

***Section One:  
Power, Politics and  
Victimisation***



The papers in this section are concerned with victimology's ability to work with and for the victims of abuses of power. As Jacob Sahetapy noted, 'like water which never streams up', such abuses affect generally the less powerful in our society and are intricately linked with local, national and international structures of domination.

In the first paper in this collection, a strong condemnation of the current state of victimology is provided by **Robert Elias**. Despite the growth of the intellectual discipline, he maintains that levels of victimisation around the world, at least as far as are measured by crime surveys, have increased. Indeed, Elias argues that victimology itself has been coopted by a particular political agenda, that of law and order, which does not work in the best interests of most victims and survivors. This form of cooption is not the only threat. Other victimologists like Ezzat Fattah and Richard Harding have suggested that the discipline has been hijacked by a 'victimisation industry' which turns conferences into 'pedestals for political rhetoric'. Elias asks if there can be any use for a victimology that shows such little imagination in escaping the clutches of a reactionary 'right realist' political paradigm which he characterises as dominant in the politics of victimisation.

Elias claims, nevertheless, that the politicisation of victimology is both inevitable and healthy. Rather than defending a politically neutral victimology, he urges us to struggle for a particular form of political agenda and offers seven possible positions which might allow us to challenge right realism. These derive from a series of liberal, feminist, radical, socialist, left realist, and peacemaking standpoints.

As part of the new agenda, Elias calls for a radical shift in attention away from victims of crime to victims in general, from the construction of symbolic policies to the implementation of tangible ones and from a manipulation of punishment to the construction of positive reinforcements. He asks us to foster a healthier social environment which in turn might generate fewer incidents of victimisation.

Not surprisingly, Elias' work has not been without its critics. At the symposium, some academics and service providers, while accepting that there was a gap in our knowledge of abuse of power and the problems of structural, institutional and collective victimisation, took issue with Elias' claim that victimology has been coopted by law and order ideologies. Hans Joachim Schneider, for instance, suggested that victimology is able to play a useful role in alerting potential victims to dangers.

One wonders, however, whether the role of lighthouse or guide-dog is enough for victimology. Many of the papers in this collection do seem to advocate a much more politically active victimology, one that makes explicit the way that victimisation is bound up in the exercise and abuse of power: papers from Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States, Yugoslavia, India, China, and Japan consider the impact of patriarchy on the abuse of women; three papers outline the violence associated with heterosexism in Australia; while American and Japanese papers investigate the nature of corporate victimisation.

## Patriarchy and the Abuse of Women

In his case study on the contradictions of patriarchal justice, Elias notes how a rhetoric of protection has, in part, been able to coopt some feminist agendas into law and order crusades which end up empowering the state by strengthening sexist institutions. For instance, campaigns to promote women's safety have sometimes ended up suggesting that women should not attempt to use public spaces after dark. In many countries there is an illusion of change, but the state continues to deal with patriarchal violence by blaming or ignoring women and paying almost no attention to the real causes of violence. Women, in short, are still not being taken seriously by men and masculinist-dominated institutions. Papers from every continent reiterated this point, using examples such as sexual assault, family violence and sexual harassment.

Many European and North American feminist researchers have drawn attention to the under-reporting of violence against women in their countries. Low levels of reported violence have been used by many state institutions to justify ignoring the widespread nature of the phenomenon. The level of under-reporting may be even higher in other parts of the world. Alessandra Raffo spoke of the high level of victimisation of women in Brazil which, she argued, has resulted in a sense of powerlessness among women. She found that Brazil still regards claims of sexual harassment as a woman's 'strategy to vengeance and a way to get money'. The paper presented by **John Dussich**, written with **Yoshiko Fujiwara** and **Asami Sagisaka**, two rape counsellors in Tokyo, investigates the enormous under-reporting of rape in Japan, as well as the lack of official interest in its true extent. In Japan, they argue there is a dominant perception that rape is a personal rather than a social problem. Partly as a result of this, there is minimal support for survivors of rape and they suffer 'tertiary victimisation' in the form of rape trauma syndrome. Patricia Easteal's paper, based on her book, *Voices of the Survivors* (Easteal 1994), also noted a tendency in Australia to blame the victim and a failure to offer them assistance.

