressing weighted x1). Due to rounding, the total may not equal 100%.

The most pressing service needs for victims appear to be assistance finding housing, employment, and treatment that is accessible for victims with their various financial and legal situations. Agencies faced some pressing issues in trying to provide services last year (Figure 3).

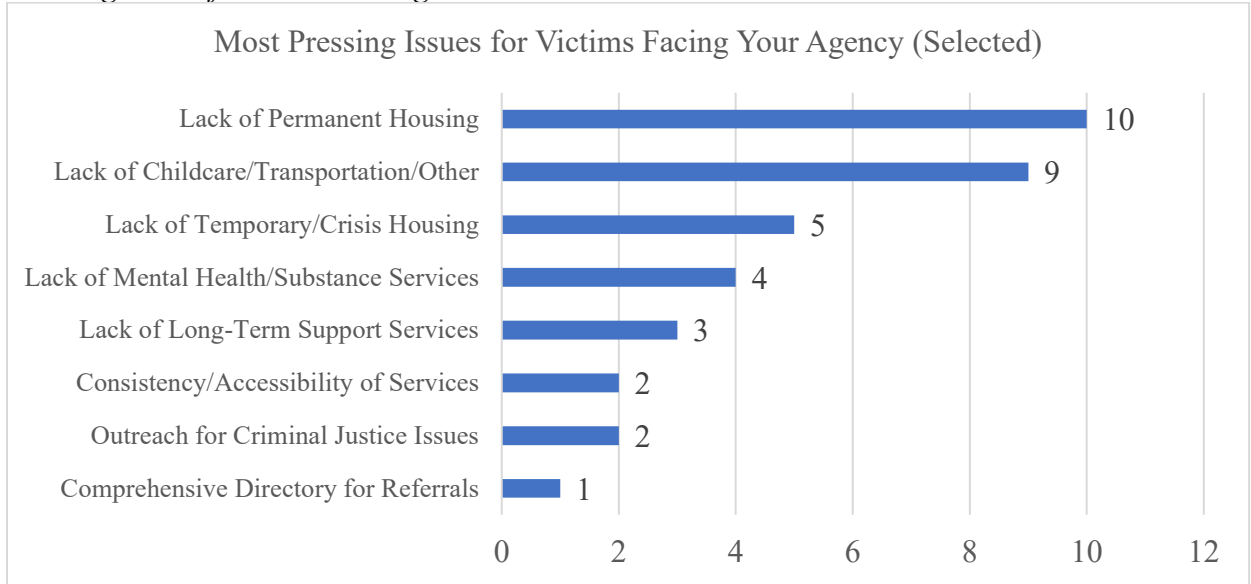
Figure 3
Pressing Issues for Agencies



Note: The N is unweighted as respondents could select options without order. While participants were instructed to select their top three needed items, the form did not require a minimum input or limit the number of responses. Because the responses were not recorded in order of selection, all responses were included here regardless of the number selected by the participant.

While this question had prefilled options for participants to select from, it was followed by a limited character box with instructions to specify any other issues not included on the list. The most pressing issues for agencies were a lack of qualified applicants to fill existing vacancies and a general lack of staff and/or space to meet the needs of victims. Other issues that were specified included limited sustainable funding to provide financial aid to victims, inability to provide competitive salaries, lack of standardized employee training manuals, lack of response to advertising to fill vacancies, and the contractual nature of revenue limiting the flexibility to attract and retain employees. Participants also got to select prefilled options for the most pressing issues for victims facing their agency (Figure 4).

