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## ASSISTING VICTIMS: THE BRITISH MODEL IN COMPARATIVE CONTEXT

### 1. INTRODUCTION

It is less than fifty years since Steven Schafer<sup>1</sup> described the crime victim as the Cinderella of the criminal justice system. Today, while funding is still skewed towards the police, prosecution process and prisons, expansion of the victims' movement across the world means that policies are commonly advocated in the name of the victim, and many focus directly on improving services for victims and reducing "secondary victimisation". These include personal help at the time of the offence, support through the investigation and prosecution process, the right to be heard in court, help after the conclusion of prosecution, and financial compensation<sup>2</sup>. However, the so-called "victims' movement" is not one movement at all. The victims' lobby emerged independently in Britain and the USA, and while other countries, such as the Netherlands<sup>3</sup>, introduced programmes that were to some extent based on those tried and tested elsewhere, variations were considerable. Moreover, the victims' movement emerged for different reasons in different countries and was supported by key players with very different agendas<sup>4</sup>. There have, of course, been pressures to adopt similar policies in different countries. Intensified by the threat of terrorism at a time of increased international travel<sup>5</sup>, international bodies like the United Nations<sup>6</sup>, Council

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<sup>1</sup> S. Schafer, *Restitution to Victims of Crime*, Stevens and Sons, London 1960.

<sup>2</sup> R.I. Mawby, "Criminal Justice and Crime Victims in Comparative Context", in: P. Davies, P. Francis (eds.), *Crime Victims and the Criminal Justice System*, Polity, Oxford 2008.

<sup>3</sup> M.E.I. Brienen, E.H. Hoegen, *Victims of Crime in 22 European Criminal Justice Systems: The Implementation of Recommendation (85) 11 of the Council of Europe on the Position of the Victim in the Framework of Criminal Law and Procedure*, University of Tilburg, Nijmegen, the Netherlands 2000 (accessed at [www.victimology.nl](http://www.victimology.nl)), p. 641–720; R.I. Mawby, *Criminal Justice...*, op. cit.

<sup>4</sup> R.I. Mawby, *Criminal Justice...*, op. cit.

<sup>5</sup> OVC, *International Perspectives (New Directions from the Field: Bulletin 19)* (see at [www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/new/directions/bulletins/welcome.html](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/new/directions/bulletins/welcome.html)); Victim Support, *New Rights for Victims of Crime in Europe*, Victim Support, London 2003 ([www.victimsupport.org.uk/about/publications/new\\_rights/New\\_rights.pdf](http://www.victimsupport.org.uk/about/publications/new_rights/New_rights.pdf)).

<sup>6</sup> I. Melup, "United Nations: Victims of Crime", *International Review of Victimology* 1991, No. 2, p. 29–59; see also, for example: [http://ec.europa.eu/civiljustice/comp\\_crime\\_victim/comp\\_crime\\_victim\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/civiljustice/comp_crime_victim/comp_crime_victim_en.htm).

of Europe<sup>7</sup>, and the European Union<sup>8</sup> have advocated improving services for victims. The EU, for example, has adopted general principles on the treatment of victims<sup>9</sup>, the *Framework decision on the standing of victims in criminal proceedings*<sup>10</sup>, and a directive on financial compensation<sup>11</sup>. The latter, adopted in 2004, enables all victims of crime and terrorism in the EU to receive compensation for the injuries and losses they have sustained, and sets a minimum standard for the award of such compensation.

Nevertheless, stark contrasts remain. International initiatives may serve a symbolic purpose, but their direct impact on individual nations is likely to be limited by principles of subsidiarity. Victim services invariably have resource implications, and governments may endorse global sentiments without committing the resources that would enable them to implement appropriate policies<sup>12</sup>. On the other hand, given adequate resources and political will, they may commit resources to specific and proven examples of policies implemented in other countries, a process known as policy transfer<sup>13</sup>. How far established policies do evidence good practice, and how appropriate it is to import them, are, however, contentious points.

