Not Just Offenders: Youth as victims of crime

# Details

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* Risks and harms
* Online safety and policy regulation
* Digital and socio-cultural environment
* Wellbeing

## Sample

Main stakeholders in Malta

## Implications For Parents About

## Other Parent Implication

Educated about effects of victimisation and how to look out for possible symptoms, how they are to interact with youth

## Implications For Educators About

## Implications For Policy Makers About

* Fighting against child sexual abuse and child exploitation
* High-quality content online for children and young people
* Creating a safe environment for children online
* Stepping up awareness and empowerment
* Other

## Other PolicyMaker Implication

Cooperation between governmental and non-governmental bodies

## Implications For Stakeholders About

Industry

# Abstract

The effects of crime can be devastating for victims, their families, friends and for society at large. Youth are just as likely as adults, in reality even more so, to fall victim to crime. Psychologically and emotionally less capable of dealing with the trauma and the after effects of victimisation, the impact on young persons is far reaching. Lacking not only the psychological and emotional resources, but also the practical means to prevent, stop or
report the abuse, youth are more susceptible to repeat victimisation and to poly victimisation. No longer perceived as vulnerable as children, but in reality lacking adult resources, youth victims of crime might be seen as falling into a category of ‘forgotten victims’, where no service caters to their specific needs.

The research paper briefly defines what is meant by crime, by youth and by youth victim and gives an overview of the psychological, emotional and social implications of crime victimisation on youth, their family, friends and society at large. Because most youth offenders were primarily victims, offering care and attention to youth victims may thus be one form of crime prevention, reducing youth offending. The issue of under reporting and the difficulty youth encounter in disclosing are also touched upon at different points throughout the paper. Basing itself on national statistics provided by the Police Statistics Office, the research paper looks into more detail at a number of crimes to which youth seem to be more prone to fall victim to, namely assault, harassment, bullying, cyber bullying, hate crime, dating violence, sexual violence (date rape and sexual assault), domestic abuse (partner and ‘child’ abuse), stalking, hit and run and theft. In each category, a definition of the crime in question is given, followed by an overview of related local and international research and statistics available. For each crime, reference is also made to how the law defines the particular crime and to the relevant sections in the Laws of Malta. A summary of the data is provided in table format at the end of this section.

The research paper then looks at the potential services which may be accessed by a young person who becomes a victim of crime. The main method for collection of information
in relation to this part of the paper was done through personal interviews. The paper also
gives examples of services offered abroad. This information was gathered online and through personal communications facilitated by Victim Support Europe, of which VSM is a member. An annex includes an overview of the main youth policy influencing bodies, including a section on the European Union, giving a basic general overview of the most salient points in the Victims’ Rights Directive.

# Outcome

Addressing youth victimisation not only affords the special attention and assistance crime victims should be entitled to, shifting the focus to a victim-centred approach, but is an efficient means of addressing youth offending and reducing crime rates. Addressing youth
victimisation will also help in addressing a series of other related issues such as substance abuse, mental health problems and interpersonal relationships.
Youth victimisation is an issue that calls for strong networking and a collaborative effort between both governmental and non-governmental bodies. The heterogeneity of this age group at times makes it difficult to reach them; networking and multi-agency cooperation will enable the creation of a structure where individuals requiring support can be better identified and offered the appropriate services.
Youth victim support services need to be mainstreamed in all policy areas – it is about raising awareness of, and educating anyone who is in touch with young people. In raising awareness of the needs of young people hurt through crime, and addressing such needs, a concerted national effort is needed.
Reporting as the first evident bond between all the governmental and nongovernmental bodies concerned. Young victims seem to find it difficult to ‘tell’ or to report abuse, yet this is the fulcrum of everything else – if abuse is not talked about, if crimes are not reported, not only will victims themselves be unable to access support services but on a policy level, in terms of resource allocation, the need will never be loud and clear enough for the provision of specialised youth victim support services. Alternative reporting procedures, such as third party reporting systems, should therefore be considered.
In any field, professionals working directly or indirectly with youth, such as in hospitals or schools, need to incorporate careful assessment of different forms of victimisation into standard assessment procedures. Youth in touch with the justice system, for example, should automatically receive some form of assessment for past (or current) victimisation so that support to address such issues can be offered.
The educational system has a crucial role to play. Early school based intervention is crucial and this education must engage parents and main carers. Parents also need to be educated about the effects of victimisation and how to look out for possible symptoms or signs. They also need to be educated about the manner in which their interactions with youth, even with other adults, may exacerbate or diminish the likelihood of youth victimisation. National truancy reduction programmes should engage all the relative players and focus on a positive involvement of the young person, rather than on punitive measures. The creation of ‘risky’ leisure activities within a controlled environment under adult supervision, the creation, or reinforcement, of positive role models infiltrated within the formal, non-formal and informal educational system and the introduction of mentors, formal or informal, could all impact positively.
It is fundamental to equip youth themselves with the knowledge that will enable them to reach out to their peers, at school, at work or in their leisure activities. Most activities or campaigns aimed at young people would be more effective if youth themselves are directly involved in the preparatory and implementation stages. A certain number of youth from different age groups and backgrounds could also be trained as ‘youth advisors’, as ‘infiltrators’, equipping them with the basic knowledge and skills to notice a peer is in difficulty and to simply offer very basic support and inform about help available. Additionally, in reaching out to youth, the power of social media networks cannot be emphasised enough.
The role of professionals in the criminal justice system can be enhanced through sensitisation to the traumatic effects of youth victimisation and to the difficulties in reporting, and perhaps trained into taking a different approach with younger people. The link between offending and previous victimisation experiences is fundamental to grasp. Police officers need to be more approachable and willing to enhance their role as prevention officers, to be more available and accessible where youth gather, for example. To be there to help, not just to apprehend. Training should include addressing myths and stereotypical beliefs about youth.
It is not only necessary that targeted and professional victim support services are available, but it is imperative to ensure that such services are easily accessible. It is crucial that developmentally appropriate victim support services are actually available for those who seek them. Such support services need to be equipped to deal not only with the initial trauma, possibly guiding the victim through criminal proceedings and other practical matters, but the service provided needs to address the series of psychological and emotional disturbances associated with victimisation, if necessary over a long period of time.
Mainstream services need to be accessible on a multicultural level addressing the needs and aspirations of persons from minority groups as well. This would facilitate the identification of victims of crimes which occur outside of mainstream culture, including hate crimes and gender-based crimes.
The development of more informal outreach in order to facilitate accessing of support for youth victims of crime. Whilst youth may find it difficult to disclose or to report due to fear of reproach, anxiety in exacerbating aggressors, or lack of appropriate knowledge, it is clear that formal institutions may not entice youth to come forward. A series of community based services which are not as such targeted at or labelled as ‘crime prevention’ can go a long way in guiding youth away from offending, thus preventing victimisation. Providing adequate support to families, for example, will help create the necessary social and family environment conducive to healthy relationships between parents and older children.
Any reform of the juvenile court must include measures which are victim-centred rather than be limited to offender-centred measures. Not only should young victims of crime be able to easily access free legal assistance and emotional support services, and be readily informed of such services and other ensuing rights from their first contact with the competent authority, but appropriate measures should be set in place to encourage offenders to provide adequate compensation to victims, including compensation for moral damages.
In Malta the only restorative justice service currently being provided with the criminal justice system is that pertaining to parole procedures. Awareness of restorative justice, at the heart of a victim-centred approach is still limited and this needs to be addressed. The introduction of victim-offender mediation, where appropriate, should be considered.