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The CRIME PREVENTION REVIEW is a professional forum for the Criminal Justice System in California designed to provide discussion of varied concepts and issues of crime prevention and useful resources for the practitioner in the field.

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crime prevention review

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Victim Services and the Police

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INTRODUCTION

The plight of victims of crime is a growing concern of politicians, academicians and criminal justice practitioners. This increasing concern is translated into a number of significant public policy issues regarding the interaction between the victims of crime and the personnel of the criminal justice system. As awareness of the needs and perceptions of victims grows and as the role of victims in the criminal justice process is more clearly understood, questions are asked about the most appropriate and effective ways to meet the needs of victims, about how to improve "consumer (victim) satisfaction" with the criminal justice process and about how to improve victim cooperation with crime control programs. One important issue for society is the nature of the relationship between police and victims: precisely what role should police officers play in providing services to victims of crime? In at least one sense the issue of the relationship between police officer and crime victim is part of the larger, continuing debate about the nature of the police function. Traditional concepts of policing are currently undergoing significant changes. Thus, as demands for victim services increase, it is useful both to review the various dimensions of the relation-

ship between police officer and crime victim and to take into consideration the many factors which affect the capacity of police departments to improve police-victim interaction and to provide services to victims. Above all, improving the relationship between victims and police should be seen as beneficial both on humanitarian grounds and as a positive and practical means to achieve effective crime control.

Consumer satisfaction with police services is a crucial aspect of successful law enforcement and crime prevention. Victim and witnesses [1] form impressions of the police officer based on an array of factors which may or may not be directly related to efficient law enforcement. Thus, victim evaluation of officer performance may be based as much on factors such as demeanor, attitude, empathy and stereotypical ideas of what an officer "should" do as it is on technically correct and effective procedures. In this sense, the officer/victim relationship resembles doctor/patient and lawyer/client relationships. Furthermore, satisfied and cooperative victims, patients and clients are essential to the success of the officer, doctor or lawyer. A crime victim provides information that is the basis for investigation and prosecution. It is in this sense that consumer satisfaction with police performance means more than simply better community support. Victim satisfaction with the police has a direct impact on the success of crime control programs.

One important factor affecting police-victim interaction is that officers and victims have different perceptions, priorities and needs during the post-victimization period. Victims are in an *extraordinary* situation: feelings of rage, confusion and fear may influence behavior. In contrast, police officers are trained to treat crisis as *routine*. Thus, the victim's needs and concerns may be very diffuse (medical treatment, reassurance, restitution, etc.) while the officer's concern is specific (apprehension). Reconciling this difference will strengthen the police-victim interaction and will benefit both victim and officer. The key questions for police-based victim service programs concern the extent and nature of such services and how to provide these services without impairment of the law enforcement function.

Victim Perception of Police Performance

A number of surveys indicate that there are specific components of police performance which if reformulated might enhance victim satisfaction and cooperation with police. These findings indicate a generally positive perception of police performance by victims who expressed considerable commendations as well as certain criticisms. The following comments are based on studies done in Sacramento, California by University of California at Davis researchers; in Fremont, California by Stanford University researchers; in Chicago, Illinois by the Chicago Police Department; and nationally by the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration.[2]

[1] Many of these remarks apply to witnesses as well as to victims. On victims generally see, Israel Drapkin and Emilio Viano, *Victimology* (Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath, 1974); William F. McDonald, ed., *Criminal Justice and the Victim* (Beverly Hills, Cal.: Sage Publications, Inc., 1976); and George Nicholson, Thomas W. Condit and Stuart Greenbaum, eds., *Forgotten Victims: An Advocate's Anthology* (Sacramento, Cal.: California District Attorney's Association, 1977.)

[2] Fremont Police Department, *Proposal for a Victims/Witnesses Project* submitted to The Police Foundation, Washington, D. C., 1974; Sacramento Police Department, *Improving Services to Crime Victims: A Report and a Proposal* submitted to The Police Foundation, Washington, D. C., 1974; James M. Rochford, "Determining Police Effectiveness" in *F.B.I. Bulletin* (October, 1974); and also the series of victimization surveys from the National Criminal Justice Information and Statistics Services Reports, Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, U. S. Department of Justice.