This chapter uses the example of services that provide personal help shortly after the offence, known in the US as victim assistance programmes and in the UK as victim support services, to illustrate both the differences that exist and the difficulties of moving towards common policies. The chapter focuses most especially on victims of domestic burglary, and we begin by briefly summarising evidence of the effects of crime and, consequently, what help victims need or would appreciate.

## 2. THE IMPACT OF CRIME

While by no means all victims are affected by their experiences, many are<sup>14</sup>. Physical injuries and financial losses are among the most obvious affects, but they are not the only ones. Emotional reactions are also relatively common. Moreover, although victims of sexual offences and other interpersonal crimes are particularly affected, burglary victims also commonly report after-effects<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> [www.coe.int](http://www.coe.int).

<sup>8</sup> J. van Dijk, M. Groenhuijsen, "Benchmarking Victim Policies in the Framework of European Union Law", pp. 363–379, in: S. Walklate (ed.), *The Handbook of Victims and Victimology*, Willan Publishing, Cullompton 2007.

<sup>9</sup> [http://europa.eu.int/comm/justice\\_home/pdf/com1999-349-en.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/justice_home/pdf/com1999-349-en.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/smartapi/cgi/sga\\_doc?smartapi!celexapi!prod!CELEXnumdoc&lg=E-N&numdoc=32001F0220&model=guichett](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/smartapi/cgi/sga_doc?smartapi!celexapi!prod!CELEXnumdoc&lg=E-N&numdoc=32001F0220&model=guichett).

<sup>11</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/civiljustice/comp\\_crime\\_victim/comp\\_crime\\_victim\\_gen\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/civiljustice/comp_crime_victim/comp_crime_victim_gen_en.htm).

<sup>12</sup> J. Goodey, *Victims and Victimology: Research, Policy and Practice*, Longman, Harlow 2005; R.I. Mawby, S. Walklate, *Critical Victimology: International Perspectives*, SAGE, London 1994.

<sup>13</sup> T. Jones, T. Newburn, *Policy Transfer and Criminal Justice*, Open University Press, Maidenhead 2006.

<sup>14</sup> P. Dunn, "Matching Service Delivery to Need", p. 255–281, in: S. Walklate (ed.), *The Handbook of Victims and Victimology*, Willan Publishing, Cullompton 2007.

<sup>15</sup> M. Maguire, "Impact of Burglary upon Victims", *British Journal of Criminology* 1980, No. 20 (3), p. 261–275; M. Maguire, J. Kynch, *Public Perceptions and Victims' Experiences of Victim Support: Findings from the 1998 British Crime Survey*, Home Office, London 2000; R.I. Mawby, *Burglary*, Willan Press, Cullompton 2001; F.H. Norris, K. Kaniasty, M.P. Thompson, "The Psychological Consequences of Crime", p. 146–166, in: R.C. Davis, A.L. Lurigio, W.G. Skogan (eds.), *Victims of Crime*, SAGE, London 1997.

This was well illustrated in the research carried out in Poland by Zofia Ostrihanska and Dobrochna Wójcik in collaboration with teams from England, Germany, Hungary and the Czech Republic<sup>16</sup>. Indeed, while many victims in each of the countries surveyed described themselves as affected by their burglary, respondents from Poland were particularly likely to say this.

The financial impact of the crime was often severe, especially where people were unable to claim insurance. In many cases, the burglars systematically stripped the home, even taking used clothes. In such cases, the overall value of the burglary might have been less, but the relative loss to the victim and the consequential impact of the crime was more pronounced.

An additional matter that is not covered by insurance is the sentimental value of items stolen. About half of all burglary victims interviewed said they had lost items of sentimental value. For example:

“A gift for my wedding anniversary... a silver chainlet, a token of remembrance” (victim from Warsaw).

“It was my wedding ring. Such things like a TV set or a video can be bought but a new ring will never have the same value as the wedding ring” (victim from Lublin).

