



Section Four
Serving Victims

Victims' Services

The nature and type of services available to victims in any particular country is indicative of political, cultural and social conditions.

Philanthropy, a significant trend in the development of services, is predicated on a desire to relieve social distress. Contrary to their somewhat tentative beginnings, philanthropic victim organisations, often victim driven, have been established across the globe. However, several commentators have suggested that some victim organisations have been hijacked by 'law and order' lobbies. **Robert Elias**, for instance, observed that a punitive element was inherent in some victim advocacy. On the other hand, **Richard Harding** acknowledged that attitudinal change in some victim support groups across Australia correlated with greater focus on victim assistance.

Marlene Young contributes a checklist of attitudes if victims' services are to be coordinated in accordance with human rights principles. She reduces her themes to four principles: *compassion* that spreads beyond traditional victim services, *community* that seeks to overcome isolation and fear, *character* that increases the accountability of the victim organisation itself, and *courage* to translate knowledge into action.

Excerpts from the papers by **John Oliphant** and **Andrew Paterson**, both of Victims of Crime Service (VOCS), demonstrate the current 'applied victimological' approach to victims' services in South Australia. Oliphant describes a successful program concerning mothers of victims of sexual abuse while Paterson details traps for the unwary in coordinating a victims of crime agency.

In some countries, victims' services have prospered through government funding and the allocation of other resources, whereas in other places state concern for victims of crime has been overshadowed by efforts to treat and rehabilitate offenders. Notwithstanding the ideals of the welfare state, prevailing economic and social conditions in several western democracies have been conducive to an evolving emphasis on economic rationalism. Although rationalists tend to favour philanthropy as a means of 'cost effective' self-help and reduced government expenditure, the politicisation of victims and their plight has ensured many victims' services are provided at government expense, or with government subsidy. Governments have also intervened through legislative and administrative reforms. In fact, political interest in victims of crime was initially manifest in the design and implementation of criminal injuries compensation schemes. Despite the apparent political favour with these schemes, it is still not clear whether payment of a lump sum to victims of crime is an effective way of extending state beneficence.

Criminal Injuries Compensation

Reflecting on judicial decisions, particularly in Australia, **Ian Freckelton** claims that there is a growing appreciation of the serious repercussions of sexual assaults on children. He asserts that the key to successful criminal injuries claims

is proof of adverse psychiatric effects on child victims of sexual assault. The growing cognisance, he concludes, may have significant ramifications for criminal injuries compensation tribunals such as those that function in several Australian States.

Unlike most countries, New Zealand has a comprehensive accident compensation scheme which covers victims of crime as well as victims of accidents. In an abridged paper **John Miller** outlines the New Zealand scheme and pronounces some of its advantages and disadvantages. He also mentions several reforms, including two new victim programs.

Professional Service Providers

The final trend in the development of victims' services has been the growth of a professional social welfare industry. Consistent with this, **Alexander McFarlane** acknowledges the part played by political as well as social forces in the increasing interest in the effects of victimisation.

McFarlane, in his keynote address, notes with concern the ambivalence in modern societies to the rights of the weak, the injured and the disenfranchised. Allied to this, he says, is the phenomenon that those in power tend to blame victims for their conditions. Moreover, victim service providers frequently fail to recognise their own pre-conceived prejudices when dealing with victims.

Consequently, the involvement of health professionals in victims' services has not necessarily led to improvements in these services. **Gwenn Roberts**, for instance, refers to various studies which show that detection rates for victims of domestic violence by doctors in hospital emergency departments are very low. She points out that these low rates have been attributed to inappropriate attitudes of health professionals towards victims of crime. She reports the findings of a study concerning an education program designed to lessen negative attitudes and increase knowledge about domestic violence among doctors and nurses at the Emergency Department of the Royal Brisbane Hospital. She concludes that attitudes towards domestic violence were a function of profession rather than gender.

Following on from Roberts, **Greg Dear** presents an overview of co-dependency theory. He discusses the premise that the co-dependency model tends to shed blame on the victim for the difficulty in coping with the emotional pain she or he experiences. Dear comments on the implications of this model for professional service providers.

Prevention and Restoration

Interest in crime prevention is not a recent phenomenon. Since the 1970s, however, there has been a resurgence in anticipating and appraising crime risk and the initiation of action to remove, or at least reduce, that risk.

In an abridged paper, **David Hunt** subscribes to a multi-agency approach to preventing crime. He warns that a lack of cooperation between government and non-government agencies can obstruct crime prevention efforts. Consequently, agencies should focus their efforts on the identification and development of

common purposes and functions. He concludes with a list of key ingredients for crime prevention based on his experience in South Australia.

The paper by **Ken Rigby** provides a theoretical overview of a worrying trend towards victimisation of children at the hands of school yard ‘bullies’. Rigby contends that school yard violence is often assumed to be part of ‘growing up’. Consequently, he adds, the seriousness of the problem is often understated. Rigby outlines several strategies to deal with incidents of bullying.

Excerpts from the paper by **Rika Snyman** provide a picture of one of the groups most commonly affected by murder. She describes a range of responses which ought to be employed at the macro and micro levels. Returning to an earlier theme in this section, Snyman concludes with several observations about victims’ services, especially for indirect victims of murder.

Restorative justice is a concept inherent in the notion that the criminal justice system ought to be seen as keen to reconcile or restore victims and offenders as it is to exhibit official state disapproval of an offender’s wrongdoings. Offenders are forced to confront their wrongdoing while being empowered to develop their own negotiated settlement with the people they have wronged. As a result victim-offender conflict is placed at centre stage rather than at the periphery of the criminal justice system. The final paper in this section is an overview of research on a pilot victim-offender reconciliation program conducted in Hannover, Germany. **Ute Hartmann** reports that an intransigent prosecutorial attitude can impede efforts to resolve conflict and stabilise the victim-offender circumstance. Indeed, she asserts, criminal justice practitioners (in this study the prosecutors) as well as the participants must want the process to work if ‘restorative’ justice is to occur.