When victims indicated dissatisfaction with police performance, the complaints usually fell in one of the following areas:

1. *Police Attitude.* One complaint by victims was about apparent officer indifference, lack of empathy or concern, officiousness, cynicism or other qualities which reflect poor interpersonal relations.

2. *Technical Competence.* Victim dissatisfaction with police case handling included complaints that not enough was apparently being done: clues were missed, ignored or ruined or officers failed to make personal site visits or were late in responding to a call. Victims often had their own ideas about what activities constituted proper policework. These opinions are undoubtedly conditioned to some extent by television and other media characterizations of policework.

3. *Providing Information.* Victims generally desired to be kept informed on the progress of the investigation and prosecution connected with their victimization. An important problem is that the criminal justice system is very often either slow in providing such feedback to victims or is not even set up to do so. The result is frequently a lack of understanding by victims of exactly what is done by police and other agencies. Thus, lack of information can also be a basis for victim dissatisfaction.

Increasing recognition of problems such as those outlined above by police administrators has led to a number of programs designed to improve police-victim interactions and victim satisfaction.[3] The scope of such programs varies from improved training for officers to creation of special units for victims and even to police officers providing direct victim services. Trends toward expansion of police services to victims also reflect changing concepts about the nature of the police function in American society.

The Police Function and Police-Victim Relations

The traditional foci of law enforcement have been the criminal act and the offender—not the victim. As Jerry V. Wilson, former Chief of the Metropolitan Police Department, Washington, D. C. has noted:

> First of all, the primary concern of the victim usually is that the crime has imposed a burden of physical and psychological pain and of financial loss. But that primary concern of the victim is of very low priority to the criminal justice system.[4]

Standard law enforcement texts include only minimal information on victims and usually stress the victim's instrumental role as complainant or witness—that is, the victim's role as a participant in the investigative and prosecution process. Attention to the victim in terms of services performed by police officers has traditionally been confined to such matters as first aid and short-run medical or other services.[5]

Traditional concepts of policing stress the importance of the crime con-

[3] For a discussion of victim services from the perspective of a probation department see James Rowland, "Victim Services in Fresno County," *Crime Prevention Review*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (April, 1976). A survey of recent victim services programs appears in Mary E. Baluss, *Integrated Services for Victims of Crime: A County-Based Approach* (Washington, D. C.: National Association of Counties Research Foundation, 1975) and Anne Newton, "Aid to the Victim: Victim Aid Programs", *Crime and Delinquency Literature*, Vol. 8 (December, 1976).

[4] Jerry V. Wilson, "Providing for the Victims of Crime," *The Washington Post* (February 7, 1975).

[5] See, for example, O. W. Wilson, *Police Administration* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1963); G. D. Eastman, ed., *Municipal Police Administration* (Washington, D. C.: International City Management Association, 1971); and *Police Reference Notebook* (Gaithersburg, Md.: International Association of Chiefs of Police, Inc., 1975).

trol function. However, increasingly the role of police is conceived of as far more complex and diffuse than simply the enforcement of the criminal law. Going well beyond the crime-fighting duties generally associated with policing, police in fact perform a wide range of services which may not directly relate to crime. The discrepancy between the image of policing and the actual nature of policework can lead to confusion about the police function for both police officers and the public. Analyses of tasks police perform and of the calls for police assistance have recently clarified this issue by describing what the police actually do and what the public expects them to do.[6] Studies indicate that police may in fact spend very little—perhaps only 10 percent—of their time in activities directly related to enforcing the criminal law. Much of policework actually involves the maintenance of order and providing a variety of social services which may or may not be crime-related; that is, police spend a large percentage of time helping people who need information, providing services to people in need of assistance, or settling quarrels or family disputes.

