

LAW ENFORCEMENT MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE

IMPLICATIONS OF VICTIM RIGHTS  
ON LAW ENFORCEMENT

A Research Contract  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for  
The Management Institute

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August, 1991



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## INTRODUCTION

Life is not like television. On T.V., when there is a murder, the offender is arraigned and brought to trial within 15 minutes. Within an hour, the defendant has been tried, convicted and sent to prison for the rest of his life. But life is not like that.

In real life, under the terms of the American system of justice, the victim of violent crime is expected to disappear. The victim's possessions are taken for use someday, as evidence. The victim may sit for weeks on a bench outside a courtroom, ordered to appear as a witness, but often not given the right to attend the trial. The victim is seldom consulted about deals struck with the offender.

The victim of violent crime thinks that his attack was a crime against his or her person. But our system says that a crime against the individual is a crime against the State. So, while criminals have a whole raft of constitutional rights, victims are left out in the cold. In some jurisdictions, victims have been forgotten by the system of justice.

The forgotten person in American criminal justice, the crime victim, has received enormous attention over the past decade. For many people, the treatment accorded the crime victim symbolizes everything that is wrong with the criminal justice system.<sup>1</sup> There has been increasing concern that the victim is forgotten, an outsider in the criminal justice system. Victims have reported contempt with the system because they do not receive any information about what is going on.

A survey taken in California in 1976 found that forty-two percent of crime victims were never told what the outcome was in their cases; sixty-one percent of the victims who qualified for state compensation were never told of their rights to file a claim; thirty-percent never had any of their personal property returned after being used as evidence in a criminal proceeding; and twelve-percent were never notified whether an arrest was made in their cases.<sup>2</sup> Typically, the crime victim never hears from the police once the initial report is taken. Even when victims are witnesses, little is done to assist with their needs.

In the past decade and a half, and especially in more recent years, the voices of victims of crimes and their advocates have been increasingly raised. Those involved in the movement demand that attention focus not only on the defendant in a criminal case, but also on the victim.

The Victims Rights Movement embraces one of the basic conservative assumptions; the "System" protects the guilty rather than the innocent. Guilty people "beat the system" and "get off easy". The most controversial victims' rights beliefs attack constitutional protections for criminal defendants and build in some protections, or rights, for victims.<sup>3</sup>

When organization referred to do not understand  
but when reference is to a specific document<sup>4</sup>  
like a task force report it should be included.

#### HISTORY

In 1982, the Presidents' Task Force on Victims of Crime, Final Report told a horrid story about a 50 year old rape victim who was subject to numerous abuses by the criminal justice system:

There was an indifferent and ineffective attempt at preventing threatening phone calls to the victim by her attacker from jail, an inconvenient scheduling of line-ups, unethical activities by defense counsel, repeated failures by the prosecutor to inform the victim about her role in hearings and the trial and to promptly notify her about postponements, the emotional and financial burden of delays in the process on the victim and the short sentence that was eventually imposed on the rapist.<sup>4</sup>

This is indeed a ludicrous story and somewhat incredible to anyone acquainted with criminal law practice. The story is, however, an example of all that could possibly go wrong in the process, and as such may lead to some insights as to possible problems and has led to victims rights proposals and laws.<sup>5</sup>

Concern for the victim originally took the form of victim's compensation statutes in the early and mid-sixties. The first state to adopt legislation in regard to the concern of the crime victim was California. In 1965, California created a compensation plan for victims. By the mid-seventies many more states had adopted such programs.

The first law to be passed by Texas dealing with the area of victim's rights was the Crime Victims Compensation Act in 1979. The compensation fund is administered by the Texas Industrial Accident Board and provides payment for medical bills, loss of past and future earnings, care of minor children, funeral expenses and loss of support. All payments are subject to restrictions found in the act, thus, those involved in law enforcement should acquaint themselves with the act to learn what these restrictions are. The act also provides for the referral of the victim to a state agency for vocational or rehabilitative services and for the provision of counseling for victims. Local law enforcement agencies must inform injured victims of crime about the act and provide application forms to victims who want the assistance provided by the act.

