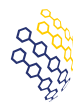Toolbox

EUCPN
EUROPEAN CRIME PREVENTION NETWORK

TOOLBOX ON

High-risk victim groups

Preventing repeat and secondary victimisation

EU2022.CZ

This toolbox discusses a victim-centred perspective on how victims can be protected from secondary and repeat victimisation. It provides a theoretical overview combined with practical information and examples.

Acknowledgements

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Preface

This paper was written by the EUCPN Secretariat and discusses the main topic of the Czech Presidency: the prevention of secondary and repeat victimisation among high-risk victim groups within society. It includes theoretical information as well as practical examples for practitioners to use while working with victims.

The Czech Presidency describes the topic as follows:

> *The aim is to exchange experiences and good practices, most importantly in the areas of early identification of victims of crime (especially those particularly vulnerable), prevention of their secondary victimisation and re-victimisation, and how to increase motivation to report crimes and thus to reduce the latency of crime. This can be achieved, inter alia, by improving the communication skills of law enforcement authorities (mostly, but not only, the police), increasing pro-client access to crime victims, witnesses and persons reporting crime. We can also achieve our goal by increasing trust in working with victims, by using new methodologies for identifying victims and for working with particularly vulnerable victims, and, last but not least, by raising legal awareness of risk groups (e.g. seniors), etc.*

This is the first of two papers that make up the toolbox on high-risk victim groups. A second paper provides an overview of the participants of the 2022 European Crime Prevention Award. All papers are available for download at https://eucpn.org/toolbox-highriskvictims.

Introduction

Everyone may, and potentially will at a certain moment in time, become a victim of a crime or another type of harmful behaviour. To support people through their victimisation, all victims have the right to receive a minimum amount of support, such as the right to be acknowledged and respected, to receive clear information and (legal) assistance. However, certain groups within the general population are more at risk of experiencing repeat- and secondary victimisation as well as intimidation and retaliation. These high-risk groups of victims are therefore granted additional protection measures to tackle secondary victimisation, which in turn will help to prevent repeat victimisation.

This toolbox provides a theoretical overview combined with practical information and examples on the topic of repeat- and secondary victimisation. The first chapter examines which groups of people can be considered as high-risk victim groups due to their personal susceptibility characteristics. The second chapter discusses how the victim-centred approach as well as multi-agency cooperation can play a role in preventing secondary victimisation. The final chapter focuses on breaking the cycle of repeat victimisation by encouraging victims' reporting behaviours, referring them successfully to other support services and assisting them during a potential court trial.

It is important to acknowledge that this toolbox focuses on the prevention of repeat- and secondary victimisation from the victim's perspective, without placing any blame or responsibility with the victims themselves. Despite this paper's focus, it is equally important to focus on tackling perpetrators who commit crimes in order to prevent victimisation.

01

High-risk victim groups

Before defining high-risk victim groups, we first need to identify what constitutes a victim. Various agencies and institutions have their own distinct interpretations. This toolbox uses the United Nations' wide-ranging definition:

> "Victims" means 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.[1]

This is a comprehensive definition that also includes victimisation due to acts that are not necessarily criminalised, such as bullying.

All victims have the right to a minimum amount of support. That is the right to be acknowledged and respected, to receive clear information and (legal) assistance.[2] However, certain groups within the population are more at risk of victimisation and are therefore the target of particular measures.[3] These high-risk groups of victims have access to additional support, protection or assistance due to their predisposition to experience secondary and repeat victimisation, intimidation and retaliation. This includes legal and moral obligations, such as the right to privacy and the provision of specific facilities.[4]

Repeat vs. secondary victimisation

Repeat victimisation (also referred to as revictimisation) entails that a person is a victim of the same type of crime within a certain period of time. This occurs when a gay couple experiences street harassment several times within a month. Near repeats happen when people close to the victim are targeted, for instance when friends of this couple also encounter hate-motivated harassment.[5]

Moreover, it is common for high-risk victims to experience multiple or chronic victimisation, during which a victim experiences more than one crime (regardless of the type) within a certain time period.[6] For example, 48% of the LGBTIQ victims who reported hate-motivated violence in 2019 experienced it more than once in the last five years.[7]

Repeat victimisation takes place in various ways. One important initiator, particularly in cases of organised crime, is retaliation against the victim or against their family or community. Gang disputes can cause patterns of (near) repeat victimisation and result in a spiral of violence. Another important cause is intimidation from the perpetrator. Victims of domestic violence, for instance, experience repeat victimisation due to intimidation aimed at stopping them from reporting incidents to the authorities.[8]

Secondary victimisation is not necessarily the result of a criminal offence. It occurs due to disrespectful, insensitive and unprofessional responses of institutions and their personnel towards victims. These include behaviours such as discrimination, stigmatisation or failure to acknowledge feelings of victimisation.[9]

By way of illustration, law enforcement officers might act indifferently when a woman reports a catcalling incident, resulting in a lack of acknowledgement towards the victim and her experiences. Moreover, they may act in a stigmatising way towards this victim by shifting the blame (i.e. victim blaming) and questioning her own role in the incident.[10]

Secondary victimisation also occurs through other institutions such as the media. By sharing personal information or explicit photos without consent, a victim can re-live the harmful events leading to further trauma.[11]