The American Bar Association has catalogued police responsibilities as follows:[7]

> (i) to identify criminal offenders and criminal activity and, where appropriate, to apprehend offenders and participate in subsequent court proceedings;
> (ii) to reduce the opportunities for the commission of some crimes through preventive patrol and other measures;
> (iii) to aid individuals who are in danger of physical harm;
> (iv) to protect constitutional guarantees;
> (v) to facilitate the movement of people and vehicles;
> (vi) to assist those who cannot care for themselves;
> (vii) to resolve conflict;
> (viii) to identify problems that are potentially serious law enforcement or governmental problems;
> (ix) to create and maintain a feeling of security in the community;
> (x) to promote and preserve civil order; and
> (xi) to provide other services on an emergency basis.

Only a small portion of these responsibilities are directly related to the traditional crime control function. In spite of evidence of the service nature of policing, police officers and administrators may still dislike thinking of themselves as "social workers" and choose to continue to emphasize the crime-fighting role.[8]

In the present period of innovation and change in the criminal justice system, a number of police planners and administrators have recognized the service nature of policing.[9] Acceptance of the "full service model" of policing which incorporates a wide array of crime- and non-crime-related activi-

[6] See James Q. Wilson, *Varieties of Police Behavior: The Management of Law and Order in Eight Communities* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968); E. Cumming, I. Cumming and L. Edell, "Policeman as Philosopher, Guide and Friend," *Social Problems,* 12 (Winter, 1965); A. J. Reiss, Jr., *The Police and the Public* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971); Egon Bittner, *The Functions of the Police in Modern Society,* Crime and Delinquency Issues (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, National Institute of Mental Health); and Bernard L. Garmire, "The Police Role in an Urban Society", *The Police and the Community,* Robert Steadman, ed., (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972.)

[7] American Bar Association Project on Standards for Criminal Justice, *The Urban Police Function,* (1974), p. 3.

[8] J. G. Rubin, "Police Identity and the Police Role," *The Police and the Community,* Robert Steadman, ed.

[9] See, for example, J. Q. Wilson, *Varieties of Police Behavior;* Georgette Bennett-Sandler and Ellen Mintz, "Police Organizations: Their Changing Internal and External Relationships," *Journal of Police Science and Administration,* Vol. 2, No. 4 (1974); and Georgette Bennett-Sandler, "From Police Force to Police Service: New Perspectives on Management," paper presented at American Society for Public Administration meeting, Chicago, Illinois, 1975.

ties has led to a number of changes in the training of officers, in the administration of police organizations and in a reordering of official police priorities. Thus, in terms of training, performance, promotion and so forth, the police officer comes to understand policework in more realistic terms as service-based rather than as primarily a battle between "cops and robbers." For a department which has accepted to some degree this service model of policing, the nature and extent of police services to victims is an important policy issue. Currently, policing is characterized by the juxtaposition—often within the same department—of both the traditional, crime-fighting concept of policework and the evolving full-service concept. This juxtaposition can produce conflict about the definition of the "real" nature of policing, and it remains unclear which concept will prevail or whether a synthesis is possible. However, it is clear that police departments are experimenting with a variety of forms and functions including providing direct services to victims.

Police-Victim Estrangement and Victim Services

A police department performing or considering a program of victim services must solve certain problems which have in the past been the source of police-victim estrangement. Here the issue of consumer satisfaction with police performance is of key importance. Traditionally police officers have not received satisfactory training about the needs of victims and how to meet those needs; furthermore, officers have generally found that there are few if any professional rewards or incentives for providing assistance to victims. Thus, during the post-victimization period the officer's concern is centered on getting information for the official report thereby laying the groundwork for a successful investigation, apprehension and prosecution. Given this set of priorities by police officers it is easy for the officer to perceive the victim *as a problem* rather than *as a person with problems.* The effect of this attitude is not lost on the victim.

Another cause of police-victim estrangement is related to the officer's perception of the victim—or even the public as a whole—as uncooperative. Thus, non-reporting or long delays in reporting crimes may be perceived as citizen indifference or hostility to police officers and *their* problems. This attitude persists although there is evidence that citizens have generally positive attitudes toward police and that even in high-crime areas there is a substantial reservoir of citizen support for police.[10]

A more complex cause of estrangement is described by James Q. Wilson as a once-burned-twice-shy lesson that is learned by police officers on the job. Wilson notes that when police arrive on the scene, victims, witnesses and suspects are in a very agitated state, but that:

> . . . the police have seen it all before and they have come to distrust victim accounts (to say nothing of suspect explanations) of what happened. Instead of offering sympathy and immediately taking the victim's side, the police may seem cool, suspicious, or disinterested because they have learned the "victims" often turn out not to have been victimized at all. . . . A genuine victim, of course, is dismayed by the routine manner in which his crisis is being attended to and irritated because the police do not instantly and fully accept his version of what happened.[11]

[10] James Q. Wilson, "The Police in the Ghetto", *The Police and the Community,* Robert Steadman, ed.
[11] James Q. Wilson, *Varieties of Police Behavior: The Management of Law and Order in Eight Communities* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968); p. 25.

In addition, the officer who first arrives on the scene is often there only to take down information and pass it on to investigators; thus, the first officer the victim comes in contact with may have very little long-term involvement with the case and, therefore, may display what is apparently little concern for the victim.

There are other factors which may contribute to poor police-victim relations. Jerome H. Skolnick has noted that the awareness of danger in his work is a major component of the police officer's "working personality." [12] This awareness can contribute to a coldness or an impersonal manner when dealing with citizens. This factor and other aspects of policework also enhances a certain occupational solidarity among police which can act to isolate police from the general community.

Past problems in police-victim relations are not sufficient cause for exclusion of police from a future role as victim service providers. However, in the absence of a strong departmental commitment to reorder officer priorities to the benefit of the victim, "consumer dissatisfaction" with certain aspects of police performance is likely to continue. It is crucial to the success of police-victim services programs that causes and effects of police-victim estrangement be understood and that good police-victim relations be maintained.

Police-Victim Services: Programs and Issues

A number of police departments around the country have initiated victim-oriented programs. The victim services program in Sacramento, California exemplifies the emerging concern for victims by police departments. With support from the Police Foundation, the Sacramento Police Department has implemented a comprehensive program centered around a designated police sergeant serving as "victim advocate." The victim advocate provides a central focus and leadership for the program. Specialized in-service training for patrol officers and for communications room personnel stresses the distinctive problems and needs of victims. The program also includes feedback to victims about the progress of their cases through the criminal justice system. In addition the patrol officer's role has been shifted from "report taker" to "preliminary investigator" in order to generate both the impression and the reality of officer involvement and concern for the victim. In Indiana, the Indianapolis Police Department Victim Assistance Program is housed in the chaplain's office. Police officers and civilian police employees provide impact counseling, needs assessment and referral assistance to victims. In addition the program helps the victim deal with the criminal justice system. The Victim Assistance Program of the Rochester Police Department in Rochester, New York, provides similar services to victims, witnesses and their families. In addition, transportation, interpreting services, assistance in filing for compensation as well as aid in securing the return of property are activities of the Rochester program. There are other programs around the country with a variety of services and organizational forms. There is, of course, no "one best way" for a police department

[12] Jerome Skolnick, *Justice Without Trial: Law Enforcement in Democratic Society* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1966). See also, Jack Goldsmith and Sharon S. Goldsmith, eds., *The Police Community: Dimensions of an Occupational Subculture* (Pacific Palisades, Cal.: Palisades Publishers, 1974).

to be involved in victim services. Each community must develop an organizational form based on its needs, capabilities and resources.

Two critical factors that will in large part determine the shape and the success of a victim services program in a police department are (1) commitment of the leadership of the department and (2) the local inter-agency configuration:

Leadership: Above all a victim services program requires a clear demonstration of commitment to the program goals by personnel at the highest levels of the department. Unless the chief believes in the program it can result in a superficial public relations exercise. Without the necessary organizational and political commitment, such a program is likely to be poorly staffed, under-financed and not taken seriously by the patrol officers who are the key to its success. Commitment to a strong program means not only sufficient staff and funds but also the appropriate training for all officers.

Cooperation: An array of agencies and groups in the public and private sectors provide important services to victims of crime in many communities. In communities with well-developed social service systems, it may be that the most appropriate role for police is the very vital one of referral agent. From the point of victimization onward, the victim requires the services of many agencies and needs a great deal of information. Furthermore, should the police department develop a victim service program, it is essential to articulate its activities with existing community services.

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