

Chapter 7: Recommendations and Findings

7.0 Introduction

In this chapter the implications of the findings generated by the research are highlighted and are used to inform a range of recommendations as to how the needs of victims can be more systematically addressed. The chapter is laid out in a sequential order, mirroring the stages that victims would possibly encounter following the committal of a crime. The chapter commences with a review of findings on the issues that may potentially arise for a victim after a crime is committed but **before it is reported** to the Gardaí. Once a crime has been committed a victim must decide whether or not to report the crime. He or she may also decide at this juncture to access support services. Such a decision will in part be premised on his or her personal knowledge about the criminal justice system and the availability of support services to victims of crime. It may also be influenced by the knowledge of friends and family, and/or relevant professionals and community organisation staff.

If the victim decides to **report** the crime, then his or her first encounter with the criminal justice system will be with the Gardaí. The needs of the victim at the initial stages after reporting vary, but they will ordinarily relate to information on the name and details of the investigating Garda, the names of relevant support organisations (general and specific),¹ and the operation of the criminal justice system. The victim will also need to be treated with compassion and respect in his or her initial dealings with the Gardaí, particularly when giving a statement of the incident.

As the **investigation** progresses, the victim will require information from the Gardaí about the status of the on-going investigation. He or she will also require information from the prosecutor particularly on decisions about whether or not to prosecute or to charge a lesser offence. At this stage too, the victim may also feel the need for or have

¹ As noted, this need may also arise in the pre-reporting stage. Indeed some victims may choose not to report a crime but wish to access the services of a victim support organisation. For sequencing purposes, therefore, we have chosen to examine the issue of public and victim awareness about the Crime Victims Helpline and more specialist support organisations in the pre-reporting stage. The operation of the Crime Victims Helpline and the support organisations are dealt with under the reporting stage.

availed of the services provided by a victim support organisation such as those relating to information, counselling or emotional support.

If the crime against the victim continues to be processed through the system, then he or she is next likely to encounter the criminal (and possibly civil) **court system**. Potential issues that can arise here relate to delay and adjournments, the victim's treatment by the judiciary and legal personnel, media reportage, court facilities, and the layout of the courtroom. A victim may also have questions relating to compensation and reimbursement of costs. Information on the possibility of making a victim impact statement after the conviction of an offender may need to be given to relevant victims. At the **post trial stage**, the victim may encounter issues relating to compensation, the sentence imposed, appeals, and information on release dates.

7.1. Prior to Reporting a Crime

After a crime is committed, the victim must decide whether or not to report the incident. More than one in five respondents to the victim questionnaire indicated that they did not report the crime to the Gardaí. As has been discussed in chapter 3 decisions on whether or not to report a crime to law enforcement authorities are influenced by a variety of factors. Non-reporting of crime is significant, not least because victims who do not report crimes may miss a key opportunity to receive information about victim support organisations.² It is important therefore that members of the public and key professional and community stakeholders have a good awareness of the Crime Victims Helpline which is designed to act as a central information and referral portal for victims of crime. This research found that almost one-third of street survey respondents indicated that they had not heard of the Crime Victims Helpline and that less than 10% of respondents in the community awareness survey could name the helpline unprompted, and only two-thirds recognised the organisation when prompted. Furthermore, victims who accessed the Crime Victims Helpline reported that they found out about it via a variety of routes, but mostly

² Though it appears from the findings of this study that the Gardaí are not systematically passing on information on support organisations to victims who report crime. Almost 60% of questionnaire respondents who reported a crime indicated that they did not receive the number of the Crime Victims Helpline from the Gardaí.

through personal referrals from the Gardaí or family/friends.³ Leaflets, advertisements and the internet did not score highly as sources where victims found information about the Crime Victims Helpline. This reinforces the view that there is insufficient public awareness of the Crime Victims Helpline. The fact that a number of the professional/community organisation respondents lamented the lack of a central referral organisation for victims again highlights a lack of awareness of the existence and role of the Crime Victims Helpline.⁴ This level of awareness of the Helpline amongst professionals and relevant community organisation staff cannot but reduce their ability to engage in the systematic referral of crime victims.

