

What Works Best In Supporting Victims and Witnesses: A Literature Review

Project Summary

This six month project currently being carried out by teams from the University of Surrey and St George's Hospital Medical School aims:

- To provide a systematic review of the evidence relating to the provision of support for victims and witnesses of crime
- To ascertain what works best in supporting victims and witnesses within the criminal justice system (CJS) and what is available for those not involved in it
- To identify what support measures for victims lead to an improvement in the CJS functioning and efficiency.

The review will consider the needs of victims of crime in general, but will particularly focus on the specific needs and issues relating to:

1. Children as victims or witnesses of crime including those crimes more frequently occurring in childhood, eg, bullying, street theft, etc
2. Elderly people
3. Victims with learning disabilities
4. Victims with mental disorder
5. Intimidated victims and witnesses
6. Victims of sexual offences
7. Victims of domestic violence
8. Black and ethnic minority victims and witnesses
9. Victims of hate crimes, ie, black and ethnic minority people, members of religious groups, travellers, gay and lesbian people, transsexuals
10. People experiencing repeated victimisation
11. People bereaved as a result of crime
12. Victims and witnesses of antisocial behaviour
13. Victims of financial crimes

In terms of interventions a range will be addressed:

1. Counselling and psychological therapy
2. Access to physical healthcare and assessment
3. Social/economic support
4. Practical assistance
5. Peer support including self help groups
6. Information and education, including web sites
7. Religious/spiritual support
8. Other forms of support
9. Organisational interventions
10. Specific changes to CJS procedure

Study Design

The proposed methodology will use an adapted systematic review methodology because of the context and time scale of this particular review. Systematic review methodology is a tool which can be used to summarise, evaluate and communicate the results and implications deriving from large amounts of research data.

Phase 1

This will include an initial scoping of the task and preliminary data gathering.

Phase 2

The aim of this phase is to generate as comprehensive a list as possible of primary sources of information, both published and unpublished. The inclusion criteria will be wide to avoid a selection bias at this stage. The studies included will be on the basis of their relevance to their primary research questions and research designs. The advisory panel will be consulted to achieve a balance between breadth and narrowness of criteria accepting that generalisability may be reduced if too narrow a range of criteria is used.

Phase 3

This phase will develop a conceptual framework to integrate the differing sources of information extracted during the initial analyses and Phase 2. This will specifically highlight areas of good practice in the UK and internationally, integrate the information on different crimes, victim populations and styles of intervention and describe both immediate and longer term effects. Where there are clear gaps in the research these will be highlighted. Discussion with involved groups, ie, police, Home Office and Victim Support will be used to validate the conceptual framework.

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