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## Victim empowerment and support in an international perspective

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*Published in:*  
Putting victims on the agenda

*Publication date:*  
1996

[Link to publication in Tilburg University Research Portal](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*  
van Dijk, J. J. M. (1996). Victim empowerment and support in an international perspective. In L. Camerer, & J. Nel (Eds.), *Putting victims on the agenda: Proceedings of a national workshop on victim empowerment and support* (Vol. 7, pp. 18-30). (IDP Monograph series; Vol. 7). Institute for Defence Policy.

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# PUTTING VICTIMS ON THE AGENDA

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Proceedings of a national workshop  
on victim empowerment and support

Edited by  
Lala Camerer and Juan Nel

IDP MONOGRAPH  
SERIES

No. 7, NOVEMBER 1996

## VICTIM EMPOWERMENT AND SUPPORT IN AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

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### INTRODUCTION

*MODERN* governments are used to assessing their economy's performance in an international perspective, and to heed the advice of international bodies such as the IMF or the World Bank. In other areas, such as public health or housing, governments are also aware of their performance relative to that of other countries, and eager to learn from foreign experiences. In contrast, criminal policy – a policy which addresses one of the most pressing social problems of our times, namely that of public safety – is almost everywhere exclusively made in splendid isolation. Within the European Union, for instance, it is one of the areas where harmonisation and integration is most fiercely resisted.

Apparently, most societies choose to struggle with ordinary street crime, household burglaries and organised crime as if these are unique national problems which ask for unique responses in the framework of their own unique legal system. Governments react like families with a violence problem: they don't want to discuss their crime problems with the neighbours.

There are several good reasons to criticise the nationalistic traditions in criminal policy-making. As criminologists have always known, crime as a social phenomenon has similar structural causes across the world. International comparisons not only increase understanding, but also provide guidance to governments on how to address pressing crime problems. In the absence of an international frame of reference, the crime issue can easily be exploited by would-be experts. The analysis of the crime problem in an international perspective can have a sobering influence on the public debate. It is also blatantly inefficient to introduce new government policies to fight crime without first looking around abroad for what seems to have worked and what didn't. Far too often, governments reinvent criminal policy wheels which have been in operation elsewhere for many years, and have been found wanting. Public money is wasted.

In this lecture I will first try to put the South African crime victimisation problem in an international perspective by presenting some results of the International Crime Victimisation Survey.<sup>1</sup> In the second part I will reflect on the emerging victim policies of South Africa on the basis of the experiences elsewhere, particularly in The Netherlands.

## URBAN VICTIMISATION RATES

The survey was carried out in 1988 and 1991 among more than 80 000 respondents in 41 countries, including South Africa (Greater Pretoria). In 1996 the survey was again repeated in 30 countries, including South Africa (Johannesburg). The co-ordinator of both South African studies was Prof C M B Naudé of the University of South Africa (Unisa) in Pretoria.

Samples sizes varied between 1 000 in developing countries, and 2 000 in most other countries. In developing countries, the interviews were carried out face to face.<sup>2</sup>

To be made presentable, the data was aggregated into rates for six global regions: the new world (the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand); western Europe (13 countries); ex-communist Europe (eight countries); Asia (Japan, India, Indonesia, the Philippines); South America (Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica); and Africa (Tanzania, Uganda, Egypt, South Africa, Tunisia). Each country was given an equal statistical weight. Data from countries where the survey was carried out twice were averaged. To ensure greater comparability, all rates were calculated for respondents living in cities with more than 100 000 inhabitants.

We will present urban victimisation rates for four different types of crime, and the overall rates of the six global regions.<sup>3</sup>

*Table 1: Percentage of the public victimised by crime in the urban areas of six global regions; results of the International Crime Survey, 1988 and 1991*

	Total	Western Europe	New World	South America	Eastern Europe	Asia	Africa
<b>Total</b>	74 000	28 000	8 000	6 000	14 000	8 000	10 000
<b>Car crime</b>	29.0	33.6	43.3	24.8	26.5	11.8	24.2
<b>Burglary</b>	20.0	16.3	24.0	20.2	17.5	13.0	37.5
<b>Other theft</b>	29.3	27.1	26.0	32.7	27.7	24.6	42.1
<b>Contact crime</b>	19.3	15.3	19.8	31.4	16.9	10.8	33.4
<b>Any crime</b>	60.7	59.8	64.6	68.4	55.8	43.9	75.7

*Most societies choose to struggle with ordinary street crime, household burglaries and organised crime as if these are unique national problems*