Under-reporting appears to be particularly common for violence, in all its forms, within families. **Elizabeth Stanko's** paper, 'Looking Back, Looking Forward', reviews what researchers in victimology have discovered about exploitation, and psychological and physical abuse within the heterosexual family, particularly of women, children and the elderly. She points out that studies have shown repeatedly that the most likely threats of sexual assault to children and adult women come from those with authority over, access to and intimacy with them. Violence between men and women, adults and children, she argues, arises largely from familiarity. It is an integral part of many heterosexual relationships, buttressed by 'institutions and structures which privileges men's control over women and children.' **Suzanne Hatty** and **Nanette Davis** interviewed over 100 homeless young women in Sydney. Their paper reports that before they left home, 65 per cent of that group had been physically abused and 80 per cent emotionally abused by other family members.

**Sushma Sood** argues that any analysis of the aetiology of domestic violence has to pay attention to the economic, social, political and legal status of women in particular societies. Three papers in this collection follow this process: Sood's own paper explores the stereotypes and myths that have led to wife battering,

bride burning, and violence against widows in India; **Xin Ren** traces the resurgence of trafficking in women in China and links it to traditional patriarchal values, the tension between those values and the official one-child per family policy. Ren explores the dramatic political and economic changes in the country which have brought about a rapid expansion in the market economy and, more specifically, in the sex industry. Finally, **Vesna Nikolić-Ristanović** examines the increase in domestic violence in Serbia as armed soldiers return from war to a country embroiled in economic crises and ethnic tensions.

Domestic or family violence was also addressed in several other presentations given at the conference: Jane Lester, the South Australian coordinator of the National Family Violence Intervention Program, spoke of the need to come to terms with Australia's past—the dispossession, 'oppression, demoralisation, confusion and despair' of Aboriginal people which had contributed to 'more family violence deaths in one Aboriginal community alone than there were Aboriginal Deaths in Custody cases presented to the Royal Commission'; Nyrell Brooks of the Aboriginal and Islander Health Service in Townsville, Queensland, argued that domestic violence in the Aboriginal community reflected the inadequate housing, health and conditions experienced by Aboriginal Australians: 'When people feel frustrated, angry, lost and powerless to make change, this negative energy turns not only inward but outward and is inflicted on all those around you'; and Anshu Padayachee spoke of the ineffectiveness of South African legislation in protecting and supporting female victims of abuse, and described the various strategies that abused women had followed in order to survive.

Helmut Kury noted that people's anxiety about their safety, known in academic, political and popular discourses as 'fear of crime', has now come to be a major concern for governments. In response, many commentators have pointed to the mismatch between official statistics—which are accepted uncritically as an indication of actual levels—and individual perceptions of the risk of victimisation. In a second paper, **Stanko** argues that heightened fear among women is the result of threats to their sexual integrity, a consequence of living under patriarchy. As a result, she maintained, any attempt to reduce women's fears must go to the source of the problem:

*The social context of women's fear of crime is such that unless women's autonomy is promoted¼ which, I advocate, must address women's freedom from sexual danger, then it is unlikely that our fear will be reduced. Good lighting, good transport, adequate childcare, decent education, safe houses and safe relationships¼ one without the others is inadequate to address women's needs, and, by extension, our fear of crime.*

Jo Goodey's highly original paper examined the gender-specific nature of the socialisation and sexualisation of fear among adolescents in England. She suggested that it is during puberty that girls learn at least in part from their parents to fear sexual assault and rape. This fear, she argued, is part of a system of social control that denies women full access to the public sphere.

## Heterosexism

Gay and lesbian activists have had significant success in mobilising their communities to combat heterosexism in Australia. In New South Wales, for instance, the Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby has launched the Lesbian and Gay Anti Violence Project, to reduce anti-lesbian and homophobic violence by identifying the nature, causes and extent of the violence, and to lobby the government and the general community to support remedies to minimise such incidents.

**Steve Tomsen**, however, notes in his paper how some activists have felt uncomfortable working within the politics of victims' rights. He appreciates the advantage of involvement in a large group advocating responsiveness to the needs of victims, but notes the difficulties of operating in a sometimes conservative political environment that 'marginalises the interests of non-traditional crime victims . . . in tandem with a political drift to tougher "law and order" policies'.