Legislation has been enacted at both the federal and state level. As of 1985, at least nine states had adopted preventive detention laws and thirty-one states had enacted laws incorporating the reforms recommended by the President's task force -- those laws include mandatory notification to victims of case status, victim impact statements, assurance of prompt return of property, protection of the victim from intimidation and harassment, and provisions for restitution.

Federally, we now have the Victim and Witness Protection Act of 1982, the Comprehensive Crime Control Act of 1984 and the Victims of Crime Act which establishes a fund that matches forty percent of the amounts paid by states in victim compensation awards.

Since the creation of the President's Task Force on Victims of Crime in 1982, much progress has been made toward addressing the needs of crime victims. Texas, like nearly all other states, has initiated a crime victim compensation program, adopted a crime victim bill of rights, and passed legislation requiring that a victim impact statement be included in the criminal justice process.

The 68th Legislature, recognizing the need to recommend solutions to the sentencing problems in the state, established the Commission on Sentencing Practices and Procedures in 1983. In its summary, the commission called upon the state to enact policies designed to bring the victim into the sentencing process. Important information about the seriousness of an offense is available only from the person most affected by the crime -- the crime victim.

Tracking, in part, the federal guidelines for fair treatment of crime victim's and witnesses in the criminal justice system, the Texas Crime Victim Bill of Rights detail

these limited rights for victims:

1. the right to receive from law enforcement agencies adequate protection from harm and threats arising from cooperation with prosecution efforts;
2. the right to have the magistrate take the safety of the victim or his family into consideration in setting the amount of bail;
3. the right, if requested, to be informed of relevant court proceedings, cancellations and rescheduling;
4. the right to be informed, when requested, of procedures in the investigative process by law enforcement and of procedures in the criminal justice system, including general procedures in plea negotiations by the district attorney's office;
5. the right to provide pertinent information to a probation department conducting a presentencing investigation concerning the impact of the offense on the victim and his family, prior to any sentencing of the offender;
6. the right to receive information regarding compensation and , when requested, the referral to available social services;
7. the right to be notified, if requested, of parole proceedings concerning a defendant in the victim's

cause and to provide to the Board of Pardons and Paroles, for inclusion in the defendant's file, information to be considered by the board prior to parole;

8. the right to be present at all public court proceedings related to the offense, subject to the approval of the judge in the case.

In 1985, the 69th Legislature passed the Texas Crime Victim Bill of Rights to provide crime victims with rights to information, referral, and involvement in the criminal justice system. The Texas Crime Victim Bill of Rights is patterned after model federal legislation. As stated previously, one of the rights of the crime victim is to receive information about the Texas Crime Victim Compensation Fund which was created by the legislature in 1979. The district or county attorney's office is given the duty to ensure, to the extent practicable, that the victim's rights are enforced.

The 70th Legislature passed legislation that stipulates that the victim be notified of the release of the inmate to mandatory supervision and of a favorable decision for parole review. This legislation also addressed the issue of confidentiality of the Victim Impact Statement in records at the Texas Department of Corrections and at the Parole Board.

By 1988, 46 states offered compensation to crime victims and their survivors; up from 37 in 1982. Payments to crime victims totaled approximately 50 million in 1982. In 1987, the total allocated by the Federal Crime Victims Fund alone was 77 million to help states compensate victims and their families. In addition, during the past decade, numerous national groups have been formed to assist victims as well as to help prevent victimization.

### IMPLICATIONS ON LAW ENFORCEMENT

It has been suggested that many of the laws enacted on behalf of the victims do not actually help the victims but that the creation of the legislation just generates other problems in the implementation.

Victim assistance programs, whether they are independently operated or sponsored by law enforcement, are feeling the impact of the increased police arrests in cases of domestic violence and increased reports of child abuse and sexual assault with workload increases.