It would thus appear that both the general public and professional/community organisation staff have insufficient knowledge of the Crime Victims Helpline which, to some extent, limits its ability to act as a key focal point for the dissemination of information about support services available to victims of crime.⁵

The findings from this research also illustrates that there are low levels of awareness of more specific victim support organisations. Key referral points for victims such as the Gardaí, relevant professionals and community organisation workers and the Crime Victims Helpline do not appear to be fully effective sources of information for victims. The Street Survey indicates that there were poor levels of awareness among the general public about the services available. The Community Awareness Survey reinforces this point with significant numbers of respondents being unaware of many of the main victims organisations and the majority identifying the need to improve awareness regarding support services.

Recommendations

7.1 The effectiveness of the Crime Victims Helpline as the key provider of information and support to victims of crime needs to be enhanced. It is vital that

³ There is no information available from the questionnaire responses on how the family and friends of victims became aware of the Crime Victims Helpline.

⁴ The Commission for the Support of Victims of Crime has launched a new website which contains a county by county list of support organisations by crime type. These details are available at www.cvsc.ie. The launch of this website took place after the fieldwork was completed.

⁵ As we shall see, it is further limited by the failure of the Gardaí to systematically pass on the Crime Victims Helpline number to victims who report crime.

awareness of the Crime Victims Helpline is increased among members of the public and in particular among key professionals and staff of relevant community organisations. In addition to devising strategies for improving awareness among the members of the general public, we would recommend that the Crime Victims Helpline should engage in a systematic information-giving programme targeted at key professionals and community organisations who are likely to be in contact with victims. Such professionals and organisations need to be aware of the existence and functions of the Crime Victims Helpline and need to have promotional material such as an information card containing telephone and website information which can be supplied to victims.

7.2 It is also important to improve the awareness levels among the general public and relevant community stakeholders of the activities of victim support organisations in local areas and the services which they can provide to victims of crime. The website of the Commission for the Support of Victims for Crime (www.csvc.ie) has a role to play with its list of funded services by county and type of service.

7.2 Initial Contact with the Gardaí.

In the initial stages, particularly after a crime is reported, victims require information from the Gardaí about the investigation (such as the contact name and details of the investigating Garda, and an incident number), the names of relevant support organisations, information on what happens when a crime is reported, and on their role and their opportunities to participate in the criminal justice process. The findings from this study would suggest however that victims are not receiving enough basic information from the Gardaí immediately after reporting the crime. 1 in 5 respondents noted that they did not receive the contact details of the investigating Garda and more than 1 in 2 of the respondents who reported a crime indicated that they did not receive the Pulse Incident Number. This information deficit can result in secondary victimisation, intensifying the harms caused by the crime and aggravating the trauma experienced by the victim. Given that the Gardaí are often one of the initial contacts following a crime, it is vital that they provide victims with relevant information on the

investigation of the crime including the name and contact details of the investigating Garda and the Pulse Incident number. The findings from the research also suggest that the Gardaí do not systematically advise victims on the support services available to them at either national or local level. More than 1 in every 2 respondents who reported a crime did not receive a contact number for a support group from the Gardaí and 6 out of every 10 respondents who reported a crime did not receive the Crime Victims Helpline number from them. These findings are supported by the observation in an earlier study prepared for the Commission for the Support of Victims of Crime which noted that ‘the perception exists among victim support groups that victims are often not aware of local support services’ (Bacik et al, 2007: 6).

In respect of these particular findings, it should also be noted that the *Framework Decision on the Standing of Victims in Criminal Proceedings*, adopted by the Council in March 2001, expressly guarantees victims of crime in EU states the right of access to relevant information, in particular as *from their first contact with the law enforcement agencies*, to the information relevant to the protection of their interests like the type of organisations that they can turn to for support. In addition, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted Recommendation Rec (2006)8 on assistance to victims of crime on the 14th June, 2006. Its provisions, *inter alia*, relate to the provision of information to victims where it notes that states ‘should ensure that victims have access to information of relevance to their case and necessary for the protection of their interests and the exercise of their rights. This information should be provided as soon as the victim comes into contact with law enforcement or criminal justice agencies or with social or health care services. All victims should be informed of the services or organisations which can provide support and the type, and where relevant, the costs of the support’.