The papers by **Mason** and **van Reyk**, like Tomsen, discuss the growing political strength of the Australian gay and lesbian communities in drawing attention to physical and symbolic violence directed against them. In short extracts from their papers, Tomsen discusses murders of gay men, Paul van Reyk outlines the incidents of assaults on both lesbians and gays in New South Wales, and Gail Mason investigates the characteristics, perceived meanings and roles of verbal hostility directed towards lesbian women in Victoria. All three authors link various forms of violence against gay and lesbian people to the ideology of heterosexism which 'denies, denigrates or stigmatises any non-heterosexual behaviour or lifestyle' (Mason). Mason, for example, argues that by circumscribing public expression of lesbianism, verbal abuse constitutes part of a wider process of reinforcing conformity to prevailing values and norms in a sexist and heterosexist culture. Interestingly, neither Mason nor Tomsen use the term victim in their papers, preferring 'recipient of abuse' or the less passive 'survivor'.

Importantly, Mason recognises that abuse directed against gay and lesbian people has to be interpreted in terms of their various identities, and notes that any attempt to disentangle the causes, meanings and experiences of violence has to be sensitive to the positioning of the subject in hierarchies of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and race.

## Corporate Victimisation

The area of corporate victimisation raises interesting questions about whether capitalism itself is criminogenic: is it the profit-seeking nature of commercial enterprises that leads to violations of employees' right to occupational health and safety, and the 'corporate looting' of communities? Why are corporations so well protected, yet arguably so poorly regulated by legal codes? Victimology has tended to examine white-collar crimes and rogue corporations rather than the kinds of routine illicit corporate activity that may give us a deeper insight into the relationship between capital and victimisation. Krishna Iyer's address outlined

how ‘corporate predations’ in countries of the developing world leave ‘a trail of victims against which even the state proves impotent.’ He described how in his native India, the explosion at the Union Carbide plant in Bhopal claimed hundreds of thousands of victims, ‘dead, living and unborn’. While the papers by **David Shichor**, **Jeff Doocy** and **Gil Geis** on a telescam operation in California, and by **Tatsuya Ota** on pyramid sales schemes in Japan do focus on rogue enterprises, they also offer a platform for a much wider critique.

In the case study analysed by **Shichor** et al. 9000 American investors were fleeced of US\$217 million over 10 years. The paper records the sense of betrayal and violation of trust experienced by 150 generally wealthy, well educated, victims of the fraud. It also notes that the victims’ anger remained unfocused and that there was no generalisation of anger against a political and economic system that failed to regulate such schemes effectively and allowed their life-savings to be spirited away.

There were over 30 000 Japanese victims of pyramid schemes in 1992 alone. In the scheme investigated by Ota, most of those defrauded were in their twenties and less well off than the Californians examined by **Shichor** et al. They too, however, suffered a loss of confidence, though in this case it was exacerbated by the fact that they were recruited by friends into the scheme.

## **Concluding Comments**

In his rapporteur’s report, John Dussich complained about the atheoretical nature of many of the papers presented at the conference, suggesting that the majority ‘seemed content with merely descriptive rather than explanatory research’. Very few papers were directly concerned with theoretical issues, though one notable exception was Sam Garkawe’s piece on attempts within victimology to respond to the law and order agenda. On the other hand, as this selection demonstrates, many papers were concerned both with locating abuse within various hierarchies of domination, and using this critique to empower survivors of such abuse. The influence of patriarchy, sexuality and capital were important themes in the conference, but other papers outlined the victimisation of the elderly, of young people and of the intellectually disabled: Margaret-Ann Diedrichs drew attention to the lack of interest South Africans had shown to the victimisation of the elderly by apartheid; Carlene Wilson, Rob Potter and Ted Nettlebeck considered the vulnerability of people with intellectual disability in Australia, while Stuart Burke and Suzanne Hatty analysed the victimisation of young travellers, the so-called ‘feral’ youth, who live in the forests of the Rainbow Region of northern New South Wales.

Elias concludes his paper by arguing that if victimology is to support attempts to tackle the patterns of domination that the papers in this section have outlined, then victimologists have to become politically responsible. It is to be hoped that this international selection of papers can contribute to the development of a politically active and intellectually mature field of study.

SECTION ONE

**References**

Easteal, P. 1994, *Voices of the Survivors*, Spinifex Press, Melbourne.