Support for victims of crime in South Africa

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**Opsomming**

Misdad is 'n verskynsel wat almal in die samelewing raak en elkeen word of direk of indirek daardeur beïnvloed. Vir elke misdad is daar ten minste een slagoffer en namate misdad toeneem, neem victimisasie ook proporsioneel toe. Duisende mense word jaarliks ongevraagd in die maalkolk van victimisasie ingetrek en op 'n verskeidenheid wyses daardeur benadeel. Be-nownens die ooglopende direkte koste van victimisasie soos verlies aan eiendom en beserings, is die emocionele impak van die victimisasie op die slagoffer en die vrees vir misdad indirek van aard. Vanuit die trauma van die victimisasie ontwikkel die slagoffer 'n verskeidenheid behoeftes wat op die lang termyn negatief kan inwerk op sowel die slagoffer as die gemeenskap as dit nie suksesvol opgelos word nie. Dienislewering aan slagoffers van misdad wat gemik is op die behoeftes wat ontstaan weens die victimisasie kan die impak van die victimisasie versag en proaktief misdad voorkom deur bewusmakingsprogramme in die breër gemeenskap te loods. Sedert 1980 het 'n verskeidenheid slagofferbystandsdienste in Suid-Afrika ontwikkel. Soos die openbare as die private sektor het in die verband inisiatief aan die dag gelê en bystandsdienste tot die beskikking van die slagoffers van misdad gestel. Die openbare sektor stel kompensasie deur middel van die Strafproseswet 51 van 1977, die Dierebeskermingswet 71 van 1962 en die Wet op Vee- diefstal 57 van 1959, asook bystand aan die slagoffers van verkrachting en kindermishandeling deur die staatshospitalite, 'n 24-uur tolvrye kindernoodlyn aan kinders in nood, en die diskrete hantering van misdade deur die polisie in die vorm van de Kinderbeskermingseenheid en Verkrachtingseenheid. Die strukture in die gemeenskap wat deur die private sektor tot stand gebring is om bystand aan die slagoffers van misdad te lever kan in drie groepe verdeel word, naamlik bystalsdienste, kindermishandeling en verkrachting. Slagofferbystandsdienste kan suksesvol uitgebou word as dit gemeet word aan standaarde wat die ontwikkeling en verandering daarvan rig, die relevantheid en effektiwiteit van hulpverlening bepaal en die misdadavoorkomende taak van die slagofferbystandsdiens omskryf.

**Much** has been said about and written on the need and necessity for and value of support services for victims of crime. The question which is being asked, is: What is being done for the victims in South Africa and of what value is it to them?

The nature of the services available to the victims of crime will be elucidated and the role of the public and private sectors in the development of victim support schemes will be examined. The different services available to the victims of crime and their relative availability will be discussed and the victim support movement in South Africa evaluated.

**The need to support the victims of crime**

The experience of crime entails a crisis for the victim, and the period immediately following a crime is traumatic. The crisis may be acute or superficial, prolonged or brief, and even crimes that are not accompanied by physical violence or injury have an emotional impact on the victim. For every crime committed there is at least one victim, and as the crime rate soars, so does the rate of victimisation. The most visible cost of crime is the direct cost that arises from for example robbery, where the victim loses money/goods, where manpower is lost due to injury and time is spent in court to give evidence. To this direct loss must be added the emotional impact victimisation has on the victim and the fear of crime that results from the crime experience. Although the effect of victimisation cannot be exactly measured in monetary terms or manpower lost, the paralysing effect on the victim cannot be doubted. From the resultant trauma of victimisation, the victim develops certain needs which, if not successfully fulfilled, can have negative effects in the long term on both the victim and society at large. Support services for the victims of crime, aimed at the needs of the victims, can soften the impact of victimisation and prevent crime (Reeves 1985: 679–686).
The role of the public sector

As early as 1918 victims of child abuse and sexual molestation were offered assistance by the Child and Family Welfare Organisation. No other help was available to the victims of crime. It is only since 1980 that a network of support for victims has been developed. The emphasis at present is on the provision of services to victims of rape, child abuse and child sexual molestation, with a few support schemes catering for the victims of other crimes. Since 1980 both the public and private sectors have showed initiative in establishing victim support services.