The findings from this research suggest a relatively high rate of victim satisfaction with the sensitivity of Gardaí with roughly 7 out of every 10 respondents indicating that they were either satisfied or very satisfied with Garda sensitivity during the statement-taking process. It is significant however that the victims interviewed in our study who expressed dissatisfaction in relation to Garda sensitivity were ones who had experienced domestic violence or sexual assault or were gay. It is therefore important that the Gardaí remain constantly vigilant about their potential to cause

secondary victimisation during the statement-taking process through invasive questioning, victim-blaming attitudes (especially in relation to hate crimes, sexual offences and domestic violence), and general insensitivity to the needs of victims. The particular need for such sensitivity in relation to victims of sexual crime was noted in a previous study undertaken for the Commission for the Support of Victims of Crime: ‘An Garda Síochána should receive improved training in taking statements from victims, particularly when sexual offences are reported to them’ (Bacik et al 2007: p. 7).

Recommendations

7.3 To ensure that victim needs regarding information are met, the Gardaí should follow existing commitments set out in the Victims Charter. In particular, they should provide victims with standard information about what happens when a crime is reported (including the name and contact details of the investigating Garda, and the Pulse Incident number), the investigation process, and the various agencies involved in providing support (including the Crime Victims Helpline and other relevant victim support organisations). The Pulse letter sent to victims could also be changed to make reference to the Commission for the Support of Victims of Crime website (www.csvc.ie) — which contains information on a variety of victim services available and the contact details of relevant support organisations — and to inform victims that the Victims Charter is available on the web, and that a written copy may be received on request to the Gardaí.

7.4 To ensure a high level of sensitivity and a high standard of communication in dealings with victims, members of the Gardaí should receive training which sensitizes them to the needs of victims. It should occur as part of the initial training of Gardaí and in subsequent in-service training. It is also recommended that the number of Gay Liaison Officers should be increased and that a quota of Gardaí in all divisions should receive specialist training in dealing with vulnerable victims such as those who have experienced sexual assault or domestic violence.

7.3. The Investigation of the Crime and Support for the Victim

Information and emotional support are key needs which victims experience during the investigation stage of a crime. This section considers the role which the Gardaí, the DPP and support organisations play in meeting these needs.

The Gardaí

Victims require information from the Gardaí about the status of an on-going investigation, in particular the scheduling and progress of proceedings. In this study, a significant minority of respondents (more than 4 out of every 10) who reported a crime expressed themselves as dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the information provided during the investigation of the crime by the Gardaí.⁶ In the qualitative sections of this study, the victims interviewed expressed particular concerns about their difficulties in getting in contact with investigating Garda officers, about the failure of the Gardaí to up-date them on the status of investigations, the failure of Gardaí to return their phone-calls, their frustration at having to repeatedly contact the Gardaí to get updates on the progress of their case, and their perception that they were viewed as a nuisance when they sought this information. The need to address the lack of information available from the Gardaí at the investigation stage was also identified by some respondents when asked in the postal questionnaire to identify how the criminal justice system could be improved.

For victims, the lack of information provided by the Gardaí in relation to the progress of a case was perceived as disrespectful and as a sign that they were not being taken seriously. This breakdown in the provision of information causes further and unnecessary suffering to victims of crime, and represents a form of secondary victimisation. In addition to investigating and prosecuting crime, the Gardaí must embrace the crucial role which they play in responding to victims' needs. These needs do not relate solely to crime detection and prosecution. They also include, *inter alia*, the need for compassion, dignity, and respect; for information about the justice system

⁶ The satisfaction rating in this survey with Garda information on the status of an on-going investigation was higher than that recorded in the Garda public attitude surveys in 2007 and 2008.

and victims services; and for regular feedback on the progress of cases. Greater accommodation of victim needs may also enhance traditional Garda objectives relating to the investigation and prosecution of crime by promoting the willingness of victims to report crimes and to cooperate with crime investigations. In addition, it should be noted that Regulation 6.5 of Recommendation Rec (2006)8 on assistance to victims of crime provides that ‘States should ensure in an appropriate way that victims are kept informed and understand the outcome of their complaint [and] relevant stages in the progress of criminal proceedings’.⁷

Of those victims assigned a Family Liaison Officer, the clear majority were either satisfied or very satisfied with the relevant emotional, psychological, informational and practical support provided.