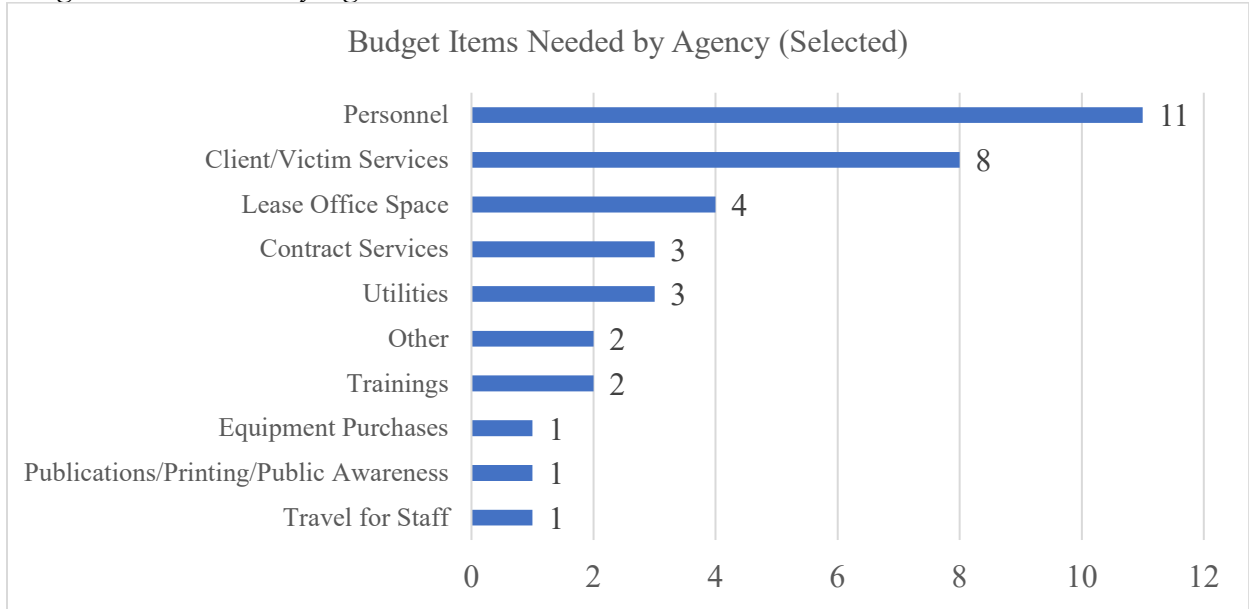
Figure 4
Pressing Issues for Victims at Agencies



Note: The N is unweighted as respondents could select options without order. While participants were instructed to select their top three needed items, the form did not require a minimum input or limit the number of responses. Because the responses were not recorded in order of selection, all responses were included here regardless of the number selected by the participant.

The most pressing issues for victims that agencies are currently faced with are the lack of access to affordable housing options, childcare, transportation, and mental health/substance abuse treatment services. The budget items needed did not appear to be closely related to the issues and needs reported by agencies (Figure 5).

Figure 5
Budget Items Needed by Agencies



Note: The N is unweighted as respondents could select options without order. While participants were instructed to select their top three needed items, the form did not require a minimum input or limit the number of responses. Because the responses were not recorded in order of selection, all responses were included here regardless of the number selected by the participant.

Participants reported that their agencies' most needed budget items were for personnel, general funds to provide victim services, and office space. Other needs that were specified in the free response box included the need for outreach supplies for highly rural areas, and the need for collaboration between agencies to fill gaps in services needed.

Discussion

The results indicate the need for victims to receive additional assistance locating available housing, childcare, employment, legal services, and treatment that is both accessible and affordable. Agencies report having difficulties maintaining adequate staffing due to high turnover, lack of flexibility to offer competitive wages, low response rates from qualified applicants, and difficulty in providing in-house training to new

employees. Participants requested standardized employee training manuals and a comprehensive service provider registry be made available to speed up the training of new hires. The registry could also be used to improve referral rates, reduce gaps in filling victim needs, and serve as a starting point for further inter-agency collaboration. Participants reported that they need additional funding for personnel and service provision. In the free response sections, some participants mentioned the lack of flexibility in the funding. VOCA grants put requirements on how the funds can be spent (OVC, 2023). This restricts participating agencies both in what they are allowed to use the funds for, and in the percentage of a grant that can be used to fund a particular budget item (OVC, 2023).

Conclusion

Surveys of victim services agencies that received VOCA grant awards in Hawaii in 2023 show that there are multiple unmet and/or under-met needs for victims in their communities. Questions that allowed for free responses or an “other” option that allowed for limited character responses appeared to provide responses that were unique but not always in line with the limitations of VOCA grant awards. Such responses revealed that agencies and the victims who they serve may be facing unique needs and challenges due to the 2023 Maui wildfire and the need for flexible funding. The responses to these questions were also more specific and nuanced. While the sample size for this survey was too small to make meaningful comparisons between counties, it appears that there may be interagency differences in the specific ways that each type of need is challenging (e.g. instead of “legal issues” agencies specified “legal representation”, “low cost legal services”, “accessible legal services for SA survivors”, “access to courts”, “cases being

dismissed”, etc.). Additional research could clarify whether these issues are agency-specific, county-specific, or generalizable. An exploratory research project could examine one or more of the highest frequency reoccurring issues to try to determine options for resolving some of the aspects of that issue. Additional research could also follow up on agency requests for standardized training manuals for new hires and a comprehensive victim services referral registry to assist agencies in continuing to provide quality services for the clients.

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