The examples of losses of sentimental value illustrate the fact that financial losses are only one part of burglary victims’ experiences. When we asked victims in different European countries what was the worst thing about the burglary, some focused on the loss itself, including sentimental losses. However, four other issues were commonly cited by respondents. First, there was concern that the burglar might return, combined with a feeling that the quality of their lives had been adversely affected:

“The lost security. I am afraid that it could happen again. I feel endangered, unsafe” (victim from Warsaw).

“I can’t sleep. I can’t live normally. I am alone now – my husband died six years ago. I can’t afford holidays. I have to stay at home. I’m afraid to visit my friends” (victim from Lublin).

Second, and following Maguire<sup>17</sup>, was concern over why *their* home had been targeted, with speculation that the burglar was someone whom they knew, someone who knew them. For example:

“I have lost confidence in my neighbours. There are reasons to suspect that they know something about the burglary... It is a horrible feeling that there is no one to rely on” (victim from Warsaw).

“I became suspicious, reserved towards people” (victim from Lublin).

Third, and most common, was a feeling of invasion of privacy, a feeling that their home and its contents had in some way been infected. In this respect, clearly, the saying that “an Englishman’s home is his castle” has wider international relevance, even in countries where home ownership was not at that time the norm:

“Not the material loss but the psychological aspects of it. Shock. The experience of a stranger entering my home. Disturbance of the privacy” (victim from Warsaw).

<sup>16</sup> R.I. Mawby, I. Görgényi, Z. Ostrihanska, S. Walklate, D. Wójcik, “Victims’ Needs and the Availability of Services: A Comparison of Burglary Victims in Poland, Hungary and England”, *International Criminal Justice Review* 1999, No. 9, p. 18–38.

<sup>17</sup> M. Maguire, *Impact of Burglary...*, op. cit.

“That a stranger was in my house” (victim from Lublin).

Finally, many victims expressed a feeling of injustice that they had worked hard for their possessions and that a thief had then stolen them without having to work for them. For example:

“Helplessness...feeling of injustice” (victim from Warsaw).

“You work your whole life to have something and the thief comes and takes it” (victim from Lublin).

While for many the impact of the crime wears off after a time, others are affected for months, even years. Thus victims of burglary tend to be more fearful of future home-based crimes, including burglary, than do other people<sup>18</sup>, while in one of the few longitudinal studies conducted<sup>19</sup>, differences were found between non-victims and victims of property and violent crime on several scales; most notably those measuring fear and avoidable behaviour.

The long-term impact is often much wider than this, affecting behaviour and lifestyle<sup>20</sup>. For example, given the relationship between victimisation, fear, and perceptions of one’s neighbourhood as a safe and desirable place to live, burglary may also result in people moving home<sup>21</sup>. One, admittedly small scale, study of elderly burglary victims living in supported accommodation even suggested that burglary may lead to an increased mortality rate, as well as pressurising some to enter residential care<sup>22</sup>.

Given this cross-national evidence, it is scarcely surprising that victim assistance programmes have emerged to provide support and reassurance to crime victims. However, these services are not available in many industrialised societies, and even where they are they often accord low priority to burglary victims.

### 3. VICTIM ASSISTANCE PROGRAMMES ACROSS THE WORLD

Victim assistance programmes provide help at the time of, or shortly after, the offence. They emerged in the 1970s in England and Wales and the USA and are now a common feature of many societies, especially in Europe<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> R.I. Mawby, “Alternative Measures of ‘Fear of Crime’: Results from Crime Audits in a Rural County of England”, *International Review of Victimology* 2007, No. 14 (4), p. 299–320.

<sup>19</sup> F.H. Norris, K. Kaniasty, M.P. Thompson, op, cit.

<sup>20</sup> A.E. Liska, A. Sanchirico, M.D. Reed, “Fear of Crime and Constrained Behaviour: Specifying and Estimating a Reciprocal Effects Model”, *Social Forces* 1988, No. 66, p. 827–837; P.W. Rountree, K.C. Land, “Burglary Victimization, Perceptions of Crime Risk, and routine activities: A Multilevel Analysis across Seattle Neighborhoods and Census Tracts”, *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 1996, No. 33 (2), p. 147–180.