The purpose of identifying particular victim groups as vulnerable is to protect them from (further) harm while also providing specialised support and assistance. However, vulnerability rather emphasises weaknesses, passivity and dependency, instead of a victim's autonomy and strengths.[12] Many victims try to avoid being labelled as such due to the negative social stigma and public perception that surrounds the term. These negative perceptions are typically based on characteristics that differ from the general norm and express a degree of disapproval. The perceived degree of victim accountability strongly influences the level of stigma towards a victim. This is why victims of interpersonal violence, such as sexual harassment (in which consent and approval are often points of discussion), experience social stigma as well as victim blaming more frequently.[13]

Victim blaming

Victim blaming occurs when victims are held partially or entirely responsible for their own victimisation. It typically involves insinuations that the harm suffered was caused by the choices or actions of victims themselves. Another common occurrence is that people give well-intended advice to victims to make them modify their behaviour. This excludes general crime prevention guidance, such as providing information on target hardening strategies to better protect your house. Rather, it refers to advice involving negative insinuations, for instance that not wearing revealing clothing will help in avoiding sexual harassment.

Such attitudes not only harm victims, they also allow violence and injustice to continue by ignoring the wrongdoing of the perpetrator and implying the solution lies with the victims themselves. As a result, victim blaming can even cause discriminatory policies and attitudes that target certain categories of victims.[14]

To avoid being labelled as a victim and avoid the associated stigma, many victims will delay seeking help or even refuse to report a crime altogether. In addition to facing this stigma, victims are also aware of the additional risks associated with victimisation, such as experiencing further trauma due to secondary victimisation or retaliation. Avoiding these risks might be an act of protection and self-preservation.[15]

Susceptibility characteristics

Countries use various susceptibility criteria to categorise high-risk victims groups. These criteria mainly relate to victim's personal traits, such as their age, gender (identity), sexual orientation, cultural or religious background or their physical and mental condition.[16]

The most common characteristic, age, entails a specific focus on children, adolescents and elderly people. Both young and old age are often linked to a decreased level of autonomy as people in these groups are frequently dependent on other people, such as parents or care givers. This makes them more prone to repeat and secondary victimisation, particularly when this dependency is towards the perpetrator.[17] By way of illustration, financial or material exploitation easily occurs when an older person's finances or property are unfairly managed.[18] Children face an increased risk of secondary victimisation during, among others, criminal proceedings if they are repeatedly asked to give statements or are confronted with their perpetrator. Another prominent group includes both young and elderly victims who live in closed settings (e.g. retirement homes, boarding schools or institutions for people with disabilities). At times, these environments allow very little communication with society. This drastically increases the risk of repeat victimisation as well as intimidation should a victim want to report their experiences.[19]

Another target group often dealing with dependency towards their perpetrator are women, for instance in cases of domestic violence. This dependency can take various forms, such as financial (when a woman is forced to stay at home without a job) or psychological (when the victim is manipulated to believe she is insignificant). It increases the difficulty of breaking the cycle of violence, making them prone to experience repeat victimisation, such as incidents of intimidation and retaliation.[20] A similar group is victims of human trafficking who are also dependent on their traffickers, as they are often left without autonomy to make decisions regarding their own housing, finances or bodies. This makes it very difficult to escape their situation of exploitation and fuels repeat victimisation.[21]

Characteristics such as gender identity, sexual orientation, religious background or having a physical or mental disability, are often of relevance in victims who are the target of hate crime. This refers to criminal offences motivated by prejudices or biases that are directed at specific groups of people. This is why target groups such as people with disabilities, ethnic minorities and the LGBTIQ community, face an increased risk of experiencing hate-motivated crime, which is in turn linked to high levels of both repeat and secondary victimisation, particularly when such negative biases are predominant in a community.[22] To give an example, people with disabilities face hate crime as well as negative public attitudes, such as condescension, ignorance and hostility, which impedes their inclusion into the wider society. It is the responsibility of Member States to facilitate physical, cognitive and psychological recovery and reintegration of victims with a disability.[23] However, vulnerability assessments are often used to justify over-protective measures that exclude disabled people from decision-making processes. They are, for instance, deemed too weak to enter legal proceedings.[24]

02

Preventing secondary victimisation

The process of identifying a victim is a type of threshold after which a person can be recognised as 'victim' and when additional measures should be taken to avoid repeat victimisation. This might prove to be an intensive task as not all victims consider themselves as such or they might avoid the authorities due to fear of stigma or retaliation.[25]

Identifying high-risk victims can be done by recognising certain markers or signs in relation to a victim. These can be divided into three categories. The first category is situational indicators, which are circumstantial signs. For instance, the constant presence of another individual (e.g. the controlling partner), signs of abuse (e.g. various wounds or scars) or the absence of important documentation (e.g. because someone else took it). Secondly, narrative indicators refer to the information delivered by the victim, such as them mentioning controlling behaviour or incidents of violence. Finally, someone's personal demeanour can indicate victimisation when, among others, they answer questions evasively or appear fearful.[26]

