

# Executive Summary

This report provides an overview of the current situation regarding services for victims of crime in Australia. It is based upon an extensive review of literature, and interviews conducted with representatives of service providers, law enforcement agencies, legal establishments and non-government organisations in each capital city of Australia.

The Australian Institute of Criminology has sought to produce a comprehensive outline of the structure of victims services in each Australian State and Territory, in order to give an accurate picture of the nature of the services existing nationally. This is believed to be one of the first such research projects undertaken on a national basis and it is hoped that this report will provide assistance to service providers, policy makers and practitioners throughout Australia. The report deals with its subject under six broad headings.

## Crime Victimization in Australia

It is not known exactly how many people in Australia have been victims of crime. According to recorded crime statistics, over one million people in Australia are victimised by crime each year. However, these figures do not include the friends and family of the victim, and the community in general, all of whom also suffer as a result of the crime. And it must be remembered that such statistics only represent the level of reported crime, so will always underestimate the true extent of crime in Australia.

In terms of the demographics of victimisation, males are more commonly victimised by crime than females, with the exception of the offences of sexual assault and abduction/ kidnapping. Victimization rates for offences against the person were generally highest for young people, particularly those aged between 15 and 19 years. Statistics have also shown that most victimisation occurs in the home, and much is among victims and offenders who know each other. Fear of crime is generally much higher than the measured level of crime.

At present, one of the best ways to determine the level of serious crime in a country is through crime victim surveys. In Australia such surveys as the Crime and Safety Surveys and the Women's Safety Survey are an attempt to overcome the

limitations of reported crime statistics. It is clear from these surveys in Australia, and from similar surveys conducted overseas, that victims report only about 40 per cent of crimes to the police (AIC 1998).

## The Impact of Crime on Victims

The task of defining who is a victim is a complex one. A distinction is often made between primary victims (those who suffer directly as a result of the crime) and secondary victims (which can include people who were witnesses to the crime, family members, friends, neighbours and whole communities—all of whom may also suffer trauma) (VCCAV 1994, p. 10).

The United Nations *Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power*, 1985, defined victims as:

*Persons who, individually or collectively, have suffered harm, including physical or mental injury, emotional suffering, economic loss or substantial impairment of their fundamental rights, through acts or omissions that are in violation of criminal laws operative within member states, including those laws proscribing criminal abuse of power... The term 'victim' also includes, where appropriate, the immediate family or dependants of the direct victim and persons who have suffered harm in intervening to assist victims in distress or to prevent victimisation.*

This section of the report details the physical, psychological and financial consequences of crime victimisation. Much of the literature has focused upon the impact of victimisation by violent crimes and neglected the impact of crimes against property. Research on the impact of crime, the needs of victims and their patterns of recovery has been dominated by studies of rape, sexual assault and child sexual abuse. According to Newburn (1993), it is only when other more common forms of victimisation (such as burglary and assault) are studied in similar detail, that a broader and more reliable picture will emerge of the impact of crime and the necessity of specific services (Newburn 1993, p. v).

Research findings in this report agreed with current literature that the impact of crime victimisation varies with the individual. It can be short- or long-lasting; some may find the psychological impact hardest; for others it may be the physical injuries. Research continues to prove that each victim will react differently according to their life experience.

# **Responses to Victims of Crime**

The literature on victimisation has given increased attention to the reactions of others as a determinant of coping by victims. Often victims seek help, or are offered help, from various individuals, ranging from friends and family to police and other professionals. This section of the report discusses the importance of the responses from others—including family and friends, victim support services, police and other criminal justice agencies, and the media—in the recovery of victims of crime.

## **The Development of Victim Support in Australia**

The majority of people in modern communities cannot imagine a time when formal criminal justice systems have not existed. However, the development of such systems is a relatively recent part of history.

This section of the report examines the development of the academic study of both victims and the victim support movement. It also examines the influence of concurrent developments such as the Women's Movement (feminism), the formulation of children's rights, victim compensation, legal and social reform and a perceived growth in crime are also examined.

The victim movement only began to emerge fully in Australia in the early 1980s, during a time of systematic and structural change. Many of the initial developments were the result of community action by victims of crime trying to improve the situation for others.

## **An Overview of Services in Australia**

A State-by-State examination of the development of services within Australia was undertaken, in order to frame the current service structure effectively, and each State's current structure is outlined. This examination of services looks at the coverage of services, including availability, access, types of service provided, funding arrangements, contact patterns, staffing levels and staff training. The coordination and integration of services within each jurisdiction is examined and limitations identified. Finally, service providers in each jurisdiction have identified

what they believe to be the main needs and requirements for the progression of successful service provision to victims of crime.

## **Responses and Policy Opportunities**

These responses have been formulated as a result of the findings in the literature and the current research study. It is hoped that the conclusions drawn in the latter part of this report will allow service providers and other stakeholders to address some of the remaining areas of difficulty faced by victims of crime.