Recommendations

7.5 As provided for in the Victims Charter, victims should be kept informed by the Gardaí about the progress of an investigation. At a policy level within the Garda organisation, more attention needs to be given to the *process of communication* (including the use of texts, emails, and letters, and protocols for returning phone calls) with victims and to the *information* which ought to be provided as a matter of practice. For victims, relevant information would relate to the arrest of a suspect, station bail, any decisions by the Gardaí not to prosecute a suspect, the initiation of criminal proceedings, any decision by the Gardaí to oppose bail in court, any court decision on bail where the Gardaí have opposed it, any court conditions that may attach to a suspect’s bail which relate to the victim, court dates, and the results of court appearances.

⁷ Regard should also be had to the *Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power* adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1985. The document is not legally binding but does set out minimum standards for the treatment of victims of crime. It has been described as providing “a benchmark for victim-friendly legislation and policies.” (Van Dijk 2005: 202). Article 6 establishes some key ways in which the judicial and administrative processes can respond to the needs of victims, in particular by the provision of information on “their role and the scope, timing and progress of the proceedings and of the disposition of their cases.”

7.6 This information should be provided within specified timescales and information should also be given to victims about available options to raise their concerns when they believe that they have not been provided with all relevant information by the Gardaí.

7.7 If the Gardaí determine that there will be no investigation into a crime, they should notify the victim of this fact as soon as possible.

The Director of Public Prosecutions

It is clear from this study that communication between the DPP's office and victims, particularly on decisions not to prosecute or to charge a lesser offence, needs to be improved. Overall most participants in the research concluded that contact with the office of the DPP was not relevant to them (i.e. the offence was not reported, the case did not go to trial, it was a minor offence tried in the District Court). Though the majority of relevant respondents to the questionnaire indicated that they were satisfied with the DPP's office, a significant minority expressed dissatisfaction for reasons such as the downgrading of charges, the absence of a prosecutor at the sentencing hearing, the failure to give reasons for a decision not to prosecute, and poor standards of communication with victims.

7.8 It is recommended that the DPP's 'Reasons Project', which is currently in pilot phase, and provides for the families of victims of crime involving a death, to be furnished with reasons for decisions not to prosecute, should be utilised to examine whether the giving of such reasons should or could be made standard practice for other victims.

Support Organisations

This research had clearly highlighted the very positive contribution which victim support organisations make in assisting victims of crime and meeting their needs. Respondents to the victim survey indicated that they were generally very happy with the services provided by their support organisations. Victims commented very positively on the positive attitude of support workers. In particular victims appreciated

the fact that crimes generally considered less serious were nevertheless taken seriously by support workers. Over three quarters of respondents reported good levels of satisfaction with the helplines provided by organisations.

It is also clear from the research that the Crime Victims Helpline is effective in meeting the needs of victims who contact it. They receive a sympathetic hearing and gain support and important information and referrals from helpline staff. However, this very positive role played currently by the Crime Victims Helpline needs to be reinforced by effective communication between itself and those organisations it refers clients onto.

The promptness of support organisations in providing an initial response to victims was rated very highly with over 90% of respondents rating response rates as satisfactory or very satisfactory. In total, three quarters of respondents reported that they accessed support services immediately (13.8%), within days (32.1%) or weeks (29.9%) of experiencing a crime. Nearly a third of participants contacted their support organisation only 1 or 2 times while over half contacted it 5 or more times. The most common services availed of by victims were information and counselling and emotional support.

In terms of the needs of victims of crime and their families, it would seem from the findings that clarification should be provided at the outset as to the distinction between the peer counselling and support on the one hand, and professional counselling on the other. The type of counselling on offer in many services (i.e. peer counselling and support) is not always sufficient and the victim may have a need for more specialised peer counselling or indeed for professional counselling.