In a survey administered by the National Institute of Justice Research in Action, the majority of victim assistance programs reported increased referrals, improvements in interagency coordination, and a better public understanding of victim's needs. Sixty-four percent of the police departments and fifty-five percent of the sheriffs reported that domestic violence arrests have increased workloads. Victim assistance programs administered by police and sheriffs tend to give priority to victims of sex crimes and domestic violence.

Other factors which have contributed to increased workloads are an increase in the number of victims filing charges, an increase in the number of crimes reported, and an increase in referrals.

Also recognized is the problem of increased responsibility placed on law enforcement for providing information to victims and then following up to ensure that the information was communicated. Legislation to facilitate the implementation of victim-witness units could lead to improved relations between victims and the criminal justice system. Improved relations between victims and the criminal justice system could begin with the police. About one fourth of the survey referred to earlier indicated that the police were their primary source for information.

A lack of understanding of victims' needs is causing responsibility to be given to law enforcement to provide more training, utilize better time management, or increase staff in order to provide specialized assistance to the needs of the victim. Crime victims need a wide variety of services in the aftermath of trauma and throughout the criminal justice process.

As we continue to have victims of specialized crimes, our training and ways of dealing with these victims are going to have to be improved. We as police are now experiencing types of crime and racial/ethnic diversity never dealt with prior to the last decade. Our minority populations are shifting to the point that soon we will have no ethnic majority. The numbers of our hispanic and black populations are increasing steadily and creating racial conflict of a very different type.

With the increase of the Asian population, we also report an increase in the number of Asians that are being educated and obtaining professional jobs. These new increases are creating a true conflict between the Asian and black communities.

Our knowledge and understanding of the Asian people is an external pressure that has been placed on law enforcement. How do we communicate with a people whose heritage fosters a mistrust of the police. We have to begin cross-cultural training to deal with their attitudes regarding police. As victims, there is no cooperation since witnesses and victims cannot be properly interviewed. This only represents the contact with the people who are actually reporting their crimes to the police. How many more are going unreported because of this distrust?

Recruitment is another major problem in this area since Asians do not feel that law enforcement is a professional job. We must begin to improve relations through cross-cultural training so that we can better understand the problems that exist. Liaisons need to be established with the Asian leaders and translators need to be utilized.

As we continue to watch the increase of gang activity, we are seeing new battlegrounds in many parts of the country which have not seen them before or only in small ways. Victims of gang warfare are for the most part uncooperative with police. The turf battles and killings-for-no-reason are stemming from the increase in narcotics traffic. With the evolution of "Crack" cocaine we have seen more bizarre crimes than ever before and a specialized victim.

Attacks on teachers are up 700% nationwide, the suicide rate among young people has doubled since 1969 and we are experiencing an increase in the number of sexual attacks on young girls. Our young people are becoming less educated and have a much greater chance of becoming victims of crime.

How do we teach our kids non-violence when there is more graphic display of violence on television than ever before? We must begin cooperation of all aspects of the public, from law enforcement to teachers to parents. Narcotics have caused us to believe that crime and therefore the victims of crime are everyone's problems.

Our country is a great country because of its people. We must begin to have a vision and try something different. We in law enforcement must become innovative. We have to realize the importance of our young people and then through training seek to improve community relations. It's time to get back to basics and through innovative law enforcement --help our victims of crime.

What are the legal issues surrounding victims' rights in Texas courts? There is no sound legal basis for asserting that a victim's family has any recognized right to testify in a criminal trial. Or so ruled a majority of the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals, the highest criminal court in Texas, last spring in reversing a murder conviction in Harris County. The court went on to call the prosecutor's argument that a murder victim's mother should have a right to testify, "frivolous".<sup>notes</sup>

On March 9th, the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals reversed Gregory Stahl's murder conviction because the mother of the victim while testifying that a morgue photo was that of her dead son, cried out in an outburst directed at the defendant. The trial judge immediately removed the jury and instructed them to disregard this outburst. The appellate court nonetheless reversed the case for prosecutorial misconduct since the prosecutor had ample knowledge of the mother's likely behavior. The court ruled that he should have known better than to permit the jury to see and hear a grief stricken mother identify her son's dead body in a photograph.