<sup>21</sup> L. Dugan, “The Effect of Criminal Victimization on a Household’s Moving Decision”, *Criminology* 1999, No. 37 (4), p. 903–928.

<sup>22</sup> R. Donaldson, *Experiences of Older Burglary Victims*, Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate, findings 198, London 2003.

<sup>23</sup> M. Maguire, J. Shapland, “Provision for Victims in an International Context”, p. 211–228, in: R.C. Davis, A.J. Lurigio, W.G. Skogan (eds.), *Victims of Crime*, SAGE, London 1997; R.I. Mawby, *Criminal Justice...*, op. cit.; Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General, *Helping Victims and Witnesses: The Work of Victim Support*, House of Commons, London 2002 (report and other relevant documents available at [www.nao.gov.uk](http://www.nao.gov.uk)), appendix 5; B. Williams, H. Goodman, “The Role of the Voluntary Sector”, p. 240–255, in: S. Walklate (ed.), *The Handbook of Victims and Victimology*, Willan Publishing, Cullompton 2007.

In Europe, a network of victim assistance programmes, named the European Forum for Victim Services<sup>24</sup>, was founded in 1990. In 2007, it was rebranded as Victim Support Europe. Currently, twenty-two organisations in nineteen countries are affiliated to Victim Support Europe. These include six former communist societies: Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Serbia and Slovakia, but not Poland<sup>25</sup>. Victim Support Europe exists to: help develop effective services for victims of crime throughout Europe; promote fair and equal compensation for victims; uphold the rights of victims; and provide a forum for the development of best practice.

Even in countries where victim assistance programmes exist, however, there are considerable variations in emphasis between them. The key features of such services can be described under five broad headings:

- *The organizational structure of the agency*: that is, whether it lies within the public or private sector, and if the latter – whether it is an NGO or for-profit organisation.
- *Its relationship with other agencies*: notably the police, with consequential implications for how victims are contacted, or contact the agency (referrals).
- *How victims are contacted*: whether victims are contacted directly or the agency relies on self-referral; if the former, whether initial contact is in person or by letter or phone call.
- *The nature of the service provided*: whether this is personal support, professional counselling, practical help/advice, legal help, etc. We may consider also the extent to which an organization is a direct service provider rather than being a means of referral on to other specialized services.
- *The nature of the victim population targeted, or prioritised*: in terms of victim characteristics (e.g. age, gender, family structure) or offence type.

In many respects, Victim Support in England and Wales has been held up as a model of best practice. Although it depends on significant state funding, it is a voluntary organization relying on volunteers for its service delivery. The total of 2,000 or so paid staff in 2006 was dwarfed by 9,000 volunteers<sup>26</sup>. From its beginnings in the 1970s, it has worked closely with the police, from whom it receives most of its referrals<sup>27</sup>, contributing much to the successful establishment of the organisation<sup>28</sup>. This has also meant that it has been able to choose which victims of recorded crime to contact, traditionally doing this by unannounced home visits, termed “cold calling”. It has provided a range of help, particularly personal support, practical advice, and more specialist support with compensation claims.

Possibly the most distinctive early feature of Victim Support in England and Wales, however, was its focus upon burglary victims, which characterized the first

<sup>24</sup> [www.euvictimservices.org](http://www.euvictimservices.org).

<sup>25</sup> Poland does, however, have a scheme for financially compensating victims of violent crime. See: <http://www.ovc.gov/publications/infores/intdir2005/poland.html>.

<sup>26</sup> *Victim and Witness Review: Annual Report and Accounts 2006*, Victim Support, London 2007 (accessible at [www.victimsupport.org.uk/vs\\_england\\_wales/about\\_us/publications/annual\\_reports/accounts\\_2006.pdf](http://www.victimsupport.org.uk/vs_england_wales/about_us/publications/annual_reports/accounts_2006.pdf)).

<sup>27</sup> A small number are self-referrals. A Victim Supportline was established in 1998 to allow victims to directly telephone Victim Support (ibidem).