The possibility of confusion not only for victims but for community stakeholders trying to assist victims was also highlighted. This can arise because of the multiplicity of organisations providing assistance to victims of crime, giving an impression of fragmented and sometimes overlapping service provision where victims and community stakeholders are uncertain about the identities and roles of the various support organisations. Such a finding reinforces the need for greater cooperation

between existing groups and a single, clearly established focal point of reference for all victims groups.

Respondents to the victim survey were also generally happy with the geographical proximity of support services, but it is important to note that the respondents were victims who accessed services. There may be victims who were unable to access services because of a lack of geographical proximity. However, they were not represented in the survey. One problem highlighted in this area is the fact that more specialised services may be less generally available geographically. Thus victims with particular needs or profiles may be forced to travel further afield in order to access these specialised organisations. It should also be pointed out that the geographic spread of offences in this survey does not reflect the geographical spread of offences more generally. This suggests that service organisations are not distributed proportionately having regard to the geographical distribution of crime. Dublin, in particular, appears to be underrepresented in relation to the prevalence of crime.

The preponderance of female respondents in our survey is very high (even allowing for the greater prevalence of female victims for some offences), indicating that men are not availing of the services offered by support organisations to the same extent as women. Some victims raised very specific concerns relating to the nature of their experiences including the failure of support organisations to cater for male victims' needs.

Some professionals/ community workers questioned whether less serious crimes are well serviced by the current system. The general service providers have perhaps been less successful than domestic violence or sexual assault organisations at raising their organisational profiles, thus leading to a perception that less serious offences are not well provided for.

Some professionals/community organisation workers also noted the importance of the need for specialised and effective services to be made available to women and children. This is particularly the case in relation to crimes such as domestic violence and sexual assault where victims are less likely to turn to the Gardaí for assistance.

Recommendations

7.9 Cooperation between the Crime Victim Helpline and the organisations it refers victims to should be strengthened through the development of a more formal cooperation and referral system, which should include specific agreements and protocols between organisations on issues such as the sharing of information, and how referrals are made and followed up.

7.10 On first contact by a victim support organisation with a victim of crime, there should be a clear communication of the name of the individual and the organisation which he or she represents. If contact is face to face, actual identification should be shown to the victim, preferably backed up with a leaflet or card which the victim can keep.

7.11 A review should be undertaken of more specialised services to assess the geographical coverage of these services.

7.12 Efforts to increase the spread of general services to victims of crime should continue.

7.13 Support organisations should provide clear and appropriate information to their clients relating to counselling services and emotional support services.

7.14. Efforts should be made to encourage male victims of crime to access the services of support organisations.

7.4 The Court Process and Compensation

It is clear from this study that the communication of information between the court system and victims regarding the timing of hearings, adjournments and decision making needs to be improved.

The research has also highlighted that victims need to be treated with dignity and respect by the legal system and the judiciary. It is clear that there is an important extra dimension to the purely legal role of the judiciary. Victims reported that practices such as the summarising of the issues at the outset of a case or the censuring of the defendant can be enormously significant and beneficial to the victim irrespective of the strictly legal outcome of the case. Equally the use of inappropriate references and language can unintentionally have an adverse effect on the victim's experience of the process.

This research indicates that the structure of courtrooms and the scheduling of their lists can impact on the experience of victims. Victims consistently reported that they found courtrooms to be intimidating and confusing environments. Factors such as the seemingly chaotic natures of call over of lists, frequent adjournments and poor audibility and seating arrangements in courtrooms contributed to the intimidation experienced by some victims. The lack of a separate waiting venue for victims also caused distress to some victims who participated in the study. In this regard, it should be noted that the *Framework Decision on the Standing of Victims in Criminal Proceedings* expressly notes that 'a suitable level of protection for crime victims and their families' should be provided by all EU member states'.

The findings also clearly point to the distress which insensitive and inaccurate media reportage can cause for victims and their families.

