

# editorial

## victims

The victim of crime is now taken seriously by many parts of the criminal justice system, and support services have expanded dramatically over the last forty years for victims of crime generally and for specific groups of victims. As **Paul Rock** highlights overleaf, 'until quite recently it was commonplace to describe victims as the 'forgotten party' in the criminal justice system', although now, he goes on to suggest, it would be difficult to apply this term. Due in no insignificant part to the pioneering work of Victim Support schemes during the 1970s, the needs of victims of crime are now more likely than ever to be listened to by the various agencies of the criminal justice system, as well as to be catered for by a plethora of voluntary and community based support agencies and structures. Victims of crime today are being given a strategic place within the development of New Labour's crime control policy. The recent *Speaking up for Justice* report produced by the Government's inter-departmental Victims Steering Group makes many recommendations regarding the provision for vulnerable and intimidated witnesses in both court and the community; these recommendations are now before Parliament. As **Helen Reeves** observes, it is crucial that adequate training for court and other personnel accompanies these changes.

Such developments have for the most part paralleled those emanating from academic studies. Whereas fifty years ago victimisation and the victims of crime were discussed solely in relation to conventional crime, today - with the influence of radical and critical feminist thought - discussions of victims are more wide-ranging and encompass the concept of victimisation by the criminal justice system itself and other powerful agencies of the state. Moreover, with the development of innovative survey design we now have a more detailed knowledge of victims of crime and victimisation at local, regional, national and international levels. Together with broader theoretical advancements this has served to extend the focus of the academic criminological telescope to hitherto neglected or hidden victims of crime. Indeed, the influence of much victimological thought, as **Sandra Walklate** stresses in her contribution to this issue, must not be underestimated: 'What is now without question is that no political voice is likely to talk about the problem of crime without addressing the concern of the crime victim'.

In this issue, we focus upon a wide range of issues surrounding victims of crime. Some of our contributors explore 'conventional' forms of victimisation and developments in the provision of services to victims of crime while others address 'newer' areas of study, including victimisation experienced as a result of contact with the

criminal justice system and within the workplace environment including the police service itself.

Mindful of the recent Macpherson Report into the Lawrence Inquiry, **Eugene McLaughlin** and **Hilary Brown** reflect upon the many ways in which the criminal justice system can let down victims of racial crime. **Brian Williams** documents the changes that have taken place in the way probation services address the needs of victims of crime and have integrated a victim perspective into their work with offenders. In our interview with **Helen Reeves** she warns of the need to ensure that victims' involvement is not taken for granted or misused in the new community-based orders for young offenders introduced by the *Crime and Disorder Act*.

Sometimes victimised communities find the strength and commitment to empower themselves and **Adrian Barton** relates the story of one such group in South Wales which succeeded in 'reclaiming' their neighbourhood. **Martin Gill** notes the lack of research into workplace victimisation and the excessive costs for both staff and employers.

**Lucy Gampell** reminds us of the way in which families of prisoners can sometimes be subject to victimisation and harassment in the community and experience 'punishment by association'. **Annabelle James** gives a personal account of an alleged wrongful conviction, while **Nick Taylor** addresses the question of providing a more equitable system of compensation for victims of miscarriages of justice.

**Vincenzo Ruggiero** provides disturbing evidence of the mental affliction suffered by prisoners through the imposition of 'institutional time' which leads to problems of concentration, memory-loss and a 'psychophysical desire to disappear from the carceral gaze'. **Peter Tatchell** raises issues surrounding the means by which the law can discriminate against young people and in doing so make victims and offenders of them. **Max Travers** focuses upon the policy of detaining people who seek refugee status and points out that asylum seekers in Britain do not have access to the services they need as victims (of torture in their countries of origin, for example), **Phil Scraton** discusses what happens to survivors and the bereaved in the aftermath of 'state-sanctioned violence', drawing upon the Hillsborough football stadium disaster. A theme running through many of our articles in this issue of *Criminal Justice Matters*, which is highlighted by **Phil Scraton** and also **Deborah Coles** and **Helen Shaw** of the charity INQUEST, is that all victims require their pain and suffering to be acknowledged through access to justice and truth.

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