The criminal justice system was originally intended to protect innocent citizens from criminals and to vindicate the victim's rights. The Texas court's position that a victim's

If you have citation would be good to put it in end note

right to testify is a frivolous notion is not shared by the United State Supreme Court.

In a 1983 decision, then Chief Justice Warren Burger told this nation's courts that in the administration of criminal justice, courts may not ignore the concerns of the victim. In that case, the Supreme Court balanced the possible harm done to the defendant by the trial court's refusal to grant him a continuance against the harm to the victim in having to go through the affliction of yet another trial and held that the rights and interests of society and the victim outweighed any potential harm to the defendant. All governments must protect the citizens who obey the law as well as those who break it. Indeed, victims are not legal parties to a criminal lawsuit. Although the rights of the state in a criminal trial can be no greater than the rights of a single person within that society, they can be no less either. Both the U. S. Constitution and the Texas Constitution explicitly grant due process rights to "All Persons".

Our constitution covers the good people who abide by the law as well as those who break it. Our courts are mistaken when they say that our crime victims have no due process rights, but this is what we are relaying to our victims of crime when we are telling them that they cannot testify in court if they are too emotional.

When will we see the cessation of crime if we keep the citizens and victims out of the courtroom? Are we not making our citizens prisoners in their own homes? This issue of victims' rights in the courtrooms of Texas is still undecided. We must look to the Texas Constitution to interpret due-process and change must happen.

In correlation with this issue is the right of the crime victim to be notified of parole proceedings concerning a defendant in the victim's case and to attend or provide a written statement to be considered for a parolee's release. We are creating laws which are very difficult at best to comply with. We now have a paperwork nightmare in which there are so many different forms to be completed that they cannot all even be reviewed. The information contained in the victim impact statements is not being adequately considered by the appropriate decision makers in the process. Even if the parole board is advised, very seldom do members of the parole board meet to discuss these issues. The majority of the business of the parole board is conducted by mail. It is safe to say that the victim impact statement has had a negligible influence on the process. There is little doubt that the grave concerns raised by the prison overcrowding crisis have contributed to this situation. Again we are looking at

victims' rights vs. defendants' rights. Who is to decide this? These are the legal issues that continue to be unanswered and undecided. The net result is a criminal justice system that does not truly represent the interests of the people of Texas.

## TODAY'S ISSUES

Although a great deal of progress has been made in victim assistance during the past several years, new challenges face the system. Many of the services and proposals designed to help crime victims actually turn out to hurt them. We have reached a high level of basic services for victims; however, society is becoming more and more complex and the issues confronting crime victims ever more complicated.

Important to the victim's right issue is how the degree of harm inflicted on the victim affects the criminal justice decisions in court. "Victim Harm" makes up the total effect of victimization which includes physical injury, psychological trauma and financial loss. Some levels of this harm are measurable, but the psychological effects and lasting trauma are harder to assess.

Victim harm is not only doctor bills, broken limbs, and lost property but is also fear and shame, anger and frustration, depression and despair. Many in the criminal justice system are trying to achieve a more balance approach in the treatment of victims. There are few areas in the processing of a case where the victims themselves can tell the criminal justice system the types and extent of harm inflicted

upon them. The prosecutors can obtain useful information from police reports, medical reports, and thorough conversations with the victim to assist in making decisions about a case. Judges have reported that the presentence investigation report is the most useful information source about victim harm. These reports are received by the judge after being obtained and filtered through a prosecutor or probation department. A victim impact statement is a formal document attached to the presentence investigation report which assists the judge in selecting a sentence. The statement usually describes the extent of the injury to the victim, the assessment of the effect the crime had on the victim's life, and sometimes contains the victim's opinion about sentencing.

This year, almost six million Americans will become victims of violent crime. People think the victim's nightmare ends when the crime is over. For some, the shock and pain of what they may face at the hands of our criminal justice system can be as painful as the initial crime. This is sometimes referred to as the "Second Assault". By receiving more information, it is hoped that victims will have better communication with the criminal justice professionals and that victims' degree of satisfaction will improve. If successful, then the second victimization will not occur.