The research found a significantly low level of take up of reimbursement of expenses and compensation by victims. This is surprising given that the Victims Charter commits the Gardaí to informing victims of their 'entitlement to court expenses'. Moreover, the *Framework Decision on the Standing of Victims in Criminal Proceedings*, which outlines the minimum rights to be ensured for all victims in the EU, provides that victims have a right to have legal costs refunded when they are parties or witnesses in the criminal proceedings. In terms of the aims of the study and specifically the needs of victims of crime and their families, it would seem important to ensure that all expenses, incurred as a result of attendance at court as a witness, are easily claimed and rapidly reimbursed to victims. This should include reimbursement for cost of attendance to cover relatives who are not witnesses at least in the case of

homicide. It is important that the Gardaí systematically inform victims of their rights to the reimbursement of expenses.

Overall the findings also show that the vast majority of respondents to the survey had little experience in receiving compensation either through the Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal or under a section 6 compensation order as provided for under the Criminal Justice Act 1993. In this regard it should be noted that the European Commission issued a proposal for a Council Directive on Compensation to Crime Victims to reduce the disparities in the compensation schemes of various member States. The Council adopted this Directive on the 29th of April, 2004. It was designed to ensure that by the 1st of July 2005, each member state would have a national scheme in place, which guarantees fair and appropriate compensation to victims of crime. Secondly, the Directive ensures that compensation is *easily accessible* in practice regardless of where in the EU a person becomes the victim of a crime.

Recommendations

7.15 The structure of courtrooms and the processing of the lists of cases should be reviewed with regard to utilising space in the best way possible. In the case of *in camera* hearings which could potentially take place in smaller venues, consideration should be given to using smaller, less intimidating settings. This would also have the effect of freeing up larger venues and would ensure a more effective overall use of courtrooms and hence reduce delays. Better audibility and seating arrangements for all should be provided, and all courtrooms should in future be designed or upgraded with this in mind. The option of a separate waiting room for victims should be provided in all cases but its utilisation should remain a matter of their choice.

7.16 The support organisations should use the Court Service's bi-annual meetings of regional user panels to highlight concerns of victims and work towards practical ways of improving the situation. Good practice solutions arising from this process in one region should be copied in other regions.

7.17 Training for judiciary and legal professionals on sensitivity to communication and language issues in relation to victims should be provided.

7.18 It is recommended that the Press Council should develop a code of practice around court reportage with special reference to the concerns of victims, but covering the legitimate concerns of those accused of crime/offenders also.

7.19 Information on the systems available for the reimbursement of court expenses should be provided by the Gardaí on a systematic basis to victims of crime.

7.20 The reimbursement for cost of attendance at court should be extended to cover relatives who are not witnesses, at least in homicide cases.

7.21 Victim support organisations should provide information to victims of crime on the mechanisms available for claiming compensation under the Criminal Injuries Compensation scheme and through the imposition of a compensation order by the court.

7.5 Sentencing/post sentencing

The research revealed the positive experience that providing a Victim Impact Statement can be for victims. Victims feel better supported if they have the opportunity to voice the impact the crime has had on them. A key theme brought out in interviews in relation to the victim impact statement was the sense of closure that the process could provide for victims. However, the uncertain nature of the opportunity to give a statement for homicide offences troubled a number of participants in the research. Victims also require clear and standardised guidance on what can be contained within the statement, and this should be made available to them before they commence the writing-up process.

Victims raised a number of concerns in relation to the lack of information related to the treatment of offenders post-sentencing. In particular, information relating to parole, prison release dates, and any compassionate release needs to be provided to victims. Concern about the reappearance of an offender back into the community requires that information on post-sentencing is effectively developed and conveyed.

Victims expressed strong views about the way offenders were treated following their conviction often identifying them as being better treated than victims. These perceptions reinforce the idea that the purposes of the sentencing, prison and post-sentence system appear skewed in favour of the offender and against the interests of the victim.

Recommendations

7.22 Consideration should be given to abolishing the discretionary role judges have in relation to the giving of Victim Impact Statements in homicide cases. In this regard, the Criminal Procedure Bill 2009, which proposes *inter alia* to extend the entitlement to adduce victim impact evidence to family members of homicide victims, is to be welcomed.