<sup>28</sup> R.I. Mawby, M. Gill, *Crime Victims: Needs, Services and the Voluntary Sector*, Tavistock, London 1987; P. Rock, *Helping Victims of Crime: The Home Office and the Rise of Victim Support in England and Wales*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1987.

scheme in Bristol<sup>29</sup>. The distinctiveness of victim services in the UK is well illustrated from responses to the international crime victims survey (ICVS). At the time of the third survey, as many as 21% of burglary victims interviewed in England and Wales received help; none in the USA sample, and 6% in the Netherlands<sup>30</sup>. The fourth survey similarly noted that overall agencies were twice as likely to offer support to victims of contact crimes compared with burglary, but that most support was offered in the UK<sup>31</sup>. Most recent data from the 2004/05 Survey confirm this pattern<sup>32</sup>. Only 4% of victims of burglary said they had any help from a specialist support agency, compared with 8% of victims of robbery and threats/assaults and 30% of victims of sexual offences. Only in the UK, the Netherlands and Belgium did more than 10% of burglary victims receive specialist help.

The contrast between Britain and Poland is marked. In Poland, specialist services for victims are minimal<sup>33</sup>. In Britain, specialist services are readily available and burglary victims have been prioritized by Victim Support since its inception. Given the extent to which burglary victims are affected by their crimes, this suggests considerable unmet need across the world. This point is underlined by the fifth ICVS. As many as 40% of burglary victims who received no help said they would have appreciated specialist support, only a few less than among victims of robbery (44%) and threats/assaults (44%). Levels of unmet need were measured by dividing the numbers who received no help but would have wanted it by the numbers who received help plus the numbers who received no help but would not have wanted it. This suggested that levels of unmet need were 62% for sexual offences, 80% for robbery, 81% for threats/assaults and 90% for burglary, leading the authors to conclude that “The gap between supply and demand of victim support is by far the largest for the group of burglary victims”<sup>34</sup>.

This corroborates our earlier research in England, Germany, Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic<sup>35</sup>. In contrast to the situation in England, very few victims of burglary in the other countries surveyed received any specialist help. In Poland, especially, comparatively more victims said that they had not been offered any help but would have found it useful, and very few said that they were offered help that they did

<sup>29</sup> M.J. Gay, C. Holton, M.S. Thomas, “Helping the Victims”, *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 1975, No. 19, p. 263–269; M. Maguire, C. Corbett, *The Effects of Crime and the Work of Victim Support Schemes*, Gower, Aldershot 1987; R.I. Mawby, M. Gill, op. cit.

<sup>30</sup> P. Mayhew, J.J.M. van Dijk, *Criminal Victimization in Eleven Industrialised Countries*, WODC, Amstelveen, the Netherlands 1997, p. 44–46.

<sup>31</sup> J. van Kesteren, P. Mayhew, P. Nieuwbeerta, *Criminal Victimization in Seventeen Industrialised Countries: Key Findings from the 2000 International Crime Victims Survey*, 2003 (<http://english.wodc.nl/onderzoeksdatabse/w00187-criminal-victimization-in-seventeen-industrialized-countries.aspx?c-p=45&cs=6796>).

<sup>32</sup> J. van Dijk, J. van Kesteren, P. Smit, *Criminal Victimization in International Perspective: Key Findings from the 2004–2005 ICVS and EU ICS*, Boom Legal Publishers, The Hague 2008 ([http://rechten.uvt.nl/icvs/pdffiles/ICVS2004\\_05.pdf](http://rechten.uvt.nl/icvs/pdffiles/ICVS2004_05.pdf)).

<sup>33</sup> In Poland, so few victims received specialist support in 2000 that the question was dropped from the 2004/2005 survey.

<sup>34</sup> J. van Dijk, J. van Kesteren, P. Smit, op. cit., p. 124.