Victims who do survive their attacks, and are brave enough to come forward, turn to their government expecting it to do what a good government should -- protect the innocent. The American justice system is absolutely dependent upon these victims to cooperate. Without the cooperation of victims and witnesses in reporting and testifying about crime, it is impossible in a free society to hold criminals accountable. When victims come forward to perform this vital service, however, they find little protection. They discover instead that they will be treated as appendages of a system out of balance. They learn that somewhere along the way the system has lost track of the simple truth that it is supposed to be fair and to protect those who obey the law while punishing those who break it. Somewhere along the way, the system began to serve lawyers and judges and defendants, treating the victim with institutionalized disinterest.<sup>6</sup>

The findings of the President's Task Force on Victims of Crime revealed a system of justice that often re-victimized those it was designed to protect. Most victims and witnesses are important primarily because they are the best evidence in a criminal case. Some victims may be asked to participate at times without compensation and without reimbursement. They may be placed on the witness stand to testify with little or no preparation and may never be informed of the case outcome. Victims who have already experienced crime may not report a

crime to police, may refuse to cooperate with prosecutors and may avoid telling their loved ones about their victimization. When the victim is stigmatized by the criminal justice system as well as society in general we have what is called by some as the "Second Assault".

Friends and neighbors may blame him for the victimization -- seeking a way to distinguish his plight from their own weaknesses. If he is to blame, then it is understandable that he was victimized; they will not be victimized since they would not precipitate such retribution for their stupidities. Rapes, murders and assaults are presumed not to happen to "good" people.

By contemplating the direct and secondary injuries inflicted on victims, the services and rights to which victims are beginning to lay claim become more understandable. It was in 1983 with the realization that compensation alone could not deal with victim's lingering physical and psychological injuries - nor the "Second Assault" of having to navigate the seeming maze of unfamiliar legal jargon and procedure constituting our criminal justice system - that the 69th Legislature passed a house bill which became the Texas Crime Victim Bill of Rights to afford crime victims certain rights.

Approximately 95% of all cases in Texas are settled by plea bargaining. Plea bargaining is an important tool and without it, our court system would come to a halt. While plea bargaining frees up the courts by alleviating the necessity for lengthy trials, it also eliminates the need for the victim's testimony, and in the process, robs the victim of a voice. It is still too early to entirely know what impact the victims' rights movement has had on the criminal justice system but with the limited review, I believe it is very little. In fact, the full power of the Victims Bill of Rights will not be realized until the criminal justice system itself cures the complex, backlogged procedures. However, the need for the Victims Bill of Rights is evident given the troubled state of the criminal justice system, the growing lack of public confidence in it, the continuing low percentage of crimes that are reported, and the rising rate of violent crime.

Unlike many beliefs about crime, assessments of risk are personal and concrete, and related to behavior. They are judgements people make about how crime problems threaten them. While beliefs about crime trends and their causes can be abstract and are often unrelated to experience, assessments of risk are evaluations of the reality of the threat of crime.<sup>7</sup>

The concept of "fear of crime" is a perception of how much crime people believe is around them. It is based on how people perceive the risk or probability of them becoming a victim. Risks are perceived greater by certain individuals and groups of people. Some are those who in the past have experienced personal contact with crime, or know someone who has. Women and elderly are two groups who believe that they are likely to be more at risk.

In our last census, the population over 60 years of age had one of the largest increases in numbers. The demographics show that America is growing older. The elderly now have increased fear that they will become a victim of crime as well as a statistic on a report. Elderly are more frequently becoming victims because of their less resistance. They are now victims of con games or fraud, domestic violence, and sexual assaults. Our parents and grandparents now hold 33% of all financial holdings in the United States and 40% of all owned real estate. More elderly are becoming the victim of what is know as "Granny bashing". This is more widely known and reported as elderly domestic violence. Children of the elderly are allowing them to live with them so that the children can obtain the wealth that their older counterparts now control. These abuses and crimes have lead to mandatory reporting of elderly abuse and confidentiality of those reporting.