Table 1 shows that the overall five-year victimisation rate is highest in Africa, where three out of every four citizens were victimised. The results for South Africa are similar to those of other African countries. Over five years, about 70 per cent of the urban population were victimised at least once. Rates for contact crimes (violent crimes, robbery etc) are also highest in Africa and South America. The distribution of car-related crimes (car theft, theft from cars and car vandalism) is strikingly different: the highest rates are in the new world countries and in western Europe. The level of the latter crimes is determined by the availability of suitable targets. The car theft victimisation rates of owners are, again, the highest in African cities.<sup>4</sup>

Multivariate analyses confirm that the levels of contact crimes and personal thefts are higher in nations where high proportions of people feel economically deprived.<sup>5</sup> By contrast, car-related crimes are more common in more affluent nations, where more households own one or more cars. South Africa seems, criminologically, to be in double jeopardy: there is a fairly large group of economically deprived adolescents, and suitable targets are widely available too.

Burglary rates are also the highest in Africa. They are also fairly high in the so-called new world countries. Previous analyses suggest that the higher burglary rates in the former new world countries are related to higher proportions of people living in detached or semi-detached houses. This explanation is consistent with the finding that burglars opt for semi-detached or detached houses as their preferred targets, because of easier access. The housing style in South Africa is similar to that in North America and Australia. This factor explains the high level of burglaries.

From these findings, the conclusion can be drawn that victimisations by crime are no longer rare events in most urban parts of the world. This is even true for victimisation by crimes of violence. A majority of all families in urban areas are struck at least once by crime in the course of five years. The experience of being criminally victimised has become a statistically normal feature of everyday life in an urban setting.

## **VICTIMS' SATISFACTION WITH THE POLICE**

### **Reporting to the police**

Victims of crime were asked whether they or anyone else had reported the incident to the police. In general, reporting percentages are highest for serious property offences such as car or motorcycle theft and burglary. Table 2 gives the reporting percentages for burglary with entry in the six global regions.

*Table 2: Percentages of burglaries reported to the police in six global regions; results of the International Crime Survey, 1988 and 1991*

	Total	Western Europe	New world	South America	Eastern Europe	Asia	Africa
<b>Total</b>	74 000	28 000	8 000	6 000	14 000	8 000	10 000
<b>yes</b>	65.0	81.1	87.6	54.1	51.4	42.4	54.4
<b>no</b>	28.2	18.0	12.3	38.8	35.0	45.3	34.8
<b>don't know</b>	6.8	0.9	0.1	7.1	13.5	12.0	10.7

Table 2 shows that reporting is much higher in new world nations and western Europe than elsewhere. The reporting rate is much lower in Africa, and this is also true for South Africa (approximately 55 per cent). The main reasons given for non-reporting were that the incident was not serious enough, or that the police could do nothing. Although few victims explicitly said so, a lack of insurance seems to be an important factor. In most African and South American countries, only between 10 and 20 per cent of the respondents are insured against household burglary. In most industrialised countries, the insurance rate is at least 70 per cent. In South Africa, roughly half of the households are insured.

### **Satisfaction with the police**

All respondents who had reported a crime to the police over the last five years were asked whether they were satisfied with the way the police had dealt with their last report. Results for the six regions are given in table 3.

*Table 3: Percentage of victims satisfied with the police after reporting any crime, in six global regions and reasons for dissatisfaction, results of the International Crime Survey, 1988, 1991*

	Total	Western Europe	New World	South America	Eastern Europe	Asia	Africa
Total	43 213	16 755	5 171	4 102	6 858	3 508	6 819
Satisfied with police							
yes	51.2	58.0	76.7	29.3	28.5	55.5	44.6
no	39.0	30.6	21.1	68.0	45.0	42.5	51.6
don't know	9.9	11.4	2.2	2.6	26.5	2.0	3.9
Reasons not satisfied							
didn't do enough	37.4	38.8	44.8	32.8	38.7	46.0	29.2
weren't interested	33.6	39.3	47.3	28.7	36.0	31.9	18.5
didn't find offender	28.4	18.2	16.4	18.8	53.1	36.7	32.3
didn't recover property	33.1	20.2	14.6	47.6	38.7	28.9	48.9
not kept informed	13.6	13.1	16.9	9.7	18.2	16.9	9.7
not treated correctly	8.1	6.9	11.5	6.5	9.4	5.3	10.7
slow to arrive	10.7	8.9	10.6	6.8	21.3	8.5	7.9
other reasons	7.6	12.0	19.0	3.6	4.3	2.6	3.9
don't know	1.7	4.4	0.2	1.1	0.5		0.1

Having reported an offence, satisfaction with the police was lowest in South America and Africa. In South Africa, too, more than half of all victims express dissatisfaction over their treatment by the police. There is a weak association between reporting rates, as presented in table 2, and levels of satisfaction. In countries where victim satisfaction is low, fewer victims report crimes to the police.