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Support for victims by state hospitals

Each state hospital in the four provinces of South Africa has its own approach to supporting the victims of crime. The Department of National Health and Population Development, under whose control the state hospitals are, has no fixed policy on singling out victims of crime for special treatment. The extent to which nursing staff at the emergency units are sympathetic to the plight of the victim depends on the staff themselves. The victims of rape and child abuse, however, are regarded by all hospitals as deserving of special treatment. Some state hospitals have special units for the victims of rape and child abuse where counseling and therapy help the victims to deal with the trauma of the crime. The units in the capitals of the Cape, Natal and Transvaal were all established between 1976 and 1983 while the major state hospitals in the
Orange Free State refer the victims of rape to NICRO and victims of child abuse and sexual molestation to the Child and Family Welfare Organisation. The functioning of these two victim support schemes will be discussed in the section on the role of the private sector in rendering support to the victims of crime.

An average of 186 victims per year are treated at each of these units. Except in the case of the Transvaal, which has full-time workers assigned to the unit, all hospital staff are actively involved in supporting the victims of crime. As all these hospitals are financed by the state. A fee, in accordance with the income of the victim, is charged. Close co-operation exists between these units and other victim support schemes in the community, like the Child Protection Unit and the Rape Unit of the SAP, Life line and Child line (Foster 1990; Van Zyl 1988; Esterhuyzen 1989a & Winkler 1990).

**Telephone service for children**

Child Help Line is a national toll-free telephone counselling service which was established on 31 August 1989 by the Department of Health Services and Welfare under Act 98 of 1986. This service is a 24-hour professional telephone service for victims of child abuse and sexual molestation. Twenty-one social workers of the department provide counselling and reference to social workers and/or other organisations for children in distress. When a child is in a life-threatening situation due to abuse, the police and/or a social worker in the city or town where the child lives is sent to the rescue by the person on duty at Child Help Line. The aims of Child Help Line are to provide immediate relief in the short term and, to prevent child abuse and sexual molestation in the long term. The response to Child Help Line was overwhelming after the services were advertised, and on average 169 calls were received daily. This service is available to all and is offered free of charge (Du Toit 1990).

**The South African Police**

Apart from their daily contact with victims of crime in the course of their duties, the police in 1986 established two specialised units, namely the Child Protection Unit and the Rape Unit, to deal with victims of the sensitive crimes of rape and child abuse.

The Child Protection Unit consists of eleven units in cities and towns throughout South Africa. In places where such a unit does not exist, a police officer, trained in the handling of victims of rape and child abuse, is stationed and assigned to the investigation of such cases. The task of the Child Protection Unit is to investigate all cases of child abuse and child sexual molestation from the point where the crime is reported and investigated and legal proceedings are instituted. The police try to establish a relationship of mutual trust between the police officer and the victim in order to minimise the chances of secondary victimisation. This unit favours a multidisciplinary approach and works closely with various experts and organisations to assist the victim as best it can (Blignaut 1990).

In all the main centres of South Africa a Rape Unit is affiliated with the Murder and Robbery Squad. Where possible, only females are assigned to these units and all rape cases are referred to them. When a rape is reported, the officer assigned to the case will carry out the investigation and support the victim throughout the trial. Apart from collecting forensic information, conducting a medical examination and testing for pregnancy, venereal diseases and Aids, information on crime prevention is given. The officers of the Rape Unit do not enter into a therapeutic relationship with the victim. The victim is referred to support units at the state hospitals, or organisations in the community, for counselling (Schutte 1990).

**The role of the private sector**

A number of organisations and individuals established structures in the community to offer support to the victims of crime. In doing so they contributed to the dynamic development of the victim support movement. While some of these organisations are functioning on a national level, others are limited to a specific geographical area. These structures in the community can be roughly divided into three groups, namely those that support only the victims of child abuse/sexual molestation, those that assist the victims of rape and those that help the victims of crimes other than rape and child abuse.