Females continue to be more likely to become victims because they are more powerless to resist if they are assaulted and they are also exposed to more traumatic physical and emotional consequences. Perceived risk is strongly related to community crime, victimization rates, and how crime is presented by the media.

Fear levels increase with city size as do crime rates. However, because urban dwellers have many reasons to evidence other concerns, they may as a result register high on measure of worry or unease about crime.<sup>8</sup>

This fear of crime has resulted in the formation of some neighborhood vigilante groups who actively patrol their areas looking for crime and yet in other instances caused some to become prisoners of their fear. This is observed by barred windows, increase in home security systems, and an increase in handgun training and more handgun purchases.

We must continue to explore the implications of A.I.D.S. for victims of crime to ensure that victims are not forgotten in the public debate surrounding this issue. Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (A.I.D.S.) is a very complex disease that attacks the immune system, leaving victims vulnerable to various infections and diseases. High risk groups for A.I.D.S. include homosexual and bisexual males; intravenous drug users, their sexual partners; and children born to women with A.I.D.S. Although a relatively new disease, A.I.D.S. is spreading rapidly. A test for the A.I.D.S. antibody is available to evaluate exposure although it cannot indicate if an exposed individual will develop A.I.D.S.

A.I.D.S. is a private disease with confidential protections to prevent discovery by other persons. Should not a victim of a sexual assault have the right to know that his attacker has A.I.D.S.? How do we address the criminal applications of transmitting A.I.D.S. to an innocent victim? In trying to provide for the rights of a victim who has been infected with A.I.D.S. from a carrier, we must seek to provide for both. At this point -- both become victims of our society and as such require special care.

Medical care for victims of A.I.D.S. in our state correctional facilities is becoming unrealistic and out of reach. One solution would be the premature release of offenders back into the community from which they came. Society will then be re-victimized again. There is no cure and no treatment at this time, and no simple solutions to the problems facing law enforcement.

## CONCLUSION

The criminal justice system was originally intended to protect innocent citizens from criminals and to vindicate the victim's rights. Even though legislation has been enacted which attempts to safeguard victims' rights, how did we get to a point where our courts now believe that victims do not even have a right to be heard in criminal trials? The scales of justice must be balanced to protect those who suffer from crime as well as those who commit crime. In a recent Supreme Court decision the harm done possibly to the defendant was balanced by the trial court's refusal to grant him a continuance against the harm to the victim. They held that the rights and interests of society and the victim outweighed any potential harm to the defendant.

A society that protects only the accused and never the accuser violates the first premise of good government. All governments must protect the citizens who obey the law as well as those who break it.

For far too long, the Criminal Justice System recognized the rights of defendants, defense attorneys, prosecutors, and judges -- everyone except victims who were often treated with indifference and neglect.

As the victims' rights movement matures and has more and more of an impact on the lives of victims, this is the time to see how far we have come and to realize that there is still much to accomplish in the future. We must continue to improve the services that are offered to victims to ensure that not one goes through this traumatic experience alone.

The progress of the victims movement over the past several years is evidence that criminal justice in this nation has entered a new era -- one of commitment to the rights of the innocent, law abiding victims of crime.<sup>9</sup>

Without question, the best thing that can be done for victims and potential victims is to reduce the level of predatory crime in the United States. Our crime victim's bill of rights is important and has done much to strengthen the victims' confidence but at this point it is not working as efficiently as hoped. The problems arising from the programs are increasing just as much as new victims of crime.<sup>10</sup>

Emphasis on Crime victim rights alone will not work, but it will certainly help those that have become victims endure the pain, fear and even the "Second Assault" of the criminal justice system.

We must reduce the rate of crime in order to really help the crime victims which will in turn reduce the fear of crime. Less crime and crime victims has to become the goal of our society and through our communities we can make our country great again.

We must re-establish the sense of trust and dignity to the lives of our citizens.

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