Signs of victimisation can sometimes be spotted before a person realises their own victimisation or before a crime is even reported. Nonetheless, many actors within society are not aware they could play a crucial role in recognising these markers and thereby prevent further victimisation. Both the public and private sector can assist in avoiding these missed opportunities. The public sector is already an essential partner when it comes to delivering victim support. Public services such as law enforcement, social services, legal assistants, and immigration officers frequently work with victims and often have the required expertise to recognise and deal with such matters, however, other public institutions such as schools, medical and healthcare services could also become an ally in identifying victims. Many victims of sexual exploitation visit the hospital at some point. This creates valuable opportunities for doctors and nurses to recognise signs of abuse, yet many hospitals do not have the necessary screening tools (e.g. the ESCAPE instrument) or policies to recognise such cases.[27] Another example are teachers who could recognise changes in children who are experiencing domestic violence.[28] It is therefore very important for these public institutions to have a better understanding of victimisation and how to recognise it as well as act on it in a helpful manner.[29]

The same applies for the private sector: companies and organisations can offer wide-ranging and valuable help in the identification of victimisation. Hotels and housing associations, for example, could play an important role in identifying human traffickers making use of their accommodation. Similarly, construction firms can monitor (sub) contractor's operations (e.g. excessive use of temporary staff and migrant workers) to recognise signs of labour exploitation.[30] The online world should also be incorporated, as many stigmatising comments, which enforce victim blaming attitudes, tend to be shared online. Social media companies can assist in detecting such harmful behaviour and report incidents to the local authorities.[31]

Educating communities

By organising trainings or workshops, the community becomes (more) involved in recognising victimisation. *MANEO*[32] is a highly-experienced gay anti-violence project in Germany. It focuses on preventive actions, such as anti-violence trainings (in collaboration with the police) in schools as well as reactive campaigns, for instance the provision of (legal) advice and the creation of its own anonymous reporting mechanism.

Another example is *Stop Hate UK*[33]. It offers trainings to enhance support systems for hate crime victims across various sectors, such as schools, housing providers, city council members, and community and resident groups. These trainings inform the participants on the different types of hate crime and their negative impact on a community. Thereafter, each target group is given information how they can recognise victimisation in their field of work and how to effectively respond to and/or report it. Both initiatives serve as examples of how the general population can be educated in recognising victimisation and how they can report incidents or help by referring victims to the correct support services.

In addition to educating the population, communities can also implement practical initiatives to protect high-risk victim groups. Spain has created an *Intergenerational Tele-assistance programme*, in which university students periodically call an elderly person to share experiences and encouragement as well as discuss physical or emotional struggles. This project increases solidarity towards a susceptible target group and facilitates the detection of victimisation.[34] Another example is the *Flex Line* in Hallstahammar, Sweden. This line forms part of the public transportation system that runs easy-access transportation for elderly people, enabling them to easily participate in community activities. It also offers an adapted vehicle with a ramp for wheelchairs and other mobility devices for people with a disability.[35]

A victim-centred, multi-agency approach

It is quite common for victims to withdraw during legal proceedings or to not even report a crime at all. This often occurs during later stages, such as during testimonies in court, but a number of victims also drop out during the first interactions with the authorities. This occurs due to various reasons, because victims of domestic violence needed a rapid de-escalation of the situation yet they do not want to report the incident; or because victims notice the authorities do not take their claim seriously and no real action is taken. It is therefore important to tackle any possibility of secondary victimisation so victims are encouraged to reach out to the authorities, which in turn helps to prevent repeat victimisation.

To prevent secondary victimisation and successfully help victims, it is vital that a victim-centred environment is created. To accomplish this, the person's preferences, needs and comfort should be central every step of the way, while also considering their previous trauma.[36] By offering a trauma-informed, safe and trusting setting, victims will feel more comfortable and be encouraged to share necessary information.[37] Following the Victims' Rights Directive[38], agencies working with victims should prioritise fundamental rights to create a supportive environment.[39]

Firstly, victims have a right to receive effective communication regarding the process they are embarking on. This includes information on their rights as a victim (e.g. the right to receive compensation) and the types of practical help (e.g. legal advice, medical assistance or security arrangements) as well as psychological help (e.g. counselling sessions, group therapy or, if applicable, religious support) they are able to receive. Services should deliver information as well as support through various means, such as in-person consultations (during the day as well as after-work hours), websites with information, apps and telephone helplines. Offering a range of methods increases the visibility and accessibility towards victims while also taking into consideration different communication preferences. At the same time, it is important that victims are not overwhelmed by the amount of information they receive or the number of times they are contacted through different channels.[40]

To guarantee an effective information exchange, victims should be received by a trained practitioner in a safe and warm environment. This can be achieved by implementing fairly feasible changes. Firstly, trained practitioners or volunteers should be available in each police district so every victim receives specialised care. This might take the form of practitioners specialised in working with children or a specific unit trained to deal with victims of hate crime. *Pink in Blue* is an example of a network within the Dutch national police force that focuses on LGBTIQ victims. They aim to increase

reporting behaviours within this target group by reaching out and offering support while also raising awareness on these issues within the national police force itself.[41]

Furthermore, to increase the victim's trust and make them more inclined to share their story, they should be invited in a welcoming area, rather than an interrogation room. This should be a warm environment tailored to the needs of various victim groups. There should be toys for children, comfortable couches for adolescents or adults and ability aids for elderly people and people with disabilities. Yet, even further measures could be taken. Victims feel more comfortable when they can choose which person will interview them. They might prefer talking to someone of the same gender or with the same cultural background. However, this is already considered an extensive change, particularly for local police departments with limited staff and resources.[42]

Do's

› Give necessary information in an understandable manner;
› Create a comfortable area aimed at different target groups;
› Keep appropriate distance from the victim;
› Show empathy and respect silences;
› Take the victim seriously and acknowledge their feelings.