<sup>35</sup> R.I. Mawby, I. Gorgenyi, Z. Ostrihanska, S. Walklate, D. Wójcik, op. cit.; R.I. Mawby, G. Kirchoff, “Coping with Crime: A Comparison of Victims’ Experiences in England and Germany”, p. 55–70, in: P. Francis, P. Davies (eds.), *Understanding Victimization: Themes and Perspectives*, University of Northumbria Press, Newcastle 1996; R.I. Mawby, E. Brabcova, I. Brabcova, “Victims’ Needs and Support for Victims in Prague”, *International Journal of the Sociology of Law* 2000, No. 28, p. 129–145.

not need. This illustrated the extent of unmet need in Poland, compared with England where most burglary victims received some offer of help. Subsequent research in one British city<sup>36</sup>, however, suggests that Victim Support was not an unqualified success.

#### 4. MEETING NEED: A CASE STUDY

Research was conducted with Plymouth Victim Support, an urban service covering a population of some 250,000, between 1998–2002. This involved focusing on the organization itself, its staff (including volunteers) and victims. The latter incorporated three phases. In Phase 1, records of all crimes reported to the police during a one-week period were analysed to see how Victim Support identified which crimes to respond to, and in which ways. This confirmed the emphasis placed on victims of household burglary, with these being routinely contacted, almost always by an unannounced visit. Victims of violent crime were also usually contacted, albeit in this case initial contact was most commonly by letter. In contrast, businesses that experienced burglary were rarely contacted. While this followed national policy, it did mean that owners or employees of small businesses, whose experiences might have been similar in many respects to household victims, were generally ignored.

On the basis of the findings from Phase 1, three samples of victims were contacted and interviewed in Phase 2: burglary victims, victims of violent crime (excluding victims of domestic violence) and victims of vehicle crime, an example taken because these were rarely contacted at all. In all 168 victims were interviewed, of whom 44 had been contacted by Victim Support by letter, 19 visited by a volunteer but not seen (usually because they were out) and 33 who were visited and seen by a volunteer. The remaining 72 had had no contact with Victim Support. Confirming the findings from Phase 1, burglary victims were most commonly contacted through a personal unannounced visit and victims of violence by letter, with those who were the victims of vehicle crime (theft of or from vehicles) rarely contacted at all. At least three issues arose from these interviews. First, we can consider the extent to which victims were affected, and their consequent need for support. Second, we can consider whether or not those most affected were contacted. Finally, we can consider whether the contact was useful or helpful.

Of those interviewed in Phase 2, 29% described themselves as “very much” affected by their experience, with 31% affected “quite a lot”. The most common reaction was anger, described by 81%, although 46% expressed shock, 39% said they were upset, 23% reported difficulty sleeping and 21% admitted being afraid. While a majority (60%) of those who had items stolen from their car were relatively unaffected, surprisingly more victims of vehicle theft (42%) than either violence (32%) or burglary (24%) described themselves as “very much” affected. The explanation for this unexpected finding clearly relates to the nature of the offence and the way it impacts upon different victims in different ways. Thus victims of vehicle crime were most likely to express anger, while victims of burglary and (especially) violence commonly described themselves as fearful, upset, or having difficulties with sleeping.

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<sup>36</sup> L. Simmonds, *Matching Provision to Need: The Example of Victim Support*, Unpublished PhD, University of Plymouth 2005.

However, while as many as 71% of those who described themselves as fearful or upset were contacted by Victim Support, victims who said they had been “very much” affected were only marginally more likely to have been contacted (55%) than those affected “little or not at all” (50%). This is partly due to the fact that victims of burglary were routinely contacted, even though a significant minority were relatively unaffected, partly because victims of vehicle crimes, even those who described themselves as upset, were highly unlikely to be contacted. As a result, Victim Support’s policy of concentrating on victims of burglary and violence meant that some victims who did not require help were contacted, while some victims who were severely affected slipped through the net.