Victims who were not satisfied were asked to give their main reasons (more reasons per respondent could be given). The reasons given for dissatisfaction show interesting differences. In South America and Africa, where satisfaction was low, the single most important reason is that the police didn't recover the property. In eastern Europe, many reporting victims also complained that the police did not find the offender, or were slow to arrive. The reasons for the dissatisfaction of African, South American

and East European victims indicate that for them, reporting is often motivated by the wish to reclaim stolen property. In more affluent nations, this financial consideration seems less pertinent. The findings on insurance coverage, presented above, corroborate this interpretation. In the developing countries, great economic interests are at stake for victims of property crimes in the criminal investigations by the police, because losses are not covered by insurance.

*Having reported an offence, satisfaction with the police was lowest in South America and Africa*

### Need for victim support

In the surveys, victims were specifically asked whether they had received support from a specialised agency. In most countries, few victims had received such help. Of those who had reported their last victimisation to the police 2,1 per cent had received help. Of all victims of contact crimes and burglary, 3,8 per cent had been given such help. The highest pick-up rates were in the United States (10), England/Scotland (10), and New Zealand (10). In all other countries, lower percentages of such victims had been clients of victim support schemes. In South Africa, an estimated 4 per cent had received specialised help.

Victims who had not received help from a specialised agency were asked whether they would have appreciated help in getting information, or practical or emotional support. Table 4 shows that on average 40 per cent of the victims would have welcomed more help than they actually got.

*Table 4: Percentage of victims who said the services of a specialised agency would have been useful for them in six global regions; results from the International Crime Survey, 1988, 1991*

	Total	Western Europe	New world	South America	Eastern Europe	Asia	Africa
Total	42 140	16 755	5 171	4 102	6 576	3 508	6 027
no	40.0	56.8	74.1	31.4	17.9	33.7	15.3
yes	42.9	31.9	22.4	68.6	34.0	55.4	69.0
don't know	17.2	11.4	3.5		48.1	11.0	15.7



In total, four out of 10 victims indicated an unmet need of help. In general, there were less victims with unmet needs in countries with extended welfare provisions and/or more specialised victim support, such as The Netherlands (12 per cent), Sweden (15 per cent), Canada (23 per cent), New Zealand (23 per cent), Australia (24 per cent) and England/Wales (24 per cent).

Levels of demand were clearly highest in Africa and South America. Here, more than half of the victims would have welcomed help. South Africa is no exception. Almost half of the victims would have appreciated specialised support.

Although the help was not explicitly associated with financial support, it is clearly welcomed most in countries where victims have no insurance or other recourse for their financial losses.

### **In conclusion**

Over a five-year period, most inhabitants of big cities are victimised by crime at least once. The chances of being victimised by robbery or assault are the highest in the urban areas of South America and (sub-Saharan) Africa. This type of violent crime is related to problems of economic hardship among the young. In affluent nations, car-related crimes tend to be more prevalent. Household burglaries are prevalent if most families live in detached houses. The cities of South Africa combine criminogenic risk factors of the developing nations (economic strain) with those of North America and Australia (high car ownership and a high proportion of detached houses). Criminal victimisation in South Africa is high, for structural reasons. There are good reasons for the government of South Africa to make the prevention and control of crime one of its priorities, and to try to address the causes.

Most victims in African countries, including South Africa, tend to be dissatisfied with the treatment given by the police. In relation to this, they are less likely to report crimes to the police. This lack of confidence in the police is an impediment to effective crime prevention and control. According to the survey, few victims in South Africa receive specialised help. Half of all victims, however, would have welcomed it. Clearly, there are many unmet needs among the many victims of crime. A better deal for crime victims seems an obvious requirement of a national crime prevention strategy.

### **TYPES OF VICTIM SUPPORT**

In the provision of services for crime victims, two general models can be discerned. Such services can firstly be delivered as special forms of welfare or charity. In this model the provision is governed by the ideology of care. Victim services can also be part of the administration of criminal justice. In the latter case, the provision is governed by the ideology of human rights or a just society. In an international perspective,

several practical examples of both models are available, and will shortly be discussed. The ideal victim policy is a mixture of both models. In addition, I would like to argue for the importance of a third model or point of view: victim policies as an integral part of crime prevention.

### **The care model**

Prime examples of the care model are state compensation schemes – especially those which apply generous standards in determining awards. Historically, state compensation schemes belong to the oldest provisions for crime victims. In many western countries, such schemes were introduced between 1965 and 1980.

