



THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN

Children as Victims of Crime

It is easy to overlook the effects of crime on children. The high level of crime committed by children and young people colours our view, and we overlook the effects of crime on them.

Victim Support in Bedfordshire undertook, on behalf of the National Association of Victim Support Schemes and the Home Office, a two year project spanning 1988-90. We considered the effect of crime on those under the age of seventeen. We also assessed their needs and the best ways of responding to them and this has resulted in a training and information package for other Victim Support schemes throughout the country. Many schemes now include this new area of work and others are preparing to do so.

The project did not look at any form of domestic child abuse but did include sexual offences committed by non family/home members.

Initially work was undertaken, with parental consent, with some children by the project worker. We rapidly moved into working with parents and children together, and finally the emphasis was on parents working with their own children, with Victim Support volunteers helping their understanding of their children's reactions and needs.

The effects of a crime varied considerably and very often hinged on parental reaction. There were instances of children feeling insecure, bed wetting, needing to sleep with a parent, needing to have the light on at night, not wanting to go to school, showing aggressive behaviour, losing concentration and achieving less at school, suffering from disturbed sleep patterns and nightmares. At the other extreme there were examples of children who appeared to enjoy the whole event: the police cars and the finger printing.

There was little difference in the reaction of children who were direct victims of crime e.g. offences of violence or theft, and indirect victims, e.g. those whose home was burgled or where a close relative suffered as a result of violence.

Irrespective of family relationship, many children did not choose to tell parents how they were coping. One reason that emerged was that they saw their parents' distress (mainly mothers)

and did not want to add to it. Where this happened a change in a child's behaviour or performance was noted at school or youth organisation.

Many parents did not consider that their children may have feelings to cope with because of their own distress and difficulties in respect of the crime.

It has been found that an early approach by Victim Support volunteers to parents can alert them to immediate and long-term needs.

A suggested programme for parents and children is one which sets targets and gives stepping stones as aids to recovery which enables a child to feel secure and recognises their

needs. Parents have also been encouraged to get their children to draw pictures and to write about their particular incident which has helped bridge the communication gap and aided parents understanding of their children's needs.

Children who have suffered a major personal trauma, such as those whose parents have been murdered, need immediate professional help via their General Practitioner.

A leaflet 'Coping with Burglary' has been produced aimed at parents and 'John's Story' written for children by a child victim has assisted in publicising the work of Victim Support.

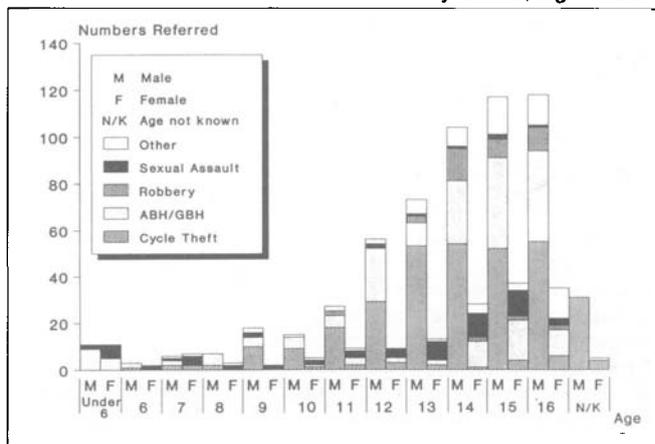
Victim Support is a charity which has schemes in most parts of the country and seeks to offer a service by giving information and practical and emotional support to victims of crime. The range of



Children involved in the Project who met HRH The Princess Royal on her visit to Bedfordshire on 5th March 1990

Victim Support Bedfordshire

Direct Child Victims Referred in 1989 by Crime, Age & Sex



Victim Support Bedfordshire

crimes is very varied - from theft to murder.

For further details of the Children's Project the Final Report is available from: Victim Support - Bedfordshire, 221/223 Bedford Road, Kempston, Bedford MK42 8DA. Price: £2.50 inclusive of postage.

The Project was researched by a team led by the late Dr Jane Morgan from The University of Oxford, Centre for Criminological Research.

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