Don'ts

› Do not promise secrecy if it cannot be maintained;
› Do not judge or blame the victim;
› Do not pressure them to give information;
› Do not use technical information or jargon;
› Do not force them into making decisions regarding the continuation of the process.

Moreover, victims have the right to understand all given information as well as be understood themselves. It is important they understand why procedures are taking place and what their role will be. This information should be presented according to general communication standards, such as the use of empathy and not forcing a victim say or do something they do not want to. Furthermore, it is vital that all information is tailored to the capacities of the victim. For victims with visual impairments, information written in braille could be arranged. Children or people with mental disabilities will require a guardian or support person to be present. Some victims (e.g. children or people with disabilities) might benefit from the use of graphic materials, such as pictures, creating drawings or using puppets to support their statements, while certain victims of human trafficking need interpreters to translate the information provided.[43]

Using interpreters can be challenging as they often have to explain technical information as well as translate personal and delicate information. For this reason, it is important that additional time is provide to create a favourable setting. The interpreter should receive time to prepare, for instance to research the topic of the conversation. They should be assisted by the interviewer who explains how conversation will be conducted and how all the participants will be positioned in the room. Additionally, victims should be able, as much as is feasible, to choose the gender of their interpreter as well as the language or dialect so they can better express themselves. Furthermore, the conversation will take longer when using an interpreter. It is important that the interviewer uses short clear sentences with basic vocabulary and leaves sufficient breaks for the interpreter to clarify possible miscommunications.[44]

In case no certified interpreter is available, for instance in a remote region, telephone or video systems can be used. It is not recommended to use unqualified volunteers or family members, unless there is no other option, such as during emergency situations. Unqualified volunteers can lack both vocabulary as well as technical skills to fully transmit the correct message, while family members might remember their own traumas when translating someone else's.[45]

Another element that is crucial in preventing both repeat and secondary victimisation, is the right to safety and privacy. Victims within a violent relationship might require specific protection measures, such as a restraining order or relocation to a shelter, to prevent retaliation while the investigation is ongoing. Another example is migrants who experience hate crime yet will not report it due to fear for arrest and

deportation.[46] To prevent this from happening and help them escape this cycle of repeat victimisation, policies such as *'Free in, free out'* from the Netherlands can be created. Free in, free out is a national practice on safely interviewing victims or witnesses without any residence status. It allows migrants to report any crime without fear of being arrested, detained or deported. Although it is considered unique and innovative, various challenges remain regarding its implementation. Many officers lack necessary knowledge and therefore still contact the immigration services for advice on whether or how to implement this policy. The involvement of immigration services consequently creates a trail to track these victims, as their personal information and situation is often discussed. Such variable levels of police discretion create an inconsistent application of the policy. While it is considered essential and encouraging by various NGOs, its execution in practice is partly held back by implementation difficulties.[47]

Safety also must be guaranteed during the continuation of this process. Victims need to know that the authorities are on their side and that they will not publicly or unnecessarily share private information, such as someone's faith or sexual orientation. Whenever information sharing is necessary, for instance with a prosecutor, this should only contain necessary information for the investigation. Furthermore, this exchange of information should happen in a secure manner to prevent data breaches.[48]

Training for frontline workers

Not all authorities possess the knowledge of how to appropriately deal with victims. It is essential that frontline workers, such as law enforcement and all other practitioners that come into contact with victims, learn about victims' fundamental rights so they can treat victims appropriately and ensure the implementation of a victim-centred approach.[49]

Various countries and organisations have created trainings and workshops aimed at public authorities. *Facing Facts* offers trainings on hate crime monitoring while treating victims of discrimination, racism, anti-Semitism, islamophobia and homophobia in a positive way. These trainings are offered at law enforcement and victim support services, yet also at other public authorities such as policy makers.[50] Another example is the *Irish Network Against Racism* (INAR) which offers similar trainings with a more specific focus on racism. It offers practical information on how to respond to racism, both offline and online or in the media, as well as information on existing legislation and possible reporting mechanisms.[51]

A method that facilitates victim-centred working is the multi-agency approach. Multi-agency working requires a variety of agencies to collaborate to provide effective victim-support services. These agencies (e.g. law enforcement, social services and education, health and legal systems) collaborate with the aim of filling the gaps between different services or resources. This way, victims are not left having to locate agencies independently, since the partners are familiar with one other's services and can coordinate a shared approach.[52] Additionally, it generally results in more proportionate and appropriate conclusions, as the involved agencies will draw a variety of shared conclusions instead of one single 'diagnosis'.[53]

In some cases, multi-agency working is centralised within one building and is referred to as a 'one stop shop'. This is the case for *Family Justice Centres*[54], *Le Refuge Bruxelles*[55] and the *Barnahus model*, which coordinates shared and centralised, rather than parallel and overlapping, victim support.[56]