In most cases the existing schemes fall short of being a fully satisfactory welfare provision for crime victims. Only some victims are eligible, and the actual delivery tends to be time-consuming and burdensome for the claimants. Victims who are poor will of course welcome the money received. In developing nations where few people are fully covered by insurance for medical bills, state compensation is an important provision. Yet state compensation should not be seen as a cure for all. In the Netherlands, many victims who received compensation still expressed dissatisfaction with the way in which the police or courts dealt with their cases. The receipt of a sum of money had not satisfied their demands.

The awarding of state compensation does not satisfy the need of victims that justice be done. Many victims would in fact rather receive recognition by the judge that they were wronged by the offender – and a verdict that he must therefore pay some sort of restitution – than to receive a larger sum from the state through a bureaucratic procedure outside the court.

An important second category of care-oriented services are the rape crisis centres, shelter homes for victims of spouse abuse, and finally, general victim support schemes. In most western countries these kinds of services were originally exclusively offered to female victims. In the 1980s similar services started to become available for all victims of all types of crime (eg burglaries, assaults and robberies). In the United Kingdom and The Netherlands, all victims of more or less

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serious crimes are now routinely contacted by trained volunteers, and offered immediate practical and moral support. The police are instructed to ask all relevant victims permission to give their names and addresses to the local support schemes. This approach seems to work well. For instance, in 1995 volunteers in The Netherlands contacted more than 110 000 crime victims, and offered help to two thirds of them during personal visits. The help given is greatly appreciated by the victims.

If the provision of voluntary help is feasible, much is to be said in favour of it. For crime victims, help offered by volunteers can help to restore trust in fellow citizens. Victim assistance agencies which employ professional counsellors tend to reach out less, and operate more bureaucratically. Voluntary schemes are also less of a financial burden to the state, which must only finance co-ordination and overheads.

In recent years victim visitors in both the United Kingdom and The Netherlands are increasingly involved in helping victims to prepare compensation settlements or court orders. Their support can no longer be seen as purely care-oriented, but has become justice-oriented as well.

### **The criminal justice model**

Examples of provisions for crime victims within the criminal justice system are: considerate reception by the police, referral to support agencies, provision of advice on preventive measures, the right to be notified of the outcome of the investigation or of ensuing criminal proceedings, the right to inform the court of the impact of the victimisation, and the right to receive restitution from the offender. In many parts of the United States, victims also have the right to express an opinion on the most appropriate punishment for the offender.

In most west European countries, victims are not allowed to express opinions on the punishment. Instead, new procedures have been put in place to help the victim to secure restitution from the offender. In The Netherlands, for instance, a new law went into action in 1995 which will improve victims' chances of receiving restitution. Victims have the right to present claims for civil damages to the court, as is the case in most continental European countries.

Under the new law, the criminal tribunal can subsequently sentence the offender to the payment of restitution as part of the criminal verdict. If such an order is given, it is the duty of the prosecutors to collect the money. Jointly with the new law, the minister of justice issued new detailed guidelines to the police and prosecutors on the required treatment of victims.

Both the police and prosecutors are instructed to make a maximum effort to arrange restitution by the suspect/offender as early in the proceedings as possible. If compensation is paid, the prosecutor is supposed to consider waiving the prosecution.

26 The new guidelines will be a stimulus for offender–victim settlements.

### **The prevention model**

The implementation of justice-oriented provisions for crime victims is sometimes hampered by a lack of motivation on the part of the relevant professions. Helping victims is often not seen as part of the core business of the police or the prosecutor. Although the provision of these services is highly desirable as an end in itself, it is also important to emphasise their importance for the prevention and control of crime. For this purpose I want to propose a third model of victim services: victim services as part of crime prevention.

There are at least four reasons why a better deal for crime victims is important for the fight against crime. The first is that most crimes are brought to the attention of the police by victims or their relatives. Also, the chance to arrest the offender and get a conviction are largely dependent on the information supplied by the victim. If many victims are, as is clearly the case in South Africa, doubtful whether reporting to the police will do them any good, the effectiveness of the police is severely undermined. For more effective criminal investigations, the co-operation of the victims is essential. For this reason, the proportion of satisfied victims ought to be used as a performance measure for criminal investigation departments.