This presupposes that Victim Support actually did provide a useful service. Earlier research suggests that victims tend to respond positively to Victim Support, but that evidence that they were actually helped is more problematic<sup>37</sup>. On the other hand, the British model is generally seen as more likely to match services to needs<sup>38</sup> than that in the US, where victims tend to want practical help and advice rather than the counselling services that are provided<sup>39</sup>. Earlier research, however, has tended to be vague about precisely what contact Victim Support had with victims. In our study, while 61% of those who were contacted in person by Victim Support said they felt better as a result, less (52%) of those contacted by letter did so, while only 28% of those who were out when the volunteer visited and received only a handwritten card said they felt better as a result. This is partly due to the different crimes they experienced, where those sent a letter tended to be victims of violence and those left a card burglary victims. But it also reflected the nature of the help offered. Thus while in each scenario a majority said they appreciated the personal support that contact symbolized, more practical support was almost exclusively available only to those contacted in person.

To further assess the nature of the contact between Victim Support and victims, Phase 3 of the research focused on 100 burglary victims who were contacted and seen by Victim Support volunteers. These were interviewed by telephone using CATI<sup>40</sup>. The majority of these victims (62%) felt better for having been visited by a volunteer:

“It made me feel considerably better to think there were people out there who were interested in our problem.”

And:

“Made me feel a lot better, like I say particularly because you think then that somebody does care out there, you’re not just being shoved off to the side somewhere, somebody has took the time to come out and visit you to see if you’re okay, that’s really nice.”

Asked to detail the services they needed and those they received, however, revealed a considerable mismatch between needs and services. From the 100 burglary victims interviewed:

- 33 said they needed personal support, but 73 said they received it.
- 39 said they needed advice on practical help, but 30 said they received it.

<sup>37</sup> P. Dunn, op. cit.; M. Maguire, C. Corbett, op. cit.

<sup>38</sup> M. Maguire, J. Kynch, op. cit.

<sup>39</sup> R.C. Davis, A.J. Lurigio, W.G. Skogan, “Services for Victims: A Market Research Study”, *International Review of Victimology* 1999, No. 6, p. 101–115.

<sup>40</sup> Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing.



- 18 said they needed compensation/insurance, and 18 said they received it.
- 22 said they needed someone to provide a link with the police, but 15 said they received it.
- 31 said they needed advice on other services that might be able to help them, but 38 said they received it.
- 40 said they needed crime prevention advice, and 42 said they received it.

Moreover, while in general those who expressed a need for a service were more likely to receive it than those who said they had no need, the differences were not great. Overwhelmingly, 82% of those who said they had been in need of personal support said they received this from Victim Support, but in other respects many, if not most, victims said they did not receive as much help as they would have liked. The dilemma for Victim Support, then, was that while it was widely appreciated by burglary victims, it was providing some help where none was needed and not providing help in some cases where it was needed.

Our case study illustrates the difficulties facing voluntary organizations helping crime victims. Given a scarcity of resources, agencies need to ration their services. Traditionally, Victim Support in England and Wales has done so by focusing on victims of certain crimes like burglary. However, victims of other crimes are also often badly affected by their experiences. As Victim Support has broadened its mandate to include some of these, it has changed the nature of the service offered. Nationally, there has been a shift away from unannounced visits, with contact by letter or telephone now the norm. This national policy was adopted in Plymouth subsequent to our research. However, as our research indicates, most practical support is provided through personal contact. The experience of Victim Support seems to be that only a small minority of victims who are contacted by letter or phone request further contact. While this may be interpreted as meaning that further help is unnecessary, we would argue that victims are reluctant to ask for further help, and may indeed be unaware of what help is available. As a result, the extent to which services are provided unnecessarily may have been reduced, but at the cost of failing to help many of those who do need support. The cost of spreading the net of victim support more widely is that it is also a much thinner net.