Barnahus model

The Barnahus ('children's house') project offers a child-friendly setting in which law enforcement, criminal justice, child protection services, and medical and mental health workers are situated under the same roof. They cooperate to assess the victimisation of a child, while placing the child's best interests at the centre, and decide upon the necessary referrals. This way, each child is offered a balanced multidisciplinary and professional intervention organised through joint case management.[57]

Each Barnahus house consists of four rooms:
1. The child protection room focusses on the individual assessment and exploratory interviews with the child and their family.
2. The criminal justice room focusses on a child-friendly forensic interview while respecting the procedural justice safeguards of both victim and perpetrator (i.e. the right to a defence is maintained as the perpetrator's lawyer can attend in a separate room). The interview is conducted by a specialised interviewer and recorded to serve as evidence in court.
3. The physical wellbeing room focusses on a child-friendly medical consultation for investigative purposes as well as to ensure the child's physical well-being and/or recovery.
4. The mental wellbeing room focusses on the mental health assessment and the provision of crisis support and short- and long-term therapeutic consultations for the child and their family.

Find out more about this evidence-based practice at:
https://www.barnahus.eu

Implementing a successful multi-agency approach that is imbedded within a community can help to reduce the stigma that surrounds victims. By incorporating local services, negative public attitudes can be converted into a positive community-generated perspective.[58] It furthermore decreases the risk of secondary victimisation by improving the quality of care that is given. This, in turn, has a positive effect on the victim's recovery process and therefore reduces the risk of repeat victimisation.[59]

However, it is essential for the victim's rights to remain central when applying this method. Badly implemented multi-agency initiatives could be overwhelming for victims, as they face contact with a multitude of services in a short period of time. It is not just about situating various agencies in the same building, they also need to offer joint services as part of a unified approach, as secondary victimisation also occurs when a victim is required to repeat their story several times to these different practitioners. One example would be to provide a single contact point for each victim who can thereafter pass along specific information to each partner agency.[60]

Individual needs assessments

Alongside implementing structural changes on a macro-level, victim-centred initiatives should also be realised on a micro-level. The Victims' Rights Directive states all victims have a right to receive a timely individual assessment.[61] Individual assessments determine the specific (protection) needs of a victim and outline the required protection measures. They consider a person's characteristics (e.g. age), their personal situation (e.g. the relationship with the perpetrator) and the type of crime they experienced.[62] They also ensure a victim receives necessary information about the (optional) legal proceedings and the financial as well as practical aspects of these proceedings. Ultimately, the interviewer should have a clear understanding of the victim's risk of repeat victimisation.[63]

Depending on the conclusion, the victim will be referred to the appropriate support services. Nevertheless, an individual assessment revolves around a victim's needs and preferences. This consequently means that if they wish not to report an incident or utilise protection measures, their choice should be respected. There are, however, certain severe circumstances in which action has to be taken, for instance, doctors in France are obliged to report when they notice signs of abuse involving minors.[64]

It is important that an individual assessment is properly integrated into a victim-centred criminal justice process. If victims are not treated with respect or they are not received in a supportive environment, the individual assessment will not produce a helpful result. The process starts as early as possible during the first point of contact, usually conducted by a law enforcement officer or a victim support organisation. Yet for victims of violence, this first point of contact will often be a medical actor, such as hospital staff. This is why all these actors should know how to conduct an individual assessment without causing any secondary victimisation.[65] Unfortunately, there is no common form in which these assessments exist or are conducted across the EU Member States.[66] Some countries use questionnaires, which are suitable for use by volunteers without specialised training, and are intended to serve as a guide to a conversation. A preferred method is the use of unscripted conversations in which the victim is encouraged to talk without being asked too many questions. In this case, trained practitioners have a conversation with the victim during which they acquire relevant information.[67]

Manual on the identification of victims

The Police Presidium of the Czech Republic has produced a methodology aimed at the identification of victims of crimes. It consists of a handbook along with a practical manual for police officers to use in their interactions with victims.

The manual consists of two separate sheets, one aimed at the identification from a legal point of view and the other from a psychological point of view. Both sheets include markers and behaviours to enable the severity of victimisation to be identified. They also include easy-to-follow steps on how to treat victims (e.g. with empathy and respect) and what information they should receive (e.g. the right to privacy) and how they should receive it (e.g. through easy and clear communication). To increase the practicality, examples of common stereotypes are presented, such as 'men cannot be victims' or 'she asked for it by dressing inappropriately'.

At last, a categorisation can be made from 'victim' to 'particularly vulnerable victim' (i.e. children and elderly people or victims displaying disturbing behaviour, such as fear, denial or guilt) who correspondingly are in need of being granted additional rights and/or support mechanisms.[68]

It is furthermore important for the individual assessment to result in a referral to the required support services (if this is in accordance with the victim's wishes). The collected information needs to be shared with the necessary entities while the victim's privacy is maintained. Some victims do not want their religion, migration status or

sexual identity to be shared out of fear of reprisal or stigma. This choice should be respected throughout the entire legal process.[69]

In summary, to prevent secondary as well as repeat victimisation, it is necessary to implement a victim-centred and multi-agency approach. By placing the rights and needs of victims central, they will feel more acknowledged and accepted by the authorities. This will make victims more inclined to report their victimisation and seek help from officials as they do not fear stigma and other types of secondary victimisation. However, increasing the trust in the authorities is not only important during this initial stage; it needs to continue throughout the entire legal process.