Even more important for the reduction of crime is the role of potential and actual victims in crime prevention. Criminality can be prevented by addressing the economic hardship of groups at risk of becoming offenders, and by helping to rehabilitate actual offenders after their release from prison. Offender-oriented prevention, although fraught with difficulties, remains a must. Since the level of crime is, as discussed above, partly determined by the availability of suitable targets, potential and actual victims can also make an important contribution to the prevention of crime by improving their self-protection. If potential victims offer fewer opportunities for crime, fewer opportunistic crimes will be committed. There is growing evidence that only some of the crimes prevented by better protection are displaced to other targets. Victim-oriented prevention works.<sup>6</sup>

In principle, all citizens living in big cities are potential victims. It is therefore justifiable to provide all school children with

*There are at least four reasons why a better deal for crime victims is important for the fight against crime*

basic information on how to protect themselves against various forms of crime. Girls might be offered self-defence training as part of the curriculum to boost their self-confidence and decrease their risks. These are examples of primary victim-oriented crime prevention.<sup>7</sup>

Groups who are most at risk can be given special courses (secondary prevention). Employees of banks, for instance are given special training sessions in The Netherlands to prepare them for the experience of being the target of an armed robbery. Evaluation studies indicate many positive effects of such 'inoculation': trained employees react more sensibly during the incident, provide better information to the police, and suffer less from post-traumatic stress.

In recent years, criminologists have focused their attention on the phenomenon of repeat victimisation.<sup>8</sup> Persons who have been victimised once run a relatively high risk of being victimised again. Those who have been victimised twice or more are even more at risk. This empirical fact of life is tragic for the persons involved, but also offers new opportunities for preventing crime (tertiary victim-oriented prevention).

Victims who report their victimisation to the police are an obvious target group for tailor-made crime prevention advice. They are often highly motivated to heed any serious advice given, and their ensuing action is likely to actually make a difference for offenders preying on them.

In the United Kingdom some police forces have introduced special programmes to prevent repeat victimisation by burglary. In the case of repeated victimisation, burglar alarms are installed which are connected to the detectives' room. The first results indicate that this policy not only prevented repeat burglaries, but also helped to increase the clearance rate of burglaries.

Finally, I would like to draw attention to the outcome of an evaluation of the effects of a better treatment of victims by the police, the prosecutors and the courts. In The Netherlands the new policies concerning victims discussed earlier were introduced experimentally in two court districts in 1993/1994.

The attitudes of victims who were treated in accordance with the new law were compared to those of a control group.<sup>9</sup> The results show that the first group of victims have a more positive attitude towards the police and the system in general. More interestingly, they are also more inclined to feel an obligation to respect the law, and are less likely to commit crimes themselves. This result confirms the hypothesis that citizens are very sensitive to the procedural justice rendered to them by the police and the judicial authorities. By treating victims better, the criminal justice system contributes to the maintenance of respect for the law and thereby to the prevention of crime. Since almost all citizens are victimised at least once during their lifetime, the impact of adequate victim policies on respect for the law and its institutions cannot be overstated.

justice system can pursue. It is also a cornerstone of effective crime prevention.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

In an international perspective, the rate of criminal victimisation in South Africa is fairly high, due to the presence of a combination of different risk factors. The level of crime is driven up by the presence of economically deprived youngsters, as in many other developing nations, and at the same time by the availability of suitable targets for crime, as in many other affluent nations. The high level of crime seems to have structural causes which must be addressed by a comprehensive crime policy.

In South Africa, many crime victims who report their victimisation to the police are dissatisfied with their treatment. Many victims would like to receive some sort of specialised help, but do not get it. The problems of crime victims are similar to those found elsewhere in Africa.

The victim policies that are needed to remedy this situation can be guided by either or both of the two prevailing victim support ideologies: the care ideology, and the criminal justice ideology. Many of the poorer victims of violence would greatly benefit from a state compensation scheme. It seems also essential to develop a nationwide network of support agencies for all victims, possibly with the involvement of voluntary visitors.

Experience in the United States and Europe suggests that a purely care-oriented approach will not suffice. The victim's demand that justice be done needs to be gratified too, and this can only be done by the criminal justice system itself. It seems advisable to draft a comprehensive bill of rights for crime victims in South Africa which covers changes in the law, changes in practical procedures, and new codes of conduct for the professions involved.

As argued, victim policies do not only contribute to the making of a more caring and just society; such policies can also help to prevent and control crime.

Potential and actual crime victims can support the police by improving their self-protection against crime in a responsible

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way. Repeat victims can also help the police to arrest offenders, eg by having burglar alarms installed.

By treating victims more fairly, the criminal justice system can maintain or restore the victim's respect for the law. In so doing, a downward spiral of criminal violence and resentment among victims can be prevented. In this perspective, helping crime victims is a task for welfare agencies and volunteers, in close co-operation with the police, the prosecutors and the courts. A victim policy clearly calls for a multi-agency approach.

## Endnotes

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