7.23 Clear guidance should be given in good time to victims who are entitled to make Victim Impact Statements so that they know what may and may not be included in their statements.

7.24 Victims of serious crime should be informed of the possibility of ‘opting in’ to receive notification of periods of temporary release and the prisoner’s final discharge date from the Victim Liaison Officer in the Irish Prison Service.

7.6 General Recommendations

This research highlighted a range of issues which hinder the compilation of accurate information on the numbers and characteristics of victims who utilise the services of support organisations. Our engagement with the support organisations revealed a range of practices in relation to data collection and record keeping. While it is understandable that systematic data collection and record keeping would not be a

priority for organisations with limited resources and a primary focus on the provision of direct victim support, the absence of such data inhibits the compilation of a detailed overview of the extent and nature of the support services availed of by victims and of the characteristics of these victims. Compilation of such information on an annual basis would allow for more sensitive analysis of the scale and nature of service provision by organisations and of the characteristics and needs of victims. Longitudinal data of this nature could underpin and guide future service development and delivery.

7.25 To address this information deficit it is recommended that a standardized record-keeping template be developed by the Commission for the Support of Victims of Crime for use by all organisations who receive funding from the Commission.

One continuous thread emerging throughout the research is the need for the criminal justice system to prevent, as far as possible, the risk of repeat victimisation of victims. Victims concerns about intimidation and further harassment should be taken seriously at all stages of the process. Indeed the *Framework Decision on the Standing of Victims in Criminal Proceedings* requires, as a minimum standard, that a suitable level of protection is provided for crime victims and their families. Measures which may help to guard against such repeat victimisation include, among other things, efficient Garda responses to crime particularly in cases concerned with domestic violence; speedy arrests where appropriate; information on safe places to stay; communication of decisions on bail to victims; secure victim waiting areas in court; the removal of long delays in relation to the prosecution of crime (i.e. court adjournments etc); consideration of the ways in which intimidation in the courtroom can be minimised; the proper enforcement of safety and protection orders; and the provision of information on parole and release dates.

The lack of knowledge and understanding of the criminal justice system by victims was also highlighted in the findings of this study. This lack of understanding relates to issues such as the roles of the various agencies involved in the criminal justice system, the different types of courts, the different classifications of crime, the reporting process, legal representation, admissibility of evidence, charge and arrest,

bail, pleas, cross-examination, victim impact statements, sentencing, appeals, parole, compensation, and the differences between civil and criminal cases. Having limited knowledge about aspects of the legal process resulted in a range of difficulties for victims. Some reported that they made decisions about whether or not to proceed with cases without having a clear understanding of the implications of their decisions. For others their lack of knowledge resulted in confusion about what they expected of the justice system and disappointment with what it provided, particularly in relation to their roles and rights in the context of trials. Fundamentally victims' lack of knowledge constitutes a need in relation to accessing information about the criminal justice system and the agencies involved in it. This need has in fact been recognised by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. In Recommendation Rec (2006)8 on assistance to victims of crime, it is provided that 'States should ensure in an appropriate way that victims are kept informed and understand the outcome of their complaint, relevant stages in the progress of criminal proceedings, the verdict of the competent court and, where relevant, the sentence'.

7.26 To ensure that all victims have access to knowledge of the legal and criminal justice system it is recommended that a single website be organised in a manner which amalgamates in a single space the variety of handbooks and materials that have been produced by government bodies, criminal justice agencies and voluntary organisations. It should include literature such as the Court Service's booklet, entitled *Going to Court: a DVD and booklet for young witnesses*, the DPP's booklets entitled, *Attending Court as a Witness*, and *Brief Guide to the Criminal Justice System* (available on the website only), the 'criminal offences' 'criminal trial' and 'victims of crime' sections of the citizens information website, and an updated version of the Victims' Charter. Details of the website should be disseminated in a manner designed to reach as many victims of crime as possible. It should, for example, be made available to the DPP, the Gardaí, victim support organisations, relevant community organisations, libraries, GPs, hospitals, and citizens information services.