03

Breaking the cycle of repeat victimisation

Identifying victims at high risk is an essential first step, but thereafter it is important to effectively refer victims so they continue to receive protection and support throughout the continuation of the process.[70] This is why the integrated victim-centred approach should remain a constant also after the initial identification stage.[71]

Encourage reporting behaviours

Reporting attitudes differ based on the crime that the victim experienced. Property crimes are often reported so people receive compensation from the insurance company. This behaviour is very different for other victims, for instance those who experienced hate crime. They might have very little faith in the authorities, fear stigmatisation and therefore not dare to report. To encourage them, they need to be able to report in a safe manner. This entails that victims are able to come forward without fear that they will be punished or face retaliation for doing so. In this case, feeling safe refers not only to the physical environment but also to the provision of rights and support services where victims are free from discrimination.[72]

Even when the victim-centred approach is effectively implemented, some victims will not report a crime due to various reasons. This may be because they are unable to, for instance when the victim lives in a closed setting or in the case of partner violence due to fear of retaliation. Some might not be sure whether discrimination actually took place or they think they have insufficient evidence. Thus, victims remain unsure whether the authorities will help them sufficiently or effectively to tackle their victimisation. To target this manifestation, the provision of alternative reporting mechanisms can help in capturing a larger audience as well as a wider range of incidents. These reporting mechanisms can additionally be used by witnesses who might want to remain anonymous.[73]

There are numerous alternative reporting options, through helplines, apps or websites. *FLAG report!* is one example: this is an app that allows victims and witnesses of hate crime, racism and sexism to anonymously report these incidents. These reports are automatically dated and geo-located in order to create an overview of risk-areas for law enforcement to use. Afterwards, victims receive information on the possible support services that are available as well as possible legal action that can be taken.[74] Numerous European countries as well as NGOs have similar tools available for the public, for example *IReport* in Ireland, the *Alert cops app* in Spain and the *Gay helpline* in Italy.[75]

Pro-active protection of victims in closed settings

It is important to acknowledge that not all victims or witnesses can easily go to the authorities to report a crime. There is a group of high-risk victims that lives in a closed institutions (e.g. detention centres or care facilities for people with a disability) and therefore experience limited contact with the outside world. This drastically increases the risk for repeat victimisation as they might face pressure or intimidation from the institution to remain silent.[76] To protect this target group, a pro-active approach is needed in which organisations reach out to identify and help these victims.

A prominent example of such an initiative is the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT). The CPT organises visits to places of detention (e.g. psychiatric hospitals and holding centres for immigrants) to evaluate how people deprived of their liberty are treated. They not only focus on cases of torture, but on a whole range of situations that are inhumane or degrading. The CPT receives unlimited access to places of detention and is allowed to interview its staff privately.[77] For this reason, this is a good example of pro-active outreach work towards this susceptible group of victims.[78] Nevertheless, the CPT only focusses on places of detention, not other closed environments such as closed wards in hospitals or retirement homes. Governments could therefore set up similar initiatives to incorporate pro-active control mechanisms for all types of closed environments.

Successful referrals to exit the chain-of-risk

Once a victim has reported their victimisation, they can be further referred towards victim support services. Effective referrals to the correct services are essential to help an individual break free from the chain-of-risk and protect them from any further victimisation.[79] The need for support should already be formulated by the victim during the individual assessment. The practitioner gathers all necessary information (e.g. whether the victimisation resulted from escalation or whether it is part of an ongoing cycle of hate violence), so they can refer the victim accordingly.[80] Even so, the needs of a victim do not remain the same throughout the criminal proceedings. For this reason, the individual assessment should be regularly repeated to ensure the victim's evolving needs are always considered. However, this does not mean asking a victim to repeat already given information as this could cause secondary victimisation due to reliving a trauma. Follow-up conversations need to be continuously organised to evaluate the victim's needs.[81]

1 All victims are given the chance to be referred

2 The referral is conducted according to the victim-centred approach

3 The referral is conducted in a timely manner

4 Privacy and the protection of data are respected

5 The referral is conducted through clear and secure communication mechanisms

Figure 1. Essential elements to conduct an effective referral.

There are numerous support services that offer a wide variety of interventions and/or protection measures. This includes healthcare support for victims who have suffered physical injuries, as well as practical support, such as repairs of damaged property (e.g. the removal of graffiti) or the installation of security measures (e.g. door and window locks).[82] This can also take form of very practical interventions tailored for a specific target group. For instance, *money management programmes* could help tackle financial exploitation of elderly people. This type of evidence-based programme arranges money management assistance, such as help with paying bills to strengthen financial skills.[83] Another example is *digital initiation workshops*, such as those organised in Lyon, France, that prevent isolation and victimisation of elderly people by teaching them how to use and better understand digital communication tools.[84]

Another type of practical support is the provision of emergency shelters for victims that live in close proximity or in the same house as their perpetrator. It is important that these shelters are available for all high-risk victim groups. For example, *Shelter Safe House*[85] focusses on victims of human trafficking as well as migrants and asylum seekers. The *Rainbow Welcome! Project*[86] welcomes LGBTIQ refugees. It is important that all high-risk victim groups are targeted. Shelters for women with children require toys and baby care products, while shelters for elderly people should be adapted to deal with health problems.[87]