**Support structures for victims of child abuse/sexual molestation**

The very first support service for victims of crime in South Africa is the Child and Family Welfare Organisation, established in 1918, for victims of child abuse and sexual molestation. Although this organisation does not have as its main aim rendering support to the victims of crime, it nevertheless offers the most comprehensive service to victims of child abuse in South Africa. Its 179 offices nation-wide handle an average of 70 cases per office per month. Some 40 social workers, supported by trained volunteers, implement the policy of the organisation which is to safeguard children who cannot protect themselves. The aims are to protect the interests of children, to identify and eliminate shortcomings in the existing services and laws, to educate the community on child abuse and to promote a multidisciplinary approach to the prevention and control of child abuse and sexual molestation. Through programmes like playing groups, school holiday programmes, parent-guidance clinics and lectures, child abuse is prevented on a primary level and.
at-risk children and their parents are identified. Where a child has already been the victim of abuse and neglect, therapeutic and reconstructive steps are taken. The Child and Family Welfare Organisation works closely together with other structures in the community, like the police, schools and city councils, to promote the interests of children (Jones 1987 & Nel 1990).

Telephone counselling services for the victims of child abuse and sexual molestation have been established in major centres such as Cape Town (Safe Line), Durban, Port Elizabeth and Johannesburg (Child Line). Child Line in Durban was established in 1982 and it was the very first in South Africa to offer immediate support through telephone counselling to a specific group of victims. Although these different telephone counselling services are organized and structured along the same lines, there is no mutual cooperation between them. In spite of the fact that most of them are called ‘Child Line’, each one is a separate entity working closely with the structures in the communities in which it operates. These telephone support services are all manned by trained volunteers as well as a co-ordinator who offers the victims an opportunity to talk about the abuse, refers them to other organisations like hospitals for professional help and gives advice on the prevention of child abuse and sexual molestation. Child Line in Durban rendered assistance in 1 228 cases of child abuse from 23 June 1988 to 31 July 1989 while Child Line in Johannesburg received 2 500 telephone calls for help from 1 January 1989 to 31 December 1989. The communities in which these services are provided support them financially with donations of office space, computers and the co-ordinator’s salary, thereby enabling them to offer these services free of charge to the children and their parents (Meyerowitz 1990 & Esterhuysen 1989b).

Support structures for victims of rape
Various organisations offer support to the victims of rape, with Life Line providing the most extensive services of them all. Life Line has 16 branches in South Africa and offers 24-hour telephone counselling services to anyone, including victims of crime, who experiences a crisis. In addition to this service, Life Line has established Rape Crisis Centres at some of its branches. These centres are manned by trained volunteers and the service is offered free of charge. Emotional support is rendered to the victim of rape, advice is given on the prevention of rape, assistance is provided during the contact with the criminal justice system while the public is educated to dispel the myths surrounding rape. An average of ten new cases are assisted at each Rape Crisis Centre every month. The contact between the victim and the Rape Crisis centre comprises four sessions of one hour each and further sessions of two hours each until the victim feels ready to terminate the contact. Good co-operation exists between the Life Line Rape Crisis Centres and other community structures such as the police, state hospitals and other rape crisis services (Labuschagne 1988).

NICRO adapted its constitution in 1987 to extend its services to the victims of crime. Four of the thirteen branches are in the process of establishing support services to victims of crime, with the Rape Crisis Centre of the Bloemfontein branch of NICRO already helping the victims of rape since 1987. Trained volunteers assisted 63 victims during 1989 by offering them an opportunity to talk about the rape, referring them for professional medical services, supported them through their contact with the criminal justice system and offering advice on crime prevention. Close co-operation exists between NICRO Bloemfontein and the different support structures in the community, like the police, hospitals and Child and Family Welfare Organisation (Foster 1990).

The feminist movement in South Africa recognised the plight of the victim of rape and women abuse in the 1970s and established ‘Rape Crisis South Africa’ (RCSA) in Cape Town in 1977, Pietermaritzburg in 1978, Durban in 1980 and Johannesburg in 1981. The Johannesburg branch later changed its name to People Opposing Woman Abuse (POWA). Short- and long-term assistance is offered to the victims through the telephone counselling service which operates daily between 17:00 and 22:00 and gives emotional support while the safe house can accommodate six women and 20 children for a period of up to three months. Trained volunteers support the victims by referring them for professional medical, legal and psychological advice, by providing practical help, giving them an opportunity to talk about the crime and rendering assistance through contact with the criminal justice system. Between 1 July 1989 and 30 June 1990 support was rendered to 1 200 victims, of which 800 were victims of woman abuse and 400 rape victims. Closer contact is maintained with community structures like the women’s group FAMSA, Radio 702 Crisis Centre and other RCSA branches (Margaret 1990).