## 5. ASSISTING VICTIMS: LESSONS FROM BRITAIN

There is considerable evidence from across the world that many victims of crime are financially and emotionally affected and would benefit from the types of service that might be offered by victim assistance programmes: financial help; emotional support; advice about other agencies that might help; practical help and information about detection and prosecution. However, the nature of victim support varies between different countries. Their key features have been described under five headings. These are revisited here to assess the nature of Victim Support in England and Wales, recent changes, and the extent to which Britain provides a model of best practice:

- *The organizational structure of the agency.* Although its NGO status is often seen as a key feature of Victim Support in the UK, in reality most victim assistance across the world is provided outside the state sector. This is no bad thing, providing that services are well integrated with state agencies such as the police, and that

funding is sufficient. While in England and Wales the former condition is met (see below), increased government funding in no way allows Victim Support to provide an adequate and comprehensive service. The question of rationing therefore arises. This is even more pertinent in other countries, including many countries in transition, where state spending levels are even more restricted and where the ability and willingness of the public to act as volunteers may be less.

- *Its relationship with other agencies.* In England and Wales, Victim Support has traditionally had an extremely positive relationship with the police, allowing access to crime files and allowing it to control the decision on which victims to contact. This is the ideal scenario, but it is not without its problems (see below).
- *How victims are contacted.* In countries where relationships with the police are poor and programmes are forced to rely on self-referrals, demand for help is minimal. Most victims who would benefit from support are either unaware of the service, unaware of what precise support is on offer, or lack the resources to seek help. The original model in England and Wales, where victims' details were provided for Victim Support by the police and victims were visited unannounced, appears ideal in theory. However in practice, two problems arose. Firstly, it was very resource intensive, given the time taken on personal visits (and the transport costs). Secondly, this was intensified by the fact that victims were often not at home. From its beginnings, Victim Support attempted to control demand by rationing its services, prioritizing burglary victims<sup>41</sup>. However, internal and governmental pressure for Victim Support to provide a service for victims of interpersonal crimes (see below) has meant that it has had to restrict its services to other victims, with telephone/letter contact becoming a form of gatekeeping.
- *The nature of the service provided.* In comparison with victim assistance programmes in the US, Victim Support in the UK has traditionally emphasized its community-based approach, with volunteers providing non-professional interpersonal support, originally eulogized as "tea and sympathy". This changed in at least two respects. Firstly, an expansion into work with victims of more serious crimes meant that rather than routinely referring such people on to more specialist agencies, Victim Support offered more intensive support through specially trained volunteers, although it continues to perform a "referral" role in some cases. Secondly, more emphasis upon practical help and advice, including help with filling in compensation and insurance forms, crime reduction advice, etc., meant that Victim Support tailored its services to meet the needs expressed by victims, albeit, as our case study illustrates, a considerable mismatch continued to exist. However, a policy U-turn, with a reliance upon letters or phone calls for first contact, means that much of this more substantial practical support is in danger of being lost.
- *The nature of the victim population targeted, or prioritized.* As already noted, there has been a shift in England and Wales from the traditional emphasis upon burglary victims towards provision of a more sustained service for victims of serious interpersonal crimes. However, as our case study notes, confirming the findings of earlier research, many victims of allegedly less serious property crimes are also affected, and are now less likely than ever to receive any support.

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<sup>41</sup> M.J. Gay, C. Holton, M.S. Thomas, op. cit.

Many victims of crime are severely affected by their experiences, but by no means all are. Given the near-impossibility of predicting which victims require support, and what type of help is required, services are required to achieve an imperfect balance between providing support for victims who do not need it and excluding some victims who require help. In Britain, new managerialist emphasis on victims as consumers means that there has been a shift to extend the number of victims contact, but limit the nature of initial contact, with the assumption that victims who are in particular need will follow up the offer of further help. We have argued that this is an unrealistic portrayal of crime victims, which places the emphasis on their determination and persistence at the precise time when they are most vulnerable. But in a resource-constrained environment there is no magical solution. Despite worldwide acceptance that victims need help, victim policies are still the poor relations within both criminal justice and welfare systems. Support agencies across the world are therefore faced with the uncomfortable reality of having to choose which victims to focus their limited resources on. The ways in which they ration limited resources and their varying priorities are the subject of international comparative analysis, demonstrating the stark differences that exist, even in an increasingly globalised world.