A third important focus area is emotional and psychological support in the form of short- and/or long-term counselling or therapy, either in a group or individually. An evidence-based example is *trauma-focused cognitive behavioural therapy* (TF-CBT), which teaches victims (particularly young victims of abuse) and their families the necessary coping skills to overcome traumatic experiences and their effects. There is a strong focus on the incident that caused trauma and the negative sensations and emotions that are associated with it. The therapy teaches cognitive strategies to manage these negative emotions and reduces, among others, symptoms of PTSD and depression.[88] For some victims emotional support takes the form of spiritual help. Religious or spiritual people often find the support they need from a trusted religious figure within their community.[89]

Finally, there is support through the provision of advice, such as legal aid, advice on obtaining a compensation or guidance concerning immigration rights and processes.[90] Advice as well as support should be available through various means to increase accessibility for all high-risk victim groups. This can also be provided through helplines,

such as the *Leuchtlinie*[91], which is equipped to provide advice and information for victims of racist and anti-Semitic violence or *Galop*[92] that focuses on LGBTIQ victims of hate crime and abuse.

Informed consent

A victim must give their informed consent for any action that is taken by the police or other public authorities. This means they are fully aware of the processes they are embarking on and their potential outcomes. It also means they can decide which steps are taken, which services are needed and which are not. Furthermore, it is essential they maintain control over how and with whom their data and personal information is shared. Preserving informed consent enforces the victim-centred approach and strengthens the victim's autonomy and empowerment.[93]

The type of support mechanisms and level of support that victims require differ from person to person. This varies due to their personal characteristics and how they cope with their victimisation experiences. A victim's social connections play an important role, as some victims have a stronger support system, consisting of friends and family, than others.[94] This is an important factor to consider when referring a victim to further support services. Conversely, the impact of victimisation can also spread beyond the direct victim and have a negative effect on their surroundings, particularly in cases of hate crime when violent attacks, for instance on refugee centres or gay bars, are intended to send a signal towards an entire community. It might be necessary, in such cases, to not only refer the victim towards support services but to also reach out to their friends and family to offer support.[95]

Finally, it is vital that the practitioner who referred the victim continues to follow-up their process afterwards. Just because a victim has been successfully referred does not mean that this will prevent new victimisation from occurring.[96]

Effective follow-up strategies

When victims have the impression that the police are not doing their best or that they do not care about their victimisation, people will lose faith in the authorities. As a consequence, fewer victims will report repeat victimisation. While it is impossible for law enforcement to solve every case, it is important they act promptly, consistently and efficiently in their actions towards victims.[97]

Being prompt and efficient means, among other things, that law enforcement should apply effective follow-up strategies, in other words, following up on victims that were referred to other support services to track their progress and the quality of their referral, as well as staying in touch with victims who did not want to file a report.

The used follow-up techniques differ depending on the victim involved. For some people, a phone call is sufficient, while for others, home visits might be more appropriate. The manner and frequency depend on the needs of the victim, yet this has to happen consistently. When the police tell a victim they will call to gather an update and they do not, this will be perceived negatively by the victim. Conversely, consistent follow-up actions will be perceived as productive and supportive. When a person does not wish to be contacted by the authorities anymore, this decision should be respected.[98]

Victim assistance during court trials

Ultimately, after reporting a crime, certain victims become a part of the court trial that follows the criminal proceedings. The role of the victim during a trial can be limited or intensive yet overall very demanding. They must be present at court for an entire day, while their statement might only last a few minutes. They might be subjected to insensitive questions or remarks and the general presence of many unknown people in a confusing setting can create a very stressful situation for the victim. The victim-centred approach should therefore remain central, also during court trials. This entails that the victim's rights mentioned in the Victims' Rights Directive are to be implemented and respected at all times.

According to the right to information, victims should be informed of the trial and all its details. They have the right to understand the practical matters, such as which courtroom procedures need to be followed for which reasons, as well as content-related matters, which exact offences the perpetrator is charged with or what actions can be taken depending on the judge's ruling (e.g. the right to compensation).[99] Courtroom procedures are often quite formal and a great deal of complex jargon is used. It is, therefore, essential that the victim is continuously informed on what is happening in a comprehensible manner. This is often a task for the lawyer, yet other practitioners such as victim support officers or court staff could take on this responsibility for high-risk victims who might not be able to afford one.

Comfortable court environment

To fully implement the victim-centred approach in courtrooms, action can be taken to make victims feel more comfortable in these stressful environments. One example is the use of facility dogs in courts as they have been shown to provide a calming influence for victims during the criminal proceedings. As neutral companions in the court setting, dogs empower high-risk victims and witnesses to describe what happened. They furthermore give emotional support to victims in court.[100]

Various organisations work with facility and/or assistance dogs for a wide arrange of victims. *Dog4Life*[101] is a non-profit organisation that trains assistance dogs to support people with a disability in their daily lives. They will additionally train dogs to serve in shelters for victims of domestic violence in Italy. Another example are NGOs *Canisha*[102] and *Hachiko*[103], which will train facility dogs to support victims during criminal proceedings in Belgium.

Another element important in safeguarding during a trial is the right to safety and privacy. Under the Directive, all Member States are required to take appropriate measures throughout the criminal proceedings to protect the privacy of victims as well as that of their families. This means that certain information, such as personal characteristics (e.g. sexual identity) or photographs of victims and their family, cannot be publicly disseminated without their consent. In the case of child victims, this information cannot be shared in any manner whatsoever. To further protect victims' personal information, certain trials can take place without the presence of the general public.[104]

The right to safety reaches further than the protection of personal information. It also includes physical protection measures. As stated by the Directive, high-risk victims require specific physical protection measures during a court trial in order to avoid (visual) contact between victims and perpetrators.[105] This can be achieved by giving both parties separate entrances as well as waiting areas in the court building. That way, the victim does not have to face the perpetrator or their family. In case the building does not have the capacity to provide separate entrances, schedules can be made to ensure both parties arrive at different times. Likewise, if the court building does not have multiple waiting areas, offices can be temporarily converted. The avoidance of contact needs to continue during the trial, for instance during the giving of evidence. Victims can, for instance, be heard through the use of communication technologies (e.g. a video conferencing tool) without having to be physically present in the courtroom. A commonly used method is audio-visual recorded interviews of child victims which can be played during the trial and used as evidence.[106]

Conclusion

Certain high-risk victim groups are more at risk of experiencing secondary and repeat victimisation, intimidation, and retaliation. This susceptibility can be partly attributed to the victim's personal characteristics, such as their age, gender (identity), sexual orientation, cultural or religious background or their physical and mental condition. For this reason, high-risk victim groups receive specific protection measures (e.g. an increased right to privacy and protection). Nonetheless, many victims still experience harmful reactions from the authorities or they have a well-founded fear of such negative behaviours.

To tackle secondary victimisation, public authorities need to implement the victim-centred approach in their daily operations. All practitioners working with victims (e.g. law enforcement or victim support services) should continuously place the victim's needs, comfort and rights at the centre to avoid any type of secondary victimisation. This can be achieved by offering them a safe and trusting setting that encourages information sharing, as well as respecting their fundamental rights by communicating in an understandable manner (e.g. avoiding jargon or using interpreters), protecting them from further harm (e.g. through restraining orders), and respecting their privacy (e.g. by not unnecessarily sharing sensitive information).

The multi-agency approach can be applied to facilitate victim-centred working. By bringing together a variety of agencies (e.g. law enforcement, social services and education, health and legal systems) victims are not left having to locate these services independently. Moreover, the different partners are familiar with one other's services and can coordinate a shared approach, which helps in preventing secondary victimisation.

As a result of a reduced risk of secondary victimisation, victims will be encouraged to reach out to the authorities, which in turn helps to prevent repeat victimisation. However, to actually break the cycle of repeat victimisation, adequate support for victims need to continue after the initial contact with the authorities has been made. Firstly, to ensure all high-risk victim groups will report their victimisation, various alternative reporting mechanisms need to be offered, for instance through apps or helplines. Secondly, victims need to be successfully referred to other support services in order for them to receive the help they need, such as healthcare support, practical

support, and emotional and psychological support. Finally, assistance needs to be offered for victims who will ultimately be required to attend a court trial. As this often is a confusing and stressful environment, victims need to be well informed on everything that is happening. They furthermore have the right to safety and privacy, entailing the provision of safety measures, such as the provision of a separate waiting room.

This toolbox discusses a victim-centred perspective on how victims can be protected from secondary and repeat victimisation. However, to fully prevent victimisation, it is equally important to focus on tackling perpetrators who commit such crimes.

High-risk victim groups

PREVENTING REPEAT AND SECONDARY VICTIMISATION
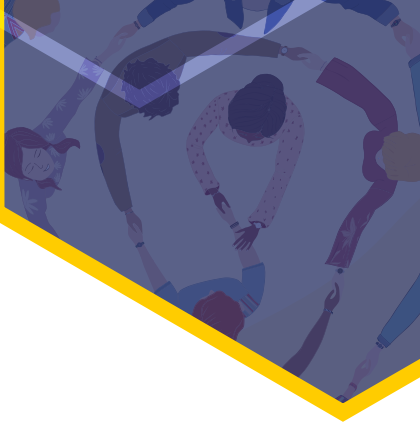
1. High-risk victim groups

Anyone can become victims, yet some target groups are more susceptible to repeat and secondary victimisation and need additional protection and support measures, for example:

› Children;
› Elderly people;

› Women;
› People with disabilities;

› Religious and ethnic minorities;
› LGBTIQ community.

2. Preventing secondary victimisation

To prevent secondary victimisation and improve people's trust in the authorities, victims' needs and comfort need to form the focus , by means of:

› A client-centred approach;

› Multi-agency working;
› Individual assessments.

3. Tackling repeat victimisation

Finally, to help victims escape the cycle of victimisation, we need to:

› Encourage reporting behaviours (through alternative reporting tools);

› Successfully refer them to victim support agencies;
› Use effective follow-up strategies;

› Provide effective victim assistance in court.

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Discover more in our toolbox:
https://eucpn.org/toolbox-highriskvictims

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