Support structures for victims of crimes other than child abuse and rape
Very little is done in South Africa for victims of crimes other than child abuse and rape. The aid that is available is through organisations such as Life Line and Radio 702’s Crisis Centre in Hillbrow, Johannesburg, which primarily assist people who experience a crisis. Although these organisations offer excellent support they are not exclusive to victims of crime and regard crime as one of the many causes of a life crisis.

The Crisis Centre of Radio 702 offers a unique walk-in and telephone counselling service between 17:00 and 22:00. Between May 1989 and March 1990

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some 5,947 people were helped, of whom a third named crime as the cause for the emotional crisis they experienced. Trained volunteers under the supervision of social workers implement the policy of the organisation, namely to restore the victim's level of functioning to what it was before the crisis occurred and to refer him/her to other organisations if he/she needs professional attention (Tracy 1990).

Owing to the high incidence of robbery, the management of a large commercial bank implemented a support service in 1989 for its employees which are the victims of bank robberies. When a branch has been robbed, counsellors are immediately dispatched to talk to the employees. This is followed by a visit to their homes the same evening, a further visit to the branch the next morning after the robbery, and a last visit a week after the incident. Thirty-two managers are trained by psychologists from the University of the Witwatersrand to provide emotional support and to identify post-traumatic stress symptoms, which are referred to psychologists for professional help. This support service is in addition to the in-service training that all employees of the bank receive and it is a definite first for a commercial bank in South Africa (Hodges 1990).

In 1989 the Pretoria branch of NICRO established an action committee to investigate the viability of a support service for victims of crime. Although the service, called VICTIMLINE, is as yet not functioning, it plans to offer emotional support to victims of all crimes on a 24-hour basis and to supply the victims with information brochures on crime prevention, the functioning of the criminal justice system and insurance claims. In the longer term, co-ordination of the local victim support schemes and expansion to all the 13 branches of NICRO is planned (Schurink 1990).

Services available to the victims of crime

A wide variety of services, varying from financial aid, the opportunity to talk about the crime and support during the court proceedings, are available to the victims of crime. Certain forms of help are, however, more readily available to victims. This assistance is listed in order of priority of the 'readily available' to 'limited availability':

- Reference for professional service
- An opportunity to talk about the crime
- Assistance during the court proceedings
- Advice on crime prevention
- Support in reporting the crime to the police
- Practical aid with repairs and transport
- Support during identification parades
- Financial aid
- Advice on compensation
- Advice and aid with insurance claims
- Help with the replacement of documents.

The role of the public sector in rendering support to the victims of crime does not differ markedly from that of the private sector, with the available services evenly spread between them. Three services that are grossly neglected by both sectors are advice on compensation, advice on and assistance with insurance claims, and help with the replacement of documents. With the exception of the Child and Family Welfare Organisation, financial aid is offered in isolation by the criminal courts through the payment of compensation and the State President's Fund by paying ex gratia amounts to victims of terrorism. Except for the courts and the State President's Fund all the victim support schemes refer the victims for professional services and, with the exception of the police, they all offer the victim an opportunity to talk about the crime (Snyman 1990:196–197).

Evaluation of the victim support schemes in South Africa

The victim support movement in South Africa developed as a result of the enthusiasm of different groups of people from church and welfare organisations, academics and pressure groups of the feminist movement. Various victim support schemes were established and over the years some of them became strong and offered quality services to victims whereas others gradually declined and offered only limited services. The reason why certain victim support schemes remained successful is the increased demands on the quality control of their services (Stelmachers 1985:2). The setting of standards increased the quality of the service rendered because standards are a measurement of the expected level of performance. The creation and following of standards by the victim support movement resulted in a drastic improvement in the quality of the specific organisation and its outputs. If victim support schemes continuously evaluate themselves, stagnation will be prevented and positive growth will be ensured (Stelmachers 1985:1–7).

The standards by which the performance of the South African victim support schemes are measured are threefold. The first set of standards control the development and change of each scheme. This development and change cannot take place in a haphazard manner and the developmental research and utilisation model of E J Thomas is taken as a measure according to which change must take place. This model consists of different methods through which support strategies can be analysed, designed, developed and evaluated (Thomas 1981:590–605). The
second set of standards concerns the fairness and effectiveness of rendering help. The four models of Brickman – the moral, medical, compensation and elucidation models – by which responsibility for the creation and solving of a problem is assigned, are taken as measurement. When support is given by a victim support scheme it must measure up to the requirements of fairness and effectiveness otherwise the assistance rendered will be futile. In addition to rendering assistance to the victims of crime, the victim support scheme also has the prevention of crime as its aim. The third set of standards ensures a balanced level of crime prevention by the different victim support schemes. The crime prevention model of Edelman and Rowe (1983:391–398) is taken as the criterium for crime prevention. This model consists of five levels, ranging from level 0 to level 4, which cover the full spectrum of crime prevention from before the crime has been committed until crime control after the crime has been committed.

A very important part of quality service delivery is the implementation of uniform standards by all the victim support schemes. An independent national co-ordinating body must co-ordinate the different victim support schemes to ensure that the common set of standards is adhered to, duplication of services is avoided and quality support is offered to the victims of crime. The co-ordinating body must, however, be careful not to over-control the different victim support schemes and not to stifle creativity and initiative. This can be avoided by constituting the national co-ordinating body from the different victim support schemes and having them controlling themselves (Snyman 1990:240).

As most of the victim support schemes were established only from 1980, they are all still in a developmental phase. Owing to the absence of a national co-ordinating body, no control is exercised over the quality of the support which the victims receive and each victim support scheme is therefore setting its own standards. In spite of a need expressed by the different support schemes for mutual co-operation no initiative to this effect has as yet come forth from either the public or the private sectors. Most of the problems experienced by the victim support schemes in South Africa will be ironed out with the establishment of a national co-ordinating body (Snyman 1990:198).

The victim support schemes in South Africa are reluctant to change and adapt their policies and practices as times change. Especially in a developing country like South Africa adjustment is essential. In spite of the availability of the victim support programmes to people of all races whites do make the most use of them. The concentration of victim support schemes in white urban areas and the great emphasis placed on telephone counselling makes these services inaccessible to the largest section of the population which lives outside these areas and for whom a telephone is a luxury. Some victims are frightened by the bureaucratic nature of some of the victim support schemes. The State President’s Fund can be taken as an example. Only three of the victims of the Strijdom Square shooting incident in Pretoria in 1989 applied for aid even though all the victims, including the families of the murdered people, were notified of the availability of aid. Only if victim support schemes are continuously updated and adapted to the needs of the communities they wish to serve will the support services be accessible and relevant to the needs of the population (Snyman 1990:200).

An outstanding characteristic of the victim support movement in South Africa is its specialised nature. The victims of rape, child abuse and sexual molestation have access to various schemes nation-wide while the victims of other crimes have access only to general crisis services. The high incidence of crime in South Africa necessitates extended support services to all victims of all crimes. Many of the existing support services are duplicated, with more than one organisation offering the same service in the same community instead of extending it to all victims. The telephone counselling services for victims of child abuse are especially guilty of duplication. Support to the victims of crime in South Africa is not evenly distributed and some victims of crime benefit at the cost of others (Snyman 1990:201).

With regard to crime prevention, the different victim support schemes do recognise the responsibility and much is being done by them to prevent crime. According to Edelman and Rowe’s view on crime prevention, the different support schemes are very involved in activating the community structures at grassroots level (Edelman & Rowe 1983:391–398). Much is being done to educate the community regarding rape and child abuse through the media, schools, women’s groups and church organisations.

The social responsibility of each individual and the value of a lawabiding attitude is developed through regular exhibitions at shopping centres by the police and the advice offered by the telephone counselling services. Potential victims are identified and crime prevention information supplied. Groups of victims which are regularly approached by the victim support schemes are the elderly and children. The victim support schemes in South Africa fulfil their crime prevention task regarding the victims of rape, child abuse and certain categories of victims like the elderly. Not enough is being done to reach out to all victims of all crimes in preventing crime (Snyman 1990:206).

Conclusion

The victim support movement in South Africa developed from initiatives by both the private and the
public sectors since 1980. A variety of services are available to the victims of rape and child abuse with very little being offered to the victims of other crimes. Because of the high crime rate attention should be paid to the enlargement of the victim support movement. A prerequisite for effective service is a national co-ordinating body which can set standards for rendering support to and providing an initiative for the dynamic development